

**Speaking In Circles:  
Indigenous Identity and White Privilege**

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*To my brothers and sisters, the Qalipu.*

*To the next seven generations.*

*And in memory of Poppy Bennett.*

### **Abstract**

This thesis explores white-seeming privilege, a term developed by the author to describe the specific experience of racial privilege in individuals who look white but primarily identify with a different ethnic label. The term is discussed through its connection with different theory areas, namely whiteness, white privilege, tribal critical race theory, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous identity, racial passing, and settler colonialism. Drawing philosophical influence from both the Indigenous research paradigm and arts-informed research, the author uses personal storytelling, poetry, and written narrative to more fully describe the concept of white-seeming privilege. The author argues that in the specific context of Indigenous people who seem white, racial privilege must be situated in a deep understanding of settler-colonialism and uses his own family history of colonization to illuminate the way settler colonialism colours, but does not diminish, his understanding of his own white-privilege. Framed as a talking circle discussion between two parts of his identity, the Indigenous and the white, the author combines Indigenous ways of knowing with Western academic knowledge, generating what some have referred to as trans-systemic knowledge and ultimately achieving reconciliation between his selves—an act that can serve as a model for reconciliation on a wider scale.

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Wela'liq.



## Preface

### Welcome

Pjila'si. Welcome. The piece you are about to read is the result of a year's worth of writing, rewriting, thinking, and dreaming, but it has been in the making for nearly my entire life. At its core, this is my story—or at least a part of it—and it is no small honour and privilege to be able to share it with you. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for choosing to read this work. Wela'lin.

Before continuing, in the interest of building a relationship and relational accountability with the reader, I should introduce myself. My name is Adrian Downey. On my Mother's side of the family, my grandfather's name was Nolan Bennett. He was a Mi'kmaw fisherman who lived in Seal Rocks and St. George's, Newfoundland for most of his life. On my father's side, my grandparents are of Irish decent and also live in Newfoundland. I am presently a graduate student, but in the past I have been a musician, a poet, a teacher, and a spiritual follower of the wind—and, to some degree, I am still all of those things. I am 27 years old and have dark brown hair, blue eyes, and white skin. Despite my skin colour, I am Mi'kmaw. Specifically, I am a member of the Qalipu band of Mi'kmaq First Nations, traditionally situated in Western Newfoundland. Though I may not always be a member of Qalipu band, I will always be Mi'kmaw.

Now that you know me, you can hear my story.

## The Road Map

In an effort to make the complexity of this story clear, as well as to metaphorically represent my own inward journey, I have framed the story as a talking circle between two parts of my identity—the Indigenous and the white. In some traditional talking circles, we go around the full circle four times, once for each of the cardinal directions. In my metaphorical written talking circle, each direction is represented by a chapter and each chapter has two sections: one representing the speech of the Indigenous self and the other representing the speech of the white self.

First, my Indigenous self says all that he needs to say regarding who I am and why I am here. Then, my white self does the same. Within the text, this section is labeled as *East Wind: Greetings*. As the wind shifts from east to south, my white self hands the Talking Stick back to my Indigenous self. Here, my Indigenous self raises up the authors that have contributed to my understanding of Indigenous knowledge through the story of my Indigenous learning. As the Talking Stick moves to my white self, the issue of whiteness and white privilege are taken up in a review of the academic literature around both topics. In the text, these sections fall under the heading of *South Wind: Situating Conversation*. As the wind moves west, my Indigenous self discusses the stories of my people, the Qalipu, and what role I play in that story. Handing the Talking Stick to my white self, I offer a description of my lived reality with white-seeming privilege, as well as an analysis of

phenomenon using the various theoretical lenses. This third section falls under the heading *West Wind: Stories of Existence*.

As the wind begins to blow north, the divided voices become one—representing the reconciliation of self or the joining of Indigenous and white selves toward a holistic understanding of my own identity. Here I discuss my methodology—the philosophy emergent from this piece. This section attempts to articulate the complexity of doing autobiographical Indigenous research within the context of a Eurocentric institution and addresses the philosophical positioning of my work within both Indigenous and Western traditions, thus generating what Marie Battiste (2013) has called trans-systemic knowledge. The final words in the talking circle are given to a discussion of what has been gained in the telling of my story and potential directions moving forward. This final section falls under the heading *North Wind: Speaking Together*.

As a way of representing the conversation between my two selves, I have used different fonts to differentiate between their voices. When I have used (font 1), I have done so to indicate the speech of my Indigenous self within the talking circle. This Indigenous self is the storyteller, the voice that articulates the truth of our shared being, and the voice that speaks to my relations in the outer layers of this talking circle. When I have used (font 2), I have done so to indicate the speech of my white self. My white self is the academic, the critical theorist, and the voice that speaks to the academy

within the outer layers of the talking circle. I use (font 3) when I am ‘speaking together’ or using the combined voices of my Indigenous and white selves. My poetry will always be in (font 3), as the poetry is almost always written from the perspective of my unified self.

**What it is**

The story that follows is multifaceted and complex. It weaves together elements of personal story, Mi’kmaw history, theoretical conversations about the power of narrative and white privilege, research philosophies, and sacred Indigenous knowledge. It is a story spoken in two voices seeking unity—the reconciliation of self. It is a story about stories, their ability to shape our perceptions of reality, and the necessity of disrupting them from time to time. It is my story, but as you read I hope that it echoes your own and that in my words you find strength.

**EAST WIND: GREETINGS****Circles<sup>1</sup>***September 20, 2016*

I invite you to come and be with me for a while.  
 There are stories I want to share  
 And things I need you to hear.  
 As I speak, listen with your heart.  
 I will do the same,  
 So we can grow together,  
 Like wild plants.  
 There  
 Are  
 Circles  
 Within  
 Circles  
 And  
 They  
 The great mystery is a circle. All that we Are is part of the circle. Grounded in circle.  
 Easier To  
 See When  
 You Really  
 Listen Deeply.  
 Spend time with me. Spend time with yourself.  
 Real Deep Learning Comes  
 From The Innermost Circles. The Ones you  
 Share With yourself. I want to share mine.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Circles' has been kept in its original font so as not to change the visual effect.

### Where I am From

The Cherokee storyteller Thomas King has said, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (King, 2003, p. 2) and, as I sit at my laptop with the intent of sharing my story, I cannot help but think that what I am really doing is beginning the process of examining 'all that I am'. Since my Indigenous reawakening, story has become my dominant lens for understanding and producing meaning and, through sharing my stories, I hope to share a deeper understanding of our shared humanity. In this process, deciding which stories to tell is often more difficult than actually telling them; however, the first story is always the same. In the Mi'kmaw<sup>2</sup> tradition we never introduce ourselves with our own name but, rather, with the names of our relations. As such, my story and 'all that I am' begins with my grandparents: in order to understand me, you need to hear about my grandfather.

My maternal grandfather's name was Nolan Bennett; he was a Mi'kmaw fisherman who lived most of his life in St. George's, Newfoundland. He married Juanita Brake, my grandmother, and together they brought thirteen children into the world, including my mother. A book put out by the St. George's band of Mi'kmaq describes my maternal family thus:

Nolan (b.1921) was born and raised in seal rocks, the son of Edward Benoit and Mary Russell. Juanita (b. 1926) was the daughter of George Brake and Jane Cormier. Nolan mainly fished for a living in the early years. Later he worked as a caretaker at the school until he retired. Nolan always had a

---

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this text, I use Mi'kmaw (the singular and adjectival form of the word) and Mi'kmaq (the plural form) instead of the terms recognized by many of my people, L'nu (native person) or L'nuk (people). I have done this because the former words are the ones used by my family and my band to identify our people. Though they are a colonial mispronunciation of our word for family, kikmaq, for some they have taken on a meaning of their own, equating roughly to our national identity.

horse and cart, and although his cart was often loaded with ice or firewood, he always found time to let kids hitch a ride on the end of the cart. (St. George's Band of Mi'Kmaq, 2008, p. 14)

The latter part of this passage captures the generosity of my grandfather's spirit. My eldest maternal uncle, Jerome, has written a book of my family's history that retells many of the stories my grandfather shared throughout his life. I've read the book several times; it always paints a vivid image in my head of my grandfather as a strong-willed, extremely devout man, who didn't take things too seriously. The accounts my mother, uncles, and aunts have shared with me support that description, but I never really had the chance to get to know my grandfather personally. My nuclear family has always lived in Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia and, although we made the trip back to Newfoundland every year, I was always something of an introvert and never spent much time around the adults on my trips to Newfoundland, opting rather for the relative quiet of my aunt's room where I could read or play video games peacefully. As I grew older and spent more time listening to my aunts, uncles, and grandparents, my grandfather grew older, began his passing into the spirit world, and became less able to tell his stories. Sometimes it seems like, as I got older and better able to make social connections, he lost the ability to maintain his. Our spirits were two ships passing after dusk, oblivious to the other in the infinite darkness of night.

I do remember some things about my grandfather that I hold deeply in my heart. I remember his beachside fishing shed where our family would gather together to have fires by the ocean and watch the sunset. It was on this beach where my family would tell stories. The adults would sit around the fire and tell stories to make one another laugh and, sometimes, to make one another think. In my younger years, I would play along the sandy shore with my cousins,

collecting beach glass or shells. Sometimes we would chase each other with sticks or walk down the coast to the spring where we could drink fresh water from the earth. In my teenage years, I would either go for long walks with my cousins, or sit near the fire with the adults and listen to their stories. My entire family has a powerful connection to my grandfather's beach and, for me, it has become something of a spiritual place to visit. My eldest uncle, Jerome, has now taken over the role of caring for the shed and my grandfather's fishing boat. Today, when I go to Newfoundland he is always generous with his time and continues the tradition of sharing stories.

Excerpts from **"Where I am From"**  
*Written in 2008*

I am from a fishhook,  
old and rusted, but still sharp;  
torn from the salty sea at birth  
and lost within the sands of generations.

I am from a sheared,  
although lost for some time,  
my wool is black from my clan's,  
but homogeneous to the past.

....

I am from the country,  
where no cars speed by  
and where the sounds of music ring from kitchens;

I am home.

I am from "long day Jib-Drib-jaw",  
and "old trout".

I am from the birds, the trees, all the things you see,  
but never think of, or maybe take for granted?

My grandfather passed into the spirit world when I was fifteen, and my whole family made the trip in the middle of December to be there. I don't remember much about that trip except the actual funeral where I sat next to my cousin, and she said the body didn't really look like my grandfather. She said he looked empty, and I agreed. The wake was held in the local church and was



observed in the Catholic way, with no trace of Mi'kmaw ceremony. Normally, in church, my father and I would joke around and hit each other, prompting my mother to scold us both. On this day, however, when I tried to tell my father a joke I noticed he was crying. I don't know that I had ever seen my father cry before then, and it made me unsure of how to act; so I just stayed quiet. I remember when they finally returned my grandfather to earth each of my uncles put a rose on his coffin and said their final goodbyes. I said my goodbyes silently in my head on that day but, ironically, I have become very close to my grandfather since his death. His spirit is alive and well in the spirit world; when I call to Creator for guidance it is his voice I hear, and when I thank my relations I know he hears me. Sometimes when I feel alone in trying to make sense of my Indigeneity, I feel his hand on my shoulder, and I know our stories are one and the same.

My grandfather's story is not complete without a description of his partner, my grandmother. Memories of my maternal grandmother are much more sparse than those of my grandfather. I remember the deep love and admiration my mother shared with her, and the respect everyone in my family always showed her. By all accounts, she was the matriarch of the family and ruled with an iron fist but not without love. My mother called her every day and talked with her for an hour or more. I never heard these conversations, and I really didn't understand them much until I moved away from home myself and started calling my parents more and more often; it was a way of maintaining connection and ensuring that the other was alright. My mother summed it up well one night during a phone call from Thailand. She said, "When I look at the moon, I know you are looking at the same one, and I know you are okay." I'm sure her mother told her the same thing.

This is my grandfather, my *Nujjinen*, the source of my Indigeneity and my connection to my Indigenous self. Now that you know him, you can begin to know my story.

## Schooling

It is through my family that I have come to understand myself and, thus, the beginning of my story comes through them; however, determining where to move from there is somewhat problematic. There are so many stories to tell, and from each told we would gain something but also lose much. Chronologically, I could tell you about the time my kindergarten teacher asked me to sit on my hands so that I would stop fidgeting, or I could tell you about the time a friend of mine lit a garbage can on fire and I was unjustly suspended or, maybe, the time my parents found out I cut class one afternoon and grounded me for the better part of a month. You might hear these stories, and they might make you laugh or inspire you to reminisce about your own schooling, but I'm not sure they would help you understand who I am today. In school, I was never a strong student, but I always managed to pull through. Most of my teachers said that I simply wasn't trying, which may also be something of a half-truth. But telling you these stories might give you the wrong idea, or at least an incomplete one, so our search continues.

I could tell you about the moment in grade eight where the toxic social climate of my art class led me into the hallways with tears streaming down my face, or the many stories after that where I started resenting my teachers and did twice the reading they assigned just to prove them wrong—something at the time I would have called resistance but now recognize as the hubris of youth. I could tell you about how in grade nine I was asked to leave my confirmation class because some of the questions I asked were deemed inappropriate—probing

about the Catholic church's condemnation of the use of condoms in Africa and their stance against gay marriage. I could tell you about these things, and they might paint you a picture of what I was like as a young man and, though I might be uncomfortable with it, it wouldn't be wrong. But if I told you these stories something might get left out; something *always* gets left out and for too long it has been the stories of Indigenous people. So let me tell you this story:

In grade ten I took a course in Mi'kmaw history, more so to fulfil my high school graduation requirements than from actual interest in the history of my people. At that time my interest was music; anything not related to music really wasn't in my realm of intrigue. My mother, however, was adamant that I take the Mi'kmaw course rather than the Canadian history course, and I thank her for that daily. The teacher of that course was a man originally from Honduras who, in his second year of teaching, claimed to be receiving little support from his department head and, at times, open racism from students and staff members. Despite his personal battles, the irony of being taught about my own people from someone who had immigrated to this land was not lost on me or the other four Mi'kmaw students in the class. Early on in that course, the eldest of our motley crew of Indigenous youth brought us together and said that it would be an insult to our people to let this man get away with anything, and that we should "send him a message" with bad behaviour. We likely would have gone ahead with the plan had the quietest member of our group not said something. She reminded us that he was just doing his job, and we might actually get more out of it if we went to him and asked to help him prepare the materials. We all agreed that we would take the night to think about how we would handle the situation. The next day, I saw one of my compatriots on the bus and sat beside him. He told me that he had talked it over with his uncle, who advised him to be

nice to the man and welcome him to Mi'kma'ki. While at the time I didn't really understand the complexity of that statement, I decided that being nice was generally a better approach than being mean and, after the first week of classes, we had established a positive, though somewhat oppositional, relationship with our teacher.

Despite knowing of my Mi'kmaw heritage, I had been raised in a suburban community in Nova Scotia, far removed from my ancestral homeland in Newfoundland, and my parents were relatively introverted. Our community connections, apart from our family ties, were nearly non-existent until much later in my life. When we gained recognition through the creation of the Qalipu band around 2008, it became more important to me to explore my identity as an Indigenous person. Yet, it has only been in the last few years since my time teaching in the North that I have reconnected meaningfully to traditional practices and only in the last year that I have connected to the Mi'kmaw community here in Nova Scotia. In 2006, when I was taking Mi'kmaw Studies 10, I had a vague notion of myself as a Mi'kmaw person, but it was not a fully formed part of my identity. To a certain degree, my peers only recognized me as "part native," more so because I lived close to the reserve and sometimes saw them outside of school than because I looked or acted native. At that time if you asked me about my identity I would have identified myself as a punk, as a musician, or perhaps as a Newfoundlander, but probably not as a Mi'kmaw or an Indigenous person, which is how I identify now.

In a magical twist of irony, when I returned to Nova Scotia to do my master's degree almost 10 years after finishing the Mi'kmaw history course, I shared a room again with the man from Honduras, this time as classmates. Although we never really spoke about our shared experience, I like to think we

reconciled through the stories we shared in class. He told stories about the racism he experienced as a young man in Nova Scotia, and I spoke about the damage schooling had done to my spirit and my mind. In the simple act of sharing stories we bonded and positioned ourselves together, rather than in opposition as we had 10 years earlier.

**The Outside**  
*May 26, 2016*

Path through forest well worn,  
Easy to follow,  
Hard to leave.

Birds say hello and goodbye,  
as I race to the end.  
To hear the drums  
of a secret powwow.

‘Where are you going?’  
They ask  
‘The powwow’  
I say  
‘You can’t’  
they say  
‘why not?’  
I ask

Does the drum not call us all?  
Do we not share this earth?

The birds cluck.  
I am too philosophical.

So I stand on the shore  
watching the invitation-only-powwow  
Washing myself in the river  
Praying to Creator  
In secret.

This time with water,  
Not smoke  
with drums in the air

Creator bless my eyes  
 So that what I see may be true.  
 Creator bless my ears,  
 so that what I hear may be true,  
 Creator bless my lips  
 so that what I say may be true,  
 Creator bless my hands,  
 so that what I do may be true,  
 Creator bless my legs  
 So I may walk the right path,  
 Creator bless my mind  
 So that my thoughts may be good,  
 Creator bless my heart,  
 So that it may guide me.

Thunk  
 Thunk  
 Thunk  
 Thunk

Msit No'Kmaq.

I pray with my relations,  
 from the outside  
 looking in.

## University

University is a time of perpetual change for young men and women in Western society; it has become a modern right of passage from adolescence into adulthood. Most of the stories I have are from the five years I spent at Bishop's University just outside of Sherbrook, Québec. They are stories of love, stories of struggle, and stories of becoming, but to tell them all would take years and you've probably lived some of them yourself. So again we are faced with the dilemma of choosing which story to tell.

I could tell you the story about how I wrote a paper for my first year education class denouncing academia as a trivial pursuit, and I could tell you that the paper was not well received—that one is always good for a laugh. I might tell

you about the time one of my professors told me to call him before I went to grad school, as though it were inevitable; it was. I could tell you about my many late nights in the library reading critical theorists like McLaren and Giroux, but these stories don't lend themselves to compelling telling and sound like they belong in a job interview more than a talking circle. Worst of all, if I told you those stories you might think I was a good student, and that would only be a small part of the truth.

Perhaps I should tell you about the six months I spent in Thailand teaching Burmese refugees, but those stories are many and require deep listening, the kind you have in a sweat lodge, not the kind you have in Western academia. If I started down that road then I would have to tell you about the people there and each of their stories. Take Rose, the grandmother of the school at which I taught. She looked after me without any hesitation and loved unconditionally, even though I was not always the best grandson:

### **Roses are Gold**

A poem for my Karen grandmother, Rose  
*From my journal, 2010*

Why did you make another son like this?  
Like you, like them. The simple.  
Why did you suck him into this,  
He didn't know any better.

She is a titan; when she moves  
The world moves with her.  
And the only time she moves  
Is for a son or daughter.

Luckily she has about 65,  
*Who-chi yuh;*  
And that is something of her age,  
For every child a year,  
Like a mighty tree standing bravely in the wind.  
Stay gold,  
I am sorry Grandmother.

If I started down that road, there would be one hundred poems to read and one hundred stories to tell; one for every person I met. And if I started to tell you stories about Thailand, I would have to tell you stories about Tanzania, where I taught for six weeks and felt more out of place and confused than I ever had before. In telling you about Tanzania, I would have to tell you about the terrible feelings of colonialism I had in teaching English there and about the work I had to do to understand how an Indigenous person can feel like a colonizer, and eventually I'd have to tell you all about my white-privilege. I could tell you those stories but it would take many words, and your eyes might start to hurt from reading.

**Well, You don't look like an Indian,**

*January 2016*

III

Mother's heartbeat from the moose-hide drum comes,  
Shakes through our relations, healing the land.  
Elders gather, listen, and sing in hums.  
Time passes and passes and moves like sand.

My grandfather's voice still rings in my head,  
With images of eagles flying high.  
Though he passed from this place he is not dead,  
His spirit lives on to soar and to fly

And here I sit with a pen in my hand  
Black ink, white page; an educated mind  
Writing in the forms of another land  
Looking to the past to see what I find:

White seem-, white look-, white-passing privilege,  
'tis the burden that I have to live with.

There is one story I'd like to tell you about working in a recycling depot and being encouraged to participate in racist comments against my African Nova Scotian co-workers and not having the strength to ask the people making those



comments to stop. But that story hurts me to tell and may trigger some readers, so it is perhaps best to leave that story untold. If I only have time for one story from my five years in university, I want to tell you this one:

This is a story of several conversations I had with a friend, usually late at night in a dingy bar—let's call him Rabbit. Rabbit was a punk from Montreal studying German literature at Bishop's, hoping to improve his grades so he could get into social work at McGill the following year. When he came to Bishop's, he immediately felt like an outsider and spent most of his time drinking and doing drugs. We met at a local rock concert; there were maybe ten people in the bar despite the bands actually not being bad (such is life for local musicians). Both being shy by nature, I can't imagine how we started talking, but I suspect it was he who initiated the conversation because he was always a little braver than I was. We took a shining to each other immediately and, a few weeks later, he invited me to Montréal to hang out with some of his friends and watch his band play. One thing I loved about Rabbit was that he absolutely would not tolerate any kind of prejudiced thinking and, even though I had made a lot of progress in that regard, there were still little bits of bias in the way I spoke and thought for which he promptly called me out. I later recognized the conversations we had as part of the process of decolonizing my mind.

Rabbit was the first person at Bishop's that I told about my status as an Indian. I wasn't actively hiding my status, but my light skin and my "father's good looks" let me blend seamlessly into the mostly white population of Bishop's, and part of me wasn't ready to deal with what it meant to be Mi'kmaw. I thought that if I was to have the legal status of Indian, I should probably understand what that meant. Although I had always known I was part Mi'kmaw, as previously mentioned, I didn't live on reserve, my skin was light in colour, and I didn't speak

the language. To me, these were all important markers of one's status as an Indian, of which I had none. I was particularly troubled given my thinking about colonial power relations and wondered if I was, in fact, participating in the colonial problem by claiming status without having suffered through residential schools or the reserve system. My family told me that I was thinking too much about all of this and should just embrace this as part of me, but I wasn't so sure. All through university, I refused to take funding for my degree because I felt unworthy of the money. I felt like that money should be saved for people who had suffered as a result of their ancestry. At the same time Rabbit and I were becoming friends, I was taking a course in Indigenous history. It was poorly taught, and I found myself constantly correcting the professor. It was one of the few times I felt like a Mi'kmaw person after leaving high school, though I now recognize that the pride I felt at putting down another was distinctly Western, and that my grandfather would not have been pleased had he known about my actions.

One night at our favourite dingy bar, when we were the only ones there, Rabbit and I started talking to the bartender about Indigenous issues and she mentioned that she was part Ojibwa. When I said that I was Mi'kmaw, she looked at me very strangely, like I had said something that couldn't possibly be true. I pulled out my card to show her and she said, "Oh, well you don't look native. " Those words stung the more I thought about them, and they continue to sting whenever I hear them.

**Well, you don't look like an Indian,**

*January 2016*

I

I'm really tired of hearing I don't look like an Indian.  
That first time in a bar, somewhere in Quebec.

And the beautiful, tan-skinned-dark-hair-might-be-Cree-or-Ojibwee  
 Bartender  
 said it when I showed her my ID.  
 It hurt more because I thought she was beautiful  
 and all she saw was the face of oppression.

The next time at an auto-shop in Mistissini.  
 The Cree mechanic and I chatting when I mentioned I was status  
 He told me to use my card, get the tax taken off my repairs,  
 then told me I didn't look Cree.  
 I told him I wasn't, I was Mi'kmaw.  
 He asked, "What's a Mi'kmaw?"  
 "Well, it's like a Cree, but we don't like the cold so much," I said.  
 We laughed, and he said I had a Cree sense of humour, whatever that means.

A few weeks later there was someone else behind the desk,  
 When I showed my card he gave me a real mean look.  
 Said something in Cree, then those old familiar words:  
 "You don't LOOK native"  
 Sensing his hostility I tried to make a joke, but it came out wrong:  
 "Just a rare albino breed: the white Indian," I said with a smile.  
 He didn't laugh, just stared, then:  
 "Funny, that's what I see when I look in the mirror. A white Indian."  
 I knew what he meant:  
 There is nothing funny about colonization.

The most recent time was a professor, here at MSVU.  
 I told him my pipe keeper said that I should return the print card he offered  
 me.

He looked at me like I was something familiar, yet foreign.  
 Later, when I made a comment in class and identified myself he asked,  
 "Are you *really* Indigenous?"

Like I would lie.  
 Like I was an equation that didn't add up. White skin not equal to  
 Indigenous.  
 White skin not equal to Indian.  
 White skin not equal to Native.  
 White skin  
 But not equal.

A few weeks after that incident, Rabbit and I started talking openly about  
 our identities. He told me that I should take ownership of my Indigenous identity,  
 be proud of who I was, and explore my family's history. He told the story of his

own mixed identity. His father was a first generation Canadian with parents from Germany, and his mother was a Trinidadian immigrant. In his youth at a private German school, he had been the only student with dark skin. He told me the other German students saw him as less German because of his skin and bullied him as a result. But he also said that it worked both ways: when he went to Trinidadian events with his mother, he was made fun of for his light skin. He said that skin colour had nothing to do with our identities, and the biggest factor in who we are is not who our parents are but how we identify and choose to live our lives. I told Rabbit that my problem with calling myself Indigenous was that I had never suffered because of my Indigenous parentage. "Everyone sees me as white. I see myself as white. I didn't grow up on a reserve, my parents didn't go to residential school, and English isn't my second language. I've had a really privileged life," I told him. "How can I call myself Mi'kmaw? I don't even know what it means to be Mi'kmaw." We talked around the issue for a while and, in our talking, I realized that I had an obligation to not deny that part of myself. Whether I wanted it or not, I was Mi'kmaw and a status Indian, and Rabbit was telling me that I needed to figure out what that meant for me; how to be Indigenous.

### Untitled

*Poem from my journal (Thailand), 2010*

Oh ignorance,  
How I miss the day  
When I first came.  
And I, a man now  
August, can see that  
When we left home  
We left ourselves behind.

Another **Untitled**  
*Poem from my journal (Thailand), 2010*

Beauty is not beauty  
 Unless it is shared.  
 Like anything we love,  
 It must be expelled into the world,  
 Tested by others ridiculed and criticized,  
 Appreciated,  
 Kept a secret by strangers,  
 And loved by them.  
 This is the process by which beauty exists.

**Mistissini**

To this day I'm not sure what made me sign up for an interview with the Cree school board, but as soon as I walked into the room I realized how different what they were doing was from any of the other interviews I had done. There were four people conducting the interview, including the director general of the school board and an Elder from the community. That interview may have been the first time in a full year that I had spoken of my Indigenous heritage to anyone other than my close personal friends and my family. They were delighted I was both Mi'kmaw and a music teacher and tried very hard to sell me on several positions. I told them I would have to think about it and get back to them. They told me they would call me in a few weeks to hear my answer. As with any decision, I already knew what I would say, but it was important that I talk with my parents first. After receiving the support of my family, I had no qualms accepting their offer to teach grade six in Mistissini the following year.

**XIII – The North**  
 From my Mistissini Journal,  
*January 20, 2014*

Snow slips on ice,  
 It dances  
 Graceful in the wind.  
 It collects,

Shifts, collides.  
Three perfect flakes  
Chase one another,  
Sharing divine conversation  
In their innocence.  
They are so joyful  
To live in the bone chilling cold.  
Snow melts my heart.

Telling stories from Mistissini is a bit like an avalanche: if I tell you one, I have to tell them all, and at the end we'll both be buried alive. For example, if I started in the beginning and told you about my first day when I couldn't get into my apartment because it was filled with someone else's boxes, the story wouldn't be complete unless I told you about my relationship with my principal who got on the phone the next day and made sure those boxes were moved and that I was able to get into my apartment. In that telling, I'd also have to tell you about all the other little stories that endeared her to me and also inspired me to be better at my job. If we started talking about my job, I'd have to tell you all about what a mess I was as a teacher in my first year, how it gradually got better, and how, in my second year, I really felt like I was in my element. Then I might have to tell you about my students and some of the good memories, like when I showed a student in grade three how to play the hand drum and she said, with wonder in her eyes, "It's like my heart is dancing." But then I'd have to tell you about the students who spat on me, pushed me out of the way, and threw milk at me. Then I'd have to explain that we didn't hate each other in anyway, we just got mad at each other, like a family. And I would certainly be remiss were I not to mention how a part of me secretly respected them for their resistance. That might naturally lead into the stories about SFA, the scripted reading program that the school administration strongly endorsed, which would lead into the pain of administrative control and the stifling of my pedagogical creativity, which

eventually spurred me into leaving Mistissini. You see, there are far too many stories to tell about Mistissini, and it is far too difficult to tell just one without telling the rest. When I started this talking circle I told you about my relations, so that you might understand me better. Now, if I am to tell you about Mistissini, I must return to the beginning of the circle and tell stories that are not my own but shared with my friends. In sharing their stories and my relationships to them, you might begin to understand Mistissini and the transformation it brought about in me.

My neighbour was a teacher in his mid-thirties who had been granted the title of honorary fire keeper with the Anishinaabe—let's call him Snow Wolf. Snow Wolf was a passionate teacher, a critical thinker, and a great listener. Although I do not remember the specifics of our initial conversations, I remember telling him early on that I was a status Indian, and part of my reason for coming to Mistissini was to connect with what it meant to be Indigenous. His own reason for coming to Mistissini was similar, although he was working from the settler perspective. He had lived in the woods for a year with a family of Anishinaabe who lived a traditional lifestyle and had found happiness and peace in their way of being. One day, Snow Wolf and I were helping a friend move when our friend mentioned he had found a dead cat on his doorstep that morning. Without hesitation, Snow Wolf and I looked at each other and decided the apartment would need to be smudged. Having Snow Wolf around strengthened my Indigenous spiritual practice and, to this day, he is my greatest teacher in that regard.

One of the gym teachers at the school was a Québécois who had been living and working in the Cree school board for forty years—let's call him Grey Wolf. Grey Wolf was a knowledge keeper in two ways. First, he knew everything

that happened in the school and why it happened. He had been the vice principal at the school the year before I arrived and, prior to that, a teacher there for so long he was able to find things out long before they were made public knowledge. He also made things happen in a somewhat magical fashion. Often the first line of defense against any kind of unexpected event was the cry, "Where is Grey Wolf!?" When Grey Wolf couldn't be found, the answers disappeared with him. In addition to being a knowledge keeper at the school, Grey Wolf was also a knowledge keeper in the community. Long ago, he learned traditional activities like building tepees and septuans, cooking geese, fishing, and hunting, and he was always willing to help teachers engage in these activities. Through teaching us these traditional activities, Grey Wolf would often get together with Snow Wolf and me and talk for long hours over tea.

**X – Untitled**

From my Mistissini Journal,  
*October 31, 2013*

Tea is balance.  
Fire and water,  
Intertwined  
like dancing dragons  
from ages long past.  
And the haste  
The great bear spirit provides  
From the bounty of autumn.  
Elements dance in the perfection  
of a cup of tea.

Elder Goose was a prominent member of the community who owned several local businesses, served as a teacher for 20 years, and had been on the parental advisory committee of the school for the last 10. She also had been present when I was interviewed at Bishop's and had been a big part of the reason I was hired. Two of her daughters worked for the school board in different



capacities and, in the second year of my teaching, I taught Elder Goose's grandson—Baby Goose. Needless to say, I was close to the family and, throughout my two years, I had many interesting conversations with the entire flock, but Elder Goose was particularly kind and generous with her time. One Saturday morning, we ran into each other at the supermarket and stood in the vegetable section for a half hour talking. We spoke briefly about the school and teaching but somehow landed on the topic of my Indigenous identity and how I didn't really feel right about taking advantage of some of the treaty rights that came with my status such as the exemption from income tax while working on a reserve as well as band-funded education. She was patient in listening to me but, when I finished, she told me the story of how she had lost her status when she married her husband who was of settler decent. She said her daughters hadn't had status during the first few years of their lives. This was because of the discriminatory policy the government had put in place through the Indian Act and the White Paper. She told me about the day she and her daughters regained their status from the amendment to the Act and how they cried together. For them, it wasn't a financial struggle, either. They owned many businesses and were financially stable, but it meant that they were recognized as a part of the community—they were always Cree, but now they were Indians too.

### III – Wind

from the second cycle of my Mistissini Journal,  
*August 28, 2014*

Her kiss moves across my body  
 With intensity and speed  
 (but no urgency)  
 we part a moment,  
 and I breathe;  
 A deep pull through both nose and mouth.  
 Another embrace,  
 This time a gentle caress.

She washes over my tired body  
Taking wordily concern with her  
Gone;  
And I  
Gentled, stilled by her love.

By the second year of my contract, I had developed a deep connection to the land and the wind. I often took walks in the evenings after work and meditated quietly with the wind as my only companion. Together, we talked in whispered tones about everything and nothing. In my listening, I started to understand more and more about myself and my Indigenous roots. I thought about my parents, and the wind showed me how similar the way I was raised was to the way my students were being raised. The wind showed me that my parents' will to work hard and sacrifice for their children was, in fact, very Indigenous—so was the deep connection we all had to family and place. Even my settler father was—and is—very connected to the land, constantly chopping wood for our fireplace or working outside. The wind blew images of my Grandfather's house into my mind, where 13 children lived together with two parents. The wind compared it to my students, who were living in similar situations. And, most importantly, the wind showed me that being Indigenous wasn't about my skin or about having suffered at the hands of colonization. It was about how you felt inside and how you intended to carry on the work of your ancestors. When the wind blew, I felt Indigenous; when the wind blew, I felt my grandfather's hand on my shoulder.

Despite these deep connections, the second year of my contract saw the departure of many friends, as well as several professional issues related to tight administrative control. By the end of two years, though I had gained much, more than anything, I was tired.

**XI - A short poem to say I love you***December 3, 2014*

Lunchtime poet,  
Life between two lines,  
Written in the margins,  
Pushed aside  
Concerns of the flesh  
Lost in the ethereal.  
The sacred realm  
of ideas.

When I arrived in Mistissini I was confused about many things, including my own identity. When I left Mistissini I felt sure of myself, grounded, and fully alive; it was all I could have asked for from my two first years of teaching. The wind told me early on, however, that I would be moving on and, in August, the wind blew me back home.

Coming home to Nova Scotia after seven years away has been a process filled with many more stories, but they are harder stories to tell because they are so close to me now, many still being lived. I now proudly identify as Mi'kmaw and articulate both my identity and my spirituality in terms of my Indigeneity, but as many of my Indigenous brothers and sisters have pointed out, I am still on a journey toward fuller understanding, as we all are.

**Stories**

These are my stories—some of them, anyway—for to tell all of them would take a lifetime. Of course, I could tell them to you, but we'd need more tea and more patience than our society has given us. But now that you've heard my stories, they are yours,

Do with [them] what you will. Tell [them] to your friends. Turn [them] into a television movie. Forget [them]. But don't say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard [those] stories.

(King, 2003, p. 29)

**Well, you don't look like an Indian***January 2016*

## II

My identity is not yours  
Nor the wind and the shores,  
Nor all the stories and the lore,  
Nor my spirit, which *IS* still sore,

About the way I must conform  
To your words and to your norms,  
In every shape and every form  
Like the loser in the dorm  
Everyday his heart torn  
'Cause no one will talk to him  
Like existing is a cardinal sin  
Like, "Maybe he's autistic or somethin'"  
Or maybe he's just another white Indian.

My life is a privilege,  
One I have to live with  
A burden I bear  
Like the looks and the stares  
For dressing sketchy and speaking in swears.  
Black bandana, trench coat and Doc Martins in pairs,  
Listen to black flag and play drums in the air,  
But listen close to this wisdom I share:

It comes from the wind, the rocks and the trees  
And it applies to everyone, to you and to me:

We are one.  
The father the son,  
At SMU or at MUN  
We are one.

So rise up my sisters and brothers  
Learn to love one another.  
Be free from damage modern society has done.  
We are one.

Treat each stranger like a lover,  
Respect the earth as our mother,  
Take a deep breath and thank the sun.

We are one.

Listen with your heart,  
Yearn to appreciate beautiful art,  
Learn to forgive instead of shun.  
Because we are one.

Finally, those silent eyes that scream “perform,”  
“change” or “conform,”  
“Be something different than what you are”  
Need to go away, very very far

Because in all honesty I’m tired of giving a fuck.

Msit No’kmaq,  
Wela’lioq.

### Words of Welcome

Now that you know who I am, we can talk. Within my understanding of academic writing, it is customary to start with a concise summary of what one is attempting to achieve through a given work; however, in Indigenous contexts, such as the talking circle, it is considered rude to be so direct. Rather, before speaking we should first offer up the names of our relations in order to situate our relational identity for the listeners (Knockwood, 1992). This is one of my reasons for starting this thesis with personal narrative. The other reason is this: it is my core philosophical belief, the driving force behind all my intellectual work, that personal narrative disrupts dominant narrative.

Dominant narratives are the stories we hear most often in our lives; they are the stories about what is normal and what is odd, what is intelligent and what is stupid, what is good and what is bad. Whenever we hear these stories, their influence becomes more and more true, and when we tell them ourselves, we unavoidably alienate someone. It is only through the sharing of our personal stories that we are able to disrupt the silent normativity of these dominant stories and achieve an accurate and complex reflection of what *is*. In this case, by placing my personal narrative ahead of the traditional academic writing or any description of what I am working toward, I have attempted to disrupt the reader's thinking about what is the most valuable aspect of this work.

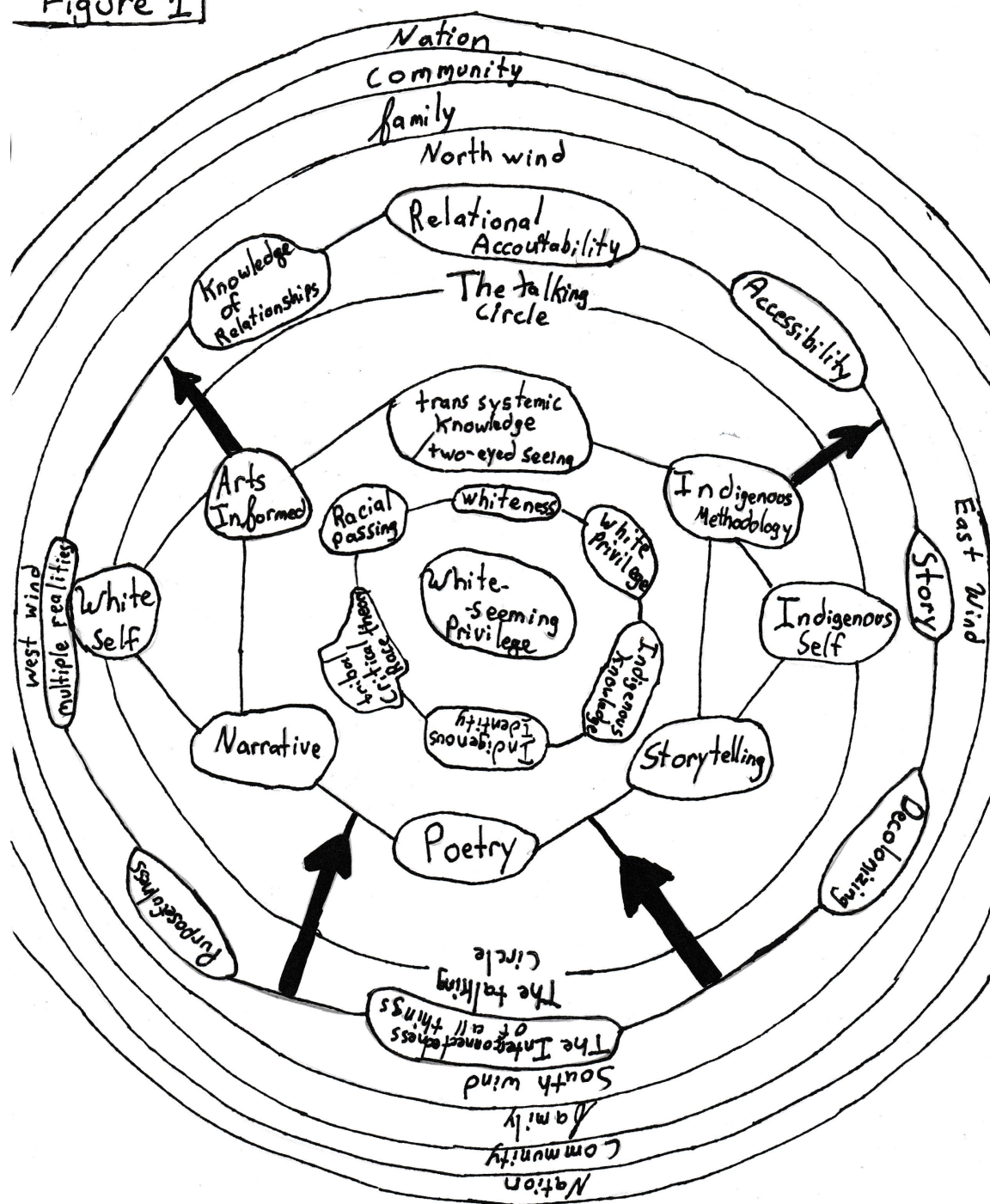
My Elders have taught me that, as Indigenous peoples, when we offer up a story, we do not need to explain anything more of it: the beauty and value of the story is the story itself and its effect, not what it represents, the lesson it carries, or its hidden meaning (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2000; King, 2003; Wilson, 2008). This valuing of story is fundamental to my ontology and epistemology and, by putting the story first in

this work, I have attempted to call you into my way of seeing the world—a world where story is how we do everything because it is the truest way we can see the world. Pjila'si; welcome to my way of being in the world.

**Talueken - What are you doing?**

Over the last two years of graduate education, one of the most common questions I have received is, “What is the topic of your thesis?” No matter how many times I answer that question, I am never confident that what I am saying truly reflects the nature of my research. Fundamentally I am telling stories—my own story of living white-seeming privilege; however, the act of sharing that story is complicated, and the best way I have come to describe this project is visually. Thus, *Figure 1* frames my discussion here and my inquiry in general. At the centre of the circle, one finds my topic, white-seeming privilege. The overall goal of this project is to offer up a description of what white-seeming privilege is and, rather than describing this phenomenon through a qualitative or quantitative process of inquiry, I am generating this description through autobiographical arts-informed (Cole & Knowles, 2008) and Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009, 2010; Wilson, 2008). By articulating my inquiry within two paradigms simultaneously, I feel I methodologically capture something of the dualistic, but non-dichotomous, complexity I find within my own identity of being both white and Indigenous. This methodological congruence between theory, topic, and form is of paramount importance in arts-informed inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2008) and qualitative research in general (Richards & Morris, 2013).

Figure 1



If we return to *Figure 1*, we see that the second layer of nodes represents the theories that inform white-seeming privilege. White-seeming privilege, being the thing that needs description, is not something that has been examined within the academic



literature; however, it is possible to generate some understanding of the phenomenon through a careful reading of the theories that inform it. Though I will take this description up more thoroughly in later sections of this work, suffice to say here that my description of white-seeming privilege is informed by the following theories: Whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000; Villaverde, 2000), white privilege (McIntosh, 1990, 2012), critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005; hooks, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Indigenous identity and Indigenous knowledge (Ernie, 1995; Graveline, 1998; Kovach, 2009; Palmater, 2011; Wilson, 2008), and racial passing (Bettez, 2011; Gisenberg, 1996; Kroeger, 2003). Many of these theories intersect with other theoretical discussions such as settler-colonialism, globalization, the flattening of culture (Downey & Sagy, Accepted; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), the reproduction of exploitative neoliberal economic models (Apple, 1979; McLaren, 2007), and even the tacit dominance of scientific knowledge within the academy (Denzin, 2009, 2010; Wilson, 2008). The aforementioned six theoretical lenses, however, are the major contributors to my understanding of white-seeming privilege and will be taken up thoroughly throughout this work.

In the third layer of nodes out from the centre in *Figure 1*, we see the methodologies and methods that inform my inquiry. Here I am examining white-seeming privilege. Were I to do this as a qualitative researcher, I might find a number of participants who experience white-seeming privilege, engage them in interviews, and then use interview transcripts as a data source for coding and analysis (Richards & Morris, 2013). Were I a quantitative researcher, I might create a survey with questions about white-seeming privilege and distribute it to a number of people who experience the

phenomenon. I could then turn the answers from the surveys into numbers and create a set of generalizable statements based on my statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). Here, however, I am not acting as either of those things. I am acting as an Indigenous arts-informed researcher engaged in autobiographical story sharing. Thus, my approach to describing white-seeming privilege is to connect with my own stories and experiences and allow them to illuminate the topic.

More specifically, I am engaged with three methods of meaning making. First, in the Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), I have used traditional storytelling to share my understanding of my lived reality. For the Indigenous storyteller, something is always gained in the telling (Archibald, 2008); as we speak we connect to our deepest heart-thoughts—those things we know at our core, but not in our mind—and consequently learn from our tellings. As I have thought through my stories and told them within the metaphorical talking circle, I have connected to my deepest thoughts and gained meaning. Secondly, within the Western qualitative paradigm, specifically the arts-informed branch of that paradigm (Cole & Knowles, 2001, 2008), I have used narrative as a way to reinterpret that which has been written down (Levy, 2009). If in telling my story something is gained, then something must also be gained in the reading of it, and it is in that way that I have constructed meaning through my narratives. Storytelling and narrative are closely linked terms (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012), but it should be understood that storytelling is an Indigenous practice that would traditionally be oral (Archibald, 2008). Narrative is a Western term and, in this context, corresponds to my stories as they exist in their written state. Once written, they can be read and meaning can be constructed, a different meaning than that gained from the telling. Finally, I have used

poetry as a way of bridging the gap between the two paradigms. Poetry, in its abandonment of the prosaic thought structure Western academia holds in such high regard (Cariou, 2014), allows me to articulate ideas that are Indigenous in nature in language appreciated by the Western qualitative paradigm. This poetry is sometimes a glimpse into my mind at certain moments during the thesis writing process or the moment a story takes place. In this regard, it is something of a data log and shows the evolution of my thinking. My poetry is the space where my heart meets my mind and where both speak in unison. It is in this way that meaning is generated through my poetry.

One challenge of this kind of inward inquiry is making it apparent to the reader. The way I have approached that problem is through artistic representation and the metaphorical artistic form represented in the fourth layer outward of *Figure 1*, the talking circle. In her book on residential schools, *Out of the Depths*, Elder Isabelle Knockwood (1992) writes about using the Talking Stick to frame her writing:

Our Mi'kmaw ancestors used the Talking Stick to guarantee that everyone who wanted to speak would have a chance to be heard and that they would be allowed to take as long as they needed to say what was on their minds without fear of being interrupted with questions, criticisms, lectures or scoldings [*sic*], or even of being presented with solutions to their problems. An ordinary stick of any kind or size is used. Those seated in the Circle commit themselves to staying to the end, not getting up to leave or walk about because this behaviour is considered an interruption. (p. 7)

Elder Knockwood uses the Talking Stick and the talking circle as a way of telling her story, having her entire book represent a single talk within the circle. In my writing, I

have approached the talking circle differently, opting to divide my identity into two voices, a white self and an Indigenous self, and allowing them to speak to each other within the talking circle in hopes of finding reconciliation and unity between the two. It is important to note here that this talking circle between my selves is a binding metaphor and an artistic form. It is a structure to my writing that speaks to my Mi'kmaw tribal epistemology (Kovach, 2009) and, while it is informed by and informs my methodology, it is not a research method. This is an important distinction to make because physical talking circles have been used extensively as research methods within the Indigenous paradigm (Archibald, 2008; Steinhauer, 2001; see also Kovach, 2009; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).

### **Relational Accountability**

The final layer of *Figure 1* is devoted to the epistemological, ontological, and axiological concerns coming out of my methodologies and contributing to every element of my inquiry. Though many of these concerns will be taken up later in this work, one requires specific mention here: relational accountability. Relational accountability is the guiding principle for how one must behave in life and within the talking circle and, thus, the guiding principle of how I have constructed this thesis. Without it, one could look at this project and see only its unorthodoxy and complexity without appreciating the reason for either. Shawn Wilson (2008) roughly equates relational accountability to an Indigenous axiology, stating it is one's obligation toward maintaining right relations with one's community and the world at large. This is a ubiquitous concept in Indigenous research, sometimes being referred to as the seven R's (Archibald, 2008) or the three R's (Pillwax-Weber, 2004), or sometimes not explicitly written but, rather, hinted at through

story (Thomas, 2005). Regardless of the shape relational accountability may take, all Indigenous researchers endeavour to maintain right relationships, which is the key difference between research done *by* Indigenous people and research done *on* Indigenous peoples (Wilson, 2008). In using the talking circle as a metaphorical form to my inquiry, I have opted to change things from the way they are normally done in Western research in order to present the necessary information in such a way that honours my relations, their traditions, their knowledge, and my tribal epistemology. This is particularly evident in my discussion of the literature, where I have made every attempt to remove my judgements from the texts I mention, as it is not my place to judge these works, and to do so may hurt someone either now or within seven generations. It is also the concept of relational accountability that drives me to disrupt the dominant narratives of our society. Due to my sacred obligation to the seven generations past and the next seven generations, I must think carefully about every word I write and ensure that it will bring them honour. In my mind, dominant narratives are hurtful and alienating and, thus, the honourable thing to do is to challenge them, so future generations can look back on my work with pride. In this regard, I ask the reader some forgiveness in what they read here; if something seems out of place or wrong, before judging it consider what the alternative would have been and whether or not someone reading this work in 840 years would look on it with pride.

On the outside of the circle represented in *Figure 1*, we see traces of the Indigenous model of self. For some Indigenous people, self is understood relationally and holistically (Archibald, 2008; Graveline, 1998). This creates a layering of circles similar to the shape of Graveline's self-in-relation to others model (1998, p. 58), where the self is

at the centre of a spiral and, as the spiral extends outward, understanding passes through these communities. Any conversation between my selves must extend outward into the communities of which I am a part—my family, my community, and my nation. This is, for me, the immediate concern of relational accountability.

### **The Significance of This Work**

Whereas this study is primarily a personal narrative, its significance is found in the fact that it serves as a disruption of the dominant narratives around how meaning is constructed and what constitutes research. In addition, it also makes several contributions to both the Western academic literature and the recent developments around Indigenous methodologies and knowledges.

First, in working on the intersection between white privilege and Indigenous identity, I am examining a largely unexplored phenomenon. The academic literature around white privilege, whiteness, racial passing, and the other theoretical considerations mentioned above are well established; however, the specific phenomenon of white-seeming privilege, while experienced by a large number of Indigenous people, is not something that has been discussed seriously by scholars. In fact, the only place white-seeming privilege has been widely discussed is in the context of popular and social media by people who experience it themselves (Watanabe, 2015a, 2015b). Part of the contribution of this work is to open the door for other authors to discuss this phenomenon as they experience it. It is not my intent to describe any more than that to which I have access—at this point, my own experience. My reasoning for this refined scope will become clear to the reader as our discussion of relational accountability and Indigenous theory principles continues.

The second major contribution of my thesis is to the growing body of literature around Indigenous research. For many generations, Indigenous peoples were seen as silent objects to be studied by anthropologists and sociologists, to the extent that in the 1990s it was said that Indigenous peoples were among the most researched people in the world (Wilson, 2008). This history of research that was not grounded in, and did not contribute to, the community in any way has left a sour taste in the mouths of many Indigenous peoples when the word research is thrown around (Tuck & Yang, 2014). While it is not my place to pass judgement on the actions of other researchers, it is important to acknowledge the perceived results of underlying colonial power structures embedded in Western thought that have fuelled, and sometimes continues to fuel, research with Indigenous peoples (Wilson, 2008). In throwing off the reigns of objectification and constructing my own narrative about my experience with Indigeneity and whiteness, I believe I am contributing to a movement in Indigenous thinking best summed up by the phrase *idle no more* (Palmater, 2015). By sharing my story and doing it in a way that is respectful of my traditions and valuing of my Indigenous knowledge, I see myself continuing the disruption of Indigenous silence in academia that other Indigenous academics have started. That silence is part of the *idle* in idle no more, and to write this piece in this way is to say *no more* to the silencing of my brothers and sisters by the academy (Graveline, 2003). We have strong, intelligent voices; we understand ourselves; we will tell our stories our way.

Third, this project has very carefully articulated a methodological space that is uniquely situated in Indigenous and arts-informed methodologies. While other researchers occupy this space, it is a relatively new position often articulated using a

variety of terms such as *Métissage* (Donald, 2012; Kelly, 2010; Lowan-Trudaeu, 2012). Although I pay homage to many of the scholars involved with *Métissage*, my work offers a more comprehensive overview of several methodological frameworks for generating trans-systemic knowledge (Battiste, 2013). This methodology builds on, and contributes to, both Indigenous knowledge and the Western paradigm of arts-informed research. Here value is found in the articulation of these paradigms, their separate and unique spaces, as well as their meeting point. A paradigm cannot be advanced unless there are people engaging with the ideas in original ways. I see this work contributing to both paradigms, as well as to the concept of trans-systemic knowledge, which, to my limited understanding, has yet to be described in such a practical space as I have attempted here.

Finally, in order to capture the full scope of my contribution with this work, it bears repeating that there is value in the telling of one's story. In my case, that story has taken the form of poetry, narrative, and storytelling, and in each of those acts there is value and beauty. As previously stated, for Indigenous peoples the value of our stories are not their meanings but, rather, the fact that they exist (Cajete, 2000). I argue that this thesis, in its attempts to disrupt the dominant narratives around meaning-making and in the personal nature of its narrative, is valuable by its own right, regardless of what contribution it makes to the various paradigmatic research literatures described above. I should state, however, that the fact my work contributes to these conceptual spaces is not purely incidental, as the topics and methodologies I have researched are deeply connected to my own experience and, thus, in some capacity reflect the dualistic nature of my own lived identity within "the racial shadow zones that have been created for us and that we create for ourselves" (King, 2008, p. 14).



### Concluding Thoughts

I think it best to conclude with a story. Elder Knockwood and I once shared a table at a knowledge holder's roundtable as part of the treaty education initiative in Nova Scotia. She was there to share her knowledge and say the opening prayer, and I was there as a note taker. Sitting down at the table, I tried as best as possible to type out everything that was said, but Elder Knockwood soon called out to me and suggested that I draw a sun with her. The two of us used the provided crayons to draw a beautiful sun, rich with colour and nuance. I was struck by how happy and free her spirit was—we laughed together and she easily put to rest the anxiety I felt at having to capture the conversation at the table in my notes. Throughout the conversation, Elder Knockwood asked many questions of the others at the table, but she also shared her opinion. On the topic of reconciliation, Elder Knockwood was openly outspoken. She said she did not want to reconcile if it meant that she would lose the critical nature of her thought. In this, her resistant spirit shone through, and I saw a flame in her eyes that reminded me of my own.

Elder Knockwood's book was one of the first of its kind, a firsthand account of her experience living in the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. It is a powerful book and tells an important story; a counter-narrative and disruption of the dominant discourse our society has told about Indigenous peoples. For me, *Out of the Depths* (1992) is an act of resistance, and it is in the spirit of resistance that I pick up the Talking Stick from where Elder Knockwood has placed it and begin to speak my truth—to tell my story.

Msit No'kmaq,

Wela'lioq.

**SOUTH WIND: SITUATING CONVERSATION**

**Tanka XXI**

First Transition

*September 20, 2016*

East wind blows to south  
Talking Stick passed between hands  
In each change we grow  
Like seasons' timeless passing  
And rings on the tree of life.

**Tanka XXII**

Elders

*September 22, 2016*

Raise up our Elders  
Their words guide us in all things  
Wisdom eternal  
Is passed down through our stories  
For seven generations.

## Stories of Indigenous Learning

### Literature Review as Remembrance

In order to set the stage for our conversation, we must acknowledge the others who have influenced our thoughts. In the Western academic tradition, the act of paying homage to those who have influenced one's thinking is often situated in the context of a literature review, and literature reviews can take different forms depending on the paradigms in which they exist (Creswell, 2014). As the story of my academic Indigenous learning is critical to the conversation moving forward, perhaps the most fitting way to frame this activity would be through the metaphor of remembrance. When Mi'kmaw people pray we use the phrase *Msit No'kmaq* or "all my relations." This is a reminder of the interconnectedness of all living beings, a way of showing respect and deference to our Elders, and a way of remembering that everything we say must honour the previous seven generations and be beneficial for the next seven generations (King, 1990). Given this, a literature review as remembrance is an opportunity to raise up and honour those ideas and people that have influenced our understanding—to borrow the words of Cajete (1999, 2000), it is a way of "remembering to remember" our connection to the world. As I review the literature around Indigenous identities and knowledges, I will remember, honour, and thank the authors for the words and stories they have shared because they have helped me to better understand my place in this world.

### Indigenous Identities and Knowledges

It is rather difficult to conceive and articulate the scope of Indigenous knowledges. As I have come to recognize my Indigenous heritage, I have gained a great deal of knowledge, but what portion of that knowledge is Indigenous in nature, and does it become Indigenous knowledge the moment I come into

contact with it? Despite having these trepidations about characterizing the term, I do have several answers for when I am asked, "What is Indigenous knowledge?" My most common response is to gesture toward a rock and say, "That is Indigenous knowledge." The implication is that the rock is made up of the same energy as the rest of the universe and, as such, it is no different than human beings, plants, or animals (Cajete, 2000). Furthermore, because the rock is alive, our knowledge of that rock is defined in terms of our relationship to it and our ability to know that relationship. Once, when a former professor asked me about Indigenous knowledge, I told her she'd have to listen for four days to know the answer—the implication being that Indigenous knowledge is endless in its scope. As we move through the world, we establish an infinite number of relationships, and to know Indigenous knowledge is to know all of those relationships intimately. Finally, there is not one Indigenous knowledge but, rather, an infinite plurality of Indigenous knowledges based on the unique relationships of each Indigenous person who has ever walked this earth (Kovach 2009). Having established the relational nature of Indigenous knowledge, it strikes me that the only way to continue with a review of the literature around Indigenous knowledges is to share, as an act of remembrance, the stories of my learning, which will hopefully shed light on my relationship to each of the authors and texts discussed.

**Stories of learning.** My first experiences with Indigenous knowledge were not academic. They were brief moments between my mother and I while picking blueberries when she would remind me where the biggest berries lived. They were stories from my grandfather about the way things were. They were fishing lessons from my father and the biologically inherited disposition toward the natural world. Over the years, there were many experiences that led me to

small pieces of my Indigenous knowledge and knowledge of my own identity, but these are mostly discussed elsewhere within the circle. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss the academic literature that has influenced my Indigenous knowledge; however, without understanding these non-academic experiences, there cannot be a full understanding of Indigenous knowledge. Many believe one cannot come to Indigenous knowledge purely through academic means. Thus, in my synthesis of what Indigenous knowledge means to me, I will attempt to integrate the academic reading I have done with my own embodied knowledge.

Fundamental to my understanding of story and Indigenous identity is my reading of the work of Thomas King, particularly his 2003 Massey lectures, *The Truth About Stories* and his 2012 book, *The Inconvenient Indian*. Every time I read *The Truth About Stories*, I take away something new but, for me, the key points always have been about the power of story, its role in the way we understand the world, and the inability to retract story once it has been given to the world. This work was also an early indicator to me of the raw deal Indigenous peoples have received throughout history. *The Inconvenient Indian* is, for me, almost a sequel to *The Truth About Stories* in that it takes a thread that is hinted at in the earlier work—the cultural genocide inflicted on the Indigenous people of North America—and fleshes it out in extreme detail. I have read *The Inconvenient Indian* twice. The first time, much of the history was over my head; however, after coming back to it recently I understand the depth and accuracy of King's historical reference. For me, this book has established a framework for the history of North American Indians upon which I have built a much deeper understanding. For these gifts and his many other wonderful books, I thank Dr. King.

Before studying Indigenous knowledge in general, I sought information from outside sources. John Ralston Saul's works, *A Fair Country* (2008) and *The Comeback* (2013), taught me several significant lessons about the positioning of Indigenous peoples within Canadian society. *A Fair Country* teaches us that Canada, as we know it today, is a Métis nation, a nation far more influenced by the Indigenous land upon which it is built than any of the colonial influences that have taken that land. *The Comeback*, for me, illustrated the degree to which I am not alone in my struggles to figure things out. Saul claims that we are in the middle of an Indigenous renaissance, a population boom combined with a long overdue shift in the public consciousness around First Nations issues. Reading these texts while I was in Mistissini gave me a starting point for understanding the reconciliation and *Idle No More* movement and, though Mr. Saul is not Indigenous himself, I raise him up for his positive contributions to our communities.

The foundation of my academic understanding of Indigenous knowledge was formed by the work of Marie Battiste, particularly her books *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds* (1995) and *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (2013). *The Circle Unfolds* taught me many lessons as I kept coming back to it throughout my time in Mistissini for direction in my pedagogy. It was in this text that I recognized the cultural politics of being a white-seeming teacher in a native community (Taylor, 1995; see also Aitken, 2005; Harper, 2000). This book also formed the foundation to my understanding of Aboriginal epistemology (Ermine, 1995) as unique and distinct from Western ways of knowing. I will concede that, at the time of my first reading, I did not understand much more than the fact that there was something different about the way Aboriginal people constructed meaning. It wasn't until I read Wilson

(2008) and Kovach (2009) that I started to see and articulate the differences myself. *Decolonizing Education* has given me many gifts through my reading. The lessons I have taken from it extend from the basic history of Mi'kmaw education in Nova Scotia (see also Battiste, 2016b; Bernard, 2016) all the way to concepts such as cognitive imperialism, the notion that universities and other institutions with intellectual power create colonial boxes into which we must fit our thinking, thereby devaluing our Indigenous knowledges. Another concept from *Decolonizing Education* that I have used throughout this work is the idea of trans-systemic knowledge, knowledge that brings together two paradigms. Marie Battiste is a flourishing Mi'kmaw scholar, and her body of work continues to inspire me. For this and all her work, I thank her.

A book with which I connect both spiritually and intellectually is Fyre Jean Graveline's *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness* (1998). This was the last book I read before starting graduate classes at Mount Saint Vincent, and it helped me to form a concept of Eurocentrism. Through *Circle Works*, I learned more about the traditional way of knowing the world and Indigenous epistemology. I was also able to better contextualize what effect this way of knowing had on pedagogy. In her chapter on resistance, Graveline reminded me of one of the threads of Battiste's work that I had not immediately recognized as being transformational to me. The idea runs that we must re-read our lived histories remembering that, at every step of the way, Indigenous peoples acted in resistance to assimilation and cultural genocide. Graveline's chapter on revitalizing the traditional worldview has not only engaged my academic thinking about what it means to be Indigenous but has also enhanced my personal and spiritual engagement in the world. Since reading and re-reading Graveline's book, I have consistently attempted to live my life as close to the traditional ideal

as I can. This task is a sort of praxis—living of one’s theory—of Indigenous knowledge. Fyre Jean Graveline’s book also contains the idea of the self-in-relation to others—or, a way of articulating the self within the traditional worldview (See also Archibald, 2008; McGaa, 1990)—emphasising the interconnectedness of all living beings summed up when we say the words “all my relations” (King, 1990; Palmater, 2015). This way of understanding the self is the way I have come to express my identity and is an important basis for all of what I call Indigenous knowledge. For these things and more, I thank Dr. Graveline and raise her spirit up.

In graduate school, two books came to my attention rather quickly and changed the way I think about Indigenous knowledge completely. Shawn Wilson’s *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008) and Margaret Kovach’s *Indigenous Research Methods: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (2009) are important books for Indigenous researchers. Between the two, they establish the foundation for the Indigenous research paradigm, which I discuss more extensively in Chapter Four. Wilson’s book has been particularly useful in articulating the resistance I mentioned earlier. Wilson is unapologetic in his articulation of Indigenous epistemologies, axiologies, methodologies, and ontologies and particularly emphasizes relational accountability—a message that all researchers need to hear, not just those working in Indigenous contexts (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Kovach’s book also articulates Indigenous research methods and emphasizes story, along with relationship, as being fundamental to the Indigenous way of knowing the world. Her emphasis on story is a welcome addition (see also Archibald, 2008; Kovach 2010; Thomas, 2005) as it is in story that I find the answer to the “How do I...” questions that arise so often in Indigenous research contexts. Without these



texts, I have no doubt that this thesis would not exist. For these gifts, I raise up Dr. Wilson and Dr. Kovach and thank them for creating a path for me to follow.

On the topic of story, few researchers have been so influential to my thinking as Jo-ann Archibald whose book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart Mind Body and Spirit* (2008) describes storytelling in educational contexts. This book emphasizes the holistic potential of story in bringing together the heart, mind, body, and spirit. It also further articulates the traditional worldview, giving gifts of knowledge that I have added to my own concept of what it means to be Indigenous. These include the four R's: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, constant reminders to be intentional and aware in my daily activity as well as my intellectual pursuit (see also Pillwax-weber, 2004). For Archibald, two-eyed seeing is fundamental to Indigenous scholarship, and it is through her writing that I find practical answer to what that looks like: a story (See also Bartlett Marshall, & Marshall, 2012). She also emphasizes the non-judgemental understanding that Wilson has worked into his book. Non-judgemental understanding is an idea toward which I actively strive with much difficulty due to my Western academic training to cast judgement on the quality of all things. Both Wilson and Archibald prove to be powerful examples for me to follow in this regard. Archibald also teaches us that listening is more important than speaking in Indigenous contexts—a lesson I take to heart academically as well as in my personal life. For these gifts, I raise up Q'um Q'um Xiiem (traditional name), honour her contributions to our communities, and thank her for her wisdom.

Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith's (2008) *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* is a book that has served me well throughout my graduate work and still holds many mysteries for me. This volume is particularly interesting

because it combines the literature of the critical paradigm, in which I became well versed during my undergraduate work, and the Indigenous research literature that I am working actively with now. In her chapter *Indigenous and Authentic*, the Hawaiian scholar Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008) reminded me, "Indigenous peoples are all about place. Land/*aina* defined as 'that which feeds', is the everything to our sense of love, joy, and nourishment. Land is our mother. This is not a metaphor" (p. 219). This connection to land cannot be overemphasized. For many authors, Indigenous knowledge is local and place specific (see also Kelly, 2010; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012; Pillwax-weber, 2004). Other chapters in the handbook remind me of the interconnectedness of struggle. There is a strong feminist element which runs through the book, and the combination of critical and Indigenous perspectives points out that patriarchy, the normalization of whiteness, the overvaluing of empirical thought, capitalism, globalization, and neo liberalism are all interconnected and feed off one another (Denzin et al., 2008; see also Graveline, 1998, 2000; Kinchloe, 1991; McLaren, 2007; Villaverde, 2000). These contributions are valuable and sometimes overlooked by Indigenous scholars. For the gifts these authors have shared, I raise them up; may their hearts beat free.

As I journeyed through the course work of my master's degree, I made attempts in all of my classes to connect my assigned reading with Indigenous knowledge and the intense reading I was doing on my own; however, having no Indigenous professors to continue to push me toward literature in the field, I returned to my own community in search of knowledge. This was where I first encountered Isabelle Knockwood's (1992) *Out of the Depths*. Her autobiographical telling of her time at residential schools reminded me of Marie Battiste's emphasis on the retelling of history through the frame of resistance.

Elder Knockwood is an example of living resistance, even asserting at various times that she will not reconcile with settlers at the cost of her critical thinking. Her book taught me much about a dark chapter in the history of our people and how our resilience kept us alive against all odds. From Elder Knockwood, I also have taken the idea of the talking circle and the example she puts forward regarding the role of personal narrative in disrupting dominant narrative. For these gifts, I thank my Elder, *Wela'lin nsukwi's*.

Deep in the search for traditional knowledge, I stumbled across a book by Trudy Sable and Bernie Francis titled *The Language of This Land, Mi'kma'ki* (2012). The book emphasizes the importance of using our language to liberate our thinking from the boxes offered to us by Western academic institutions (see also Battiste, 2013; Palmater, 2015). It was this book that first taught me that rocks are alive and, scattered throughout our land, that the seven grandfather stones still live and guide travellers. The emphasis on the importance of the Mi'kmaw language is not lost on me and, though I am not a fluent speaker, I continue to make a conscious effort to use the language in my writing and in my daily life. I have come to think of these words and phrases as powerful in disrupting the reading of Western academics. The unfamiliarity of the language is jarring and, I hope, causes the reader to question the normalized status of the English language. This book also has gifted me with more information regarding the historical context of my people. For these things, I thank the authors, Dr. Sable and Elder Francis, and raise them up for their contributions to our people.

Recently, the biggest developments in my Indigenous knowledge have occurred in the learning of the history of my people. There are three books that have contributed to this deep learning. First, Marie Battiste's *Living Treaties: Narrating Mi'kmaw Treaty Relations* (2016) is a collection of essays regarding the

treaty relations between the Mi'kmaw people and the English and French colonial regimes. These essays have served as the basis for my understanding of the covenant chain treaties between 1629 and 1786, as well as the struggle of the Mi'Kmaq in Nova Scotia to have those treaties recognized by the English and Canadian federal governments. Second, Daniel Paul's book *We Were Not the Savages* (2006) has been illuminating in learning the history of my people and has served as an example of the kind of reframing of history with a focus on resistance for which Battiste and Graveline call. These texts share a similar historical story from the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec. For the story of my own people, the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland, it was necessary for me to consult Doug Jackson's work, *On the Country: The Micmac of Newfoundland* (1993), supplementing my understanding with a paper by anthropologists Bartels and Janzen (1991) on the migration of the Mi'kmaq to Western Newfoundland. These documents showed me precisely how and why my great grandfather changed his name from Benoit to Bennett and why our Indigenous heritage was such a taboo subject growing up. I also was able to confirm things I already knew from the stories of my uncles, such as the commonality of union (intermarriage) between the French and Mi'kmaq in St. George's during the nineteenth century. Together, these texts have given me a fuller understanding of where I come from as an Indigenous person—an understanding I will share more fully in Chapter Three. I thank the authors named above for their wisdom, as well as all my relations for the sacrifices they have made and the battles they have fought so that I may exist as I do today.

When I began thinking about my thesis, I was immediately drawn to arts-based understanding, and I would be remiss were I not to mention the effect Indigenous artist and scholar Vicki Kelly has had on my thinking. I was fortunate

enough to hear Dr. Kelly speak at a conference in New Brunswick where I was held in awe of the heart behind her words. The language she used was not academic in the traditional sense but still held complexities and layers I thought about for days afterwards. She spoke from the heart with free, decolonized words that led me to question my own use of language. Upon reading her chapter about the path to Indigenous artistry (2014), my own inner artist was awakened, and I began to move through my inner landscapes with more awareness and sensitivity. Likewise, her earlier work (2010) reminded me of the importance of land to Indigenous peoples and how we carry that land with us no matter where we go. Vicki Kelly identifies as Métis and is heavily influenced by the concept of *métissage* (Donald, 2012; Kelly, 2010), a metaphoric weaving of different ideas together to form something new. For all the gifts Vicki Kelly's work has bestowed upon me, I thank her, *wela'lin*, and raise her up for her contributions to our shared communities.

Before moving on to my attempt to synthesize my understanding of Indigenous knowledge, I must mention the fiction that has influenced my understanding of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous literature is as important as Indigenous scholarship in determining Indigenous knowledge because of our belief in the validity of story as ontology (Kovach, 2009, 2010)—or, the way we understand the world through story (King, 2003). Some of our greatest storytellers are not scholars but, rather, novelists, poets, and filmmakers, who say clearly with metaphor what their learned counterparts in academia use analytic language to describe. Richard Wagamese's *Keeper'n Me* (1994) is a book with which I identify greatly. In it, an Indigenous man who is lost in the world makes his way back to the reserve from which he was removed as a child and gradually reconnects with traditional spirituality and his family. This book gave me strength

to reconnect with my own spirituality through its description of the red road—or, what it means to be Indigenous in the traditional, spiritual sense. *The Reason You Walk* (2015) by Wab Kinew is the autobiographical story of how a young Indigenous man grows and learns to walk the red road. As Kinew shares his story, he reminds me that it is okay to make mistakes so long as we find our way back to the path eventually. *Birdie* (2015) by Tracey Lindberg is the story of lost women who journey inward in search of where they lost themselves. The story of one's inward journey is not dissimilar to what I have tried to accomplish here. Through her words, Lindberg also reminds us of our lost sisters. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (2007) and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1994) by Sherman Alexie are books about native people—some of the first of their kind to have significant commercial success. They remind me of the simple importance of sharing the stories that we deem positive, as well as those we consider negative. Finally, *The Back of the Turtle* (2014) by Thomas King reminds me that nothing is black and white, and it is not our place to cast judgement on the actions of others. In life, there is balance and harmony, and we must trust that Creator will leave things in balance. All of these authors teach little truths about Indigenous knowledge through their stories, but the big truth they all remind us of is the power of story to articulate the complexities of our realities. For the gift of their stories, I thank each of these authors and honour their names.

**Synthesizing: What is Indigenous knowledge?** Having shared the stories and relationships I have developed with various scholars and authors who inform my concept of Indigenous knowledge and identity, it would now be wise to bring together these various threads in a discussion of what Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous identity mean for me. Some literature reviews may

use this section to comment on the completeness of literature. This is not my place to say and, as such, I must simply summarize and synthesize my understanding of these concepts and offer them up so that others may build on them as they see fit.

So, what is Indigenous knowledge? Based on my reading, experience, and unique position with the world, I believe that there are several shades to Indigenous knowledge. First, there is the notion that Indigenous knowledge is place-based knowledge (Donald, 2012; Kelly, 2010; King, 2014; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012; Meyer, 2008; Pillwax-Weber, 2004). For me, this shade is coloured by the sun setting over the pier on my grandfather's beach, the knowledge of where the best blueberries grow, and the feeling of wind on my legs as I sit watching time pass. This knowledge lives in words like *Nutuklamuk*, which is sometimes translated as sustainability but is a hard word to understand and has to do with the interconnectedness of all living beings, including the relationships between human beings. It is here where one shade bleeds into another, for a second theme of my Indigenous knowledge is relationality, or the idea that everything is connected to everything else (Graveline, 1998; McGaa, 1990; Ross, 2014; Sable & Francis, 2012; Wagamese, 1994; Wilson, 2008). For me, this shade smells like humility and environmentalism. It is the rain falling gently on rooftops and the prayer said for dead animals on the side of the road. It is the spiritual knowledge that we are all one energy and my attempts to keep that energy positive. This shade washes into another: the red road or relational accountability (Achibald, 2008; Graveline, 1998; Kinchloe & Stienberg, 2008; Knew, 2015; Kovach, 2009; McGaa, 1990; Pillwax-weber, 2004; Ross, 2014; Wagamese, 1994; Wilson, 2008). This is the idea that we must act in a way that respects our sacred relationship with the land and the beings that inhabit it. For me, this shade feels like my

grandfather's spirit watching over my shoulder and sounds like *Msit No'kmaq*. It looks like the covenant chain treaties, trans-systemic knowledge, treaty education in every school in Canada, and knowing the history of my people (Battiste, 2013, 2016; Jackson, 1993; King, 2012; Paul, 2006). In my mind's eye, I see a canoe paddled from the Bay of Saint George's to Eskasoni, repairing the relationship between the Qalipu and our long forgotten brothers and sisters. In this shade I see non-judgemental understanding (Lindberg, 2015; Wilson, 2008) and the wisdom to listen with my heart before I speak (Archibald, 2008). When we listen, we hear stories—another shade of Indigenous knowledge (Alexie, 1993, 2007; Archibald, 2008; Graveline, 1998; King, 2003, 2014; Kovach, 2009, 2010; Sable & Francis, 2012; Thomas, 2005). In this shade, I see my grandfather's beach again and hear the laughter of my uncles and aunts. I see myself as a teacher standing in front of a room of familiar faces weaving a tale of adventure. I see my poems flash by with sounds of soft guitar and thunderous drums in the background. In this shade, I remember the pithy summation of my entire philosophical project: personal narrative disrupts dominant narrative. From this position within the story-shade of Indigenous knowledge, all things are possible. I hear voices from the outside lending me their energy. Freire (1996) and Fanon (1991) teach me that all oppressions are both unique and similar (see also Coulthard, 2014); Emdin (2016) reminds me of the *neoindigenous* and how, by calling his urban students by this name, he positions us together in our struggles. I hear their stories and I draw strength from them. Your voices contribute to Indigenous knowledge; they give us the words for the feelings we have in our hearts. This shade is powerful, and it is where I spend the most time. Together, these colours and shades paint a bright and beautiful picture of how I see



Indigenous knowledge: a rich inner landscape (Kelly, 2010). To offer any less full a definition would serve as counterproductive to the spirit of my thesis.

### **Indigenous Identity**

For some of Canada's Indigenous peoples, there can be a lot of pain around the questions "Who is an Indian?" and "Are you Indigenous?" Despite what we know in our hearts, there is an external body that decides whether or not we legally belong to the group of "status Indians." Below, I will attempt to describe the two aspects of Indigenous identity I see within myself. First, the internal, or how I have come to understand my own Indigenous identity and, second, the external or how the government views my Indigenous identity.

**Internal Indigenous identity.** Indigenous identity is, for me, best defined relationally and in terms of one's Indigenous knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Graveline, 1998; Wilson, 2008). "Ultimately, within Indigenous contexts, one's understanding of one's self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998) and one's understanding of the universe (reality)—or one's ontology—are interconnected and inseparable" (Downey, proposal outline, 2016). My identity as an Indigenous person is deeply connected to the way I see the world through the eyes of an Indigenous thinker. Through the stories laid out in Chapter One, it may be seen that, when I gained status through the creation of the Qalipu in 2011, I was uneasy with the idea of calling myself Indigenous. In retrospect, I believe part of this dis-ease was from not fully understanding what it "meant" to be Indigenous. The answer I have developed in response to the question of what it means to be Indigenous is the combination of the historical, theoretical, practical, and spiritual knowledge I described above—my inner landscape. Again, I would reiterate that my understanding of my identity is my own, and I will not claim to speak for others. For me, being Indigenous is knowing that the rocks are alive,

feeling my grandfather's presence, listening with my heart, and being with my family. Everyone must answer these questions for themselves, so here is my answer; do with it what you will.

**Tanka III**

Wind

*September 3, 2016/ March 15<sup>th</sup> 2016*

When window opens  
I hear soft wind in the trees,  
And Grandfather's voice  
Sharing stories of spirit  
And guiding the thoughts I write.

**External Indigenous Identity.** In large part, my understanding of the issue of First Nations people's legislated identity, and the status system more broadly, comes from Pamela Palmater's doctoral work (2009) and subsequent book *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity* (2011). In this work, Palmater reminds us that the expressed purpose of the *Indian Act*, the legislative document that established the federal registry of Indians and the concept of Indian status, was to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the body politic of Canada. She furthers her discussion thus:

The *Indian Act* and its previous incarnations have resulted in many groups and individuals being excluded from legal recognition as Indians or band members based on grounds of gender, marital status, family status, race, age, and blood quantum or descent. (p. 28)

Forte (2013) has more of the same to offer and elaborates on the inherent patriarchy of the *Indian Act*:

Let us not forget that assimilation policies in Canada, combining race and place with patriarchy, sought to remove aboriginals from their lands and

their status as aboriginals. Starting in 1869, Indian status was removed from Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal males... (p. 26)

To discuss the specific mechanisms through which Indigenous peoples have been excluded is beyond the scope of this document, but suffice it to say that, by taking the power to determine our identities away from Indigenous peoples, the federal government has succeeded in excluding a huge number of people from their own history.

Though it is a hugely problematic system, which represents both racist and patriarchal ideologies, the status system is part of the mechanism through which I began to construct my identity as an Indigenous person. As previously noted, throughout my teenage years I would have identified primarily as a punk, a musician, or a Newfoundlander. The power of these subcultural and geographical designations on youth is well noted in sociological literature (Baron, 1989; Skutlin, 2016; Steinberg, 2011). After being designated a status Indian, however, I was called upon to redefine the way I saw myself. After my initial resistance to the idea, I began to engage with the question of what it meant to be Indigenous through the prompting of a close friend, Rabbit. This search for answers led me to the internal definition I have described above, but it should be noted that the impetus for my quest was the external designation.

It would serve here to briefly describe how I gained my Indian status. I have already articulated my immediate family history in Chapter One and will describe my Mi'kmaw lineage in greater detail in coming chapters, so this conversation will focus on the formation of the Qalipu band of Mi'kmaq First Nations. There are relatively few references in the academic literature of the Qalipu, but Hanrahan (2012) summarizes the situation succinctly:

Like most First Nations in Canada, the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq suffered territorial losses as Europeans settled on their land. They experienced the suppression of their language and culture through church and other agents. The resulting internalized shame led, in turn, to further cultural loss. The omission of the Indian Act in the 1948 Terms of Union between Canada and Newfoundland (Confederation occurred the following year) contributed to the process of ongoing loss for the Mi'kmaq. The Newfoundland Mi'kmaq did not exist on paper. (p. 62)

In the above section we see that the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland were not recognized at the time of Newfoundland's confederation and, as such, none of my relations were recognized as status Indian's despite their Indigenous ancestry. Hanrahan, a self-identified Newfoundland Mi'kmaq, continues:

Sixty-two years after Newfoundland's confederation with Canada, the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation was formed through an order in council. This action followed the four-decades-long struggle of the Federation of Newfoundland Indians. Qalipu Vice-Chief Kevin Barnes describes this as laying the ghost of 1949. (The Labrador Innu struggle, carried out through the same period, resulted in application of the Indian Act in 2002.) Qalipu is a landless band, but, with over 23,900 successful applications processed thus far, it will be the largest First Nation band in Canada. (p. 65)

Through the creation of the Qalipu band, my maternal family gained legal status as Indians and, in so doing, publically acknowledged our Indigenous heritage for the first time in four generations. It was through the creation of this band that I gained my Indian status and began my journey toward deeper understanding.

When the Qalipu band was originally formed, three criteria for joining were set: self-identification, group acceptance, and Indigenous ancestry. These

criteria were later refined and redefined in a supplemental agreement (FNI & Canada, 2013), which established a review of the membership that has recently forced over 10,000 Qalipu Mi'kmaq to relinquish their status (Qalipu First Nation, 2017). The first criterion, self-identification, states that in order to be considered an Indian under the law, one must self-identify as such. In the case of my family's membership review, we were required to submit documents demonstrating we were engaged in traditional activities such as fishing or hunting, as well as any other supporting material. As part of my review, I submitted the poem *Where I Am From*. Though at the time I may not have been sure of what it meant to be Indigenous, I knew from where I had come, and my mother was adamant in her claim that we were, in fact, Mi'kmaw. The second criterion for joining the Qalipu was to have the recognition of the community that you are Indigenous. This was an easy criterion for my family to meet. As soon as one person in St. George's started talking about their Indigenous ancestry, it paved a path for others to do the same, and when the history was gradually unearthed, there was no doubt of my family's past. The third criterion is the expectation that a member of the Qalipu have at least one drop of Indigenous blood in his or her veins. That is to say, they should be able to prove that somewhere in their lineage there is an Indigenous person. Again, because of my family's strong oral tradition and meticulous record keeping, this was an easy task.

With such a strong set of evidence, I thought it was impossible for the federal government to deny my family's Indigenous heritage. Yet, as I revisit this chapter, I must admit I was wrong. Though my extended family has maintained their status without question, many of us living away from the province have had our memberships revoked. At this point I can only take solace in the fact that we have been granted an appeal and are presently working together with our

disenfranchised brothers and sisters to show the federal government the error of their ways. To my struggling brothers and sisters, I extend my heart and speak words of wisdom that have kept me strong in my times of need: keep paddling your canoe.

Here I have tried to capture the way I see my own Indigenous identity. There are many facets of Indigenous identity, and it shares many intersections with other theoretical spaces, but the purpose of this section is to articulate exactly what I mean when I say Indigenous identity. If it has not been clear thus far, I will reiterate that, for me, Indigenous identity is a concept with at least two shades. The first shade is our internal identity—or, how we respond to the question, “What does it mean to be Indigenous?” My answer to this question, and the way I define my Indigenous identity, is expressed through my Indigenous knowledge and my inner landscape, which I have explained to the best of my abilities at the start of this chapter. That is to say, Indigenous identity is defined in terms of one’s Indigenous knowledge and ontology. For me, to be Indigenous is to see, feel, hear, and walk in the world Indigenously. The second shade of Indigenous identity is the legal designation of having Indian status, which my maternal family and I gained through the formation of the Qalipu band. Though the concept of status is a colonial tool of assimilation, I have endeavored here to articulate my understanding of my legal identity as an Indian, thus giving an account of what it means for me to be legally Indigenous. Finally, I would be remiss were I not to thank the authors I have mentioned in this section for their contributions to my understanding. To all my learned brothers and sisters, I say *wela’liq*.

**On Heroes (Rita Joe)***August 16, 2016*

You lost your talk,  
So that I could find mine,  
Somewhere between Niskan and  
Kesalu'l.

You light my path  
With inner flame  
Pulling me along,  
into my history

1000 L'nu scream  
In gentle voices,  
"This is not right!"  
"The treaties!"  
and I agree.  
But you say more  
In five words  
Than most  
With a book.

As I toil away  
Learning the lost  
—For good reason.  
I return to your words  
For guidance

Wela'lin Nukumi  
Thank you grandmother.  
Msit No'Kmaq.

### **Whiteness and White Privilege**

As the Talking Stick passes between my selves, our conversation shifts to concepts born of Western minds, albeit with emancipatory intent. White privilege and whiteness are intersecting terms that share certain dispositions but not a similar definition. Based on my reading, white privilege is a term used specifically to refer to the benefits, material or otherwise, that come from having white skin (McIntosh, 1990; Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). The wider discourse around the normalization of white culture, ethnicity, and bodies is often called whiteness or white studies (Rodriguez, 2000). Yet it is my experience that, just like Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous identity, terms like whiteness and white privilege resist simplistic definitions and call for characterization, or a more thorough description. In this section, I will attempt to characterize these terms, as well as racial passing and tribal critical race theory, with reference to the relevant literature.

#### **White Privilege**

White privilege is often articulated using Peggy McIntosh's (1990) metaphor of the invisible knapsack. In this knapsack, there is a series of metaphorical goods that make life easier, for example a blank cheque, maps, or passports. These metaphorical goods represent the actual invisible privileges white people have access to in Western society simply by existing in their bodies. Some examples of these listed in McIntosh's original work include:

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.



2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed. (p. 2)

McIntosh goes on to list twenty-six of these privileges, each of which is a seemingly banal activity often taken for granted by people who have never experienced the pain of racism. Feagin and O'Brien offer another succinct definition of white privilege, "Unearned advantage one receives solely by virtue of group membership..." (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003, p. 72). Since white privilege entered the discourse, it has become a widely researched and discussed topic. Attempts to measure the attitudes of white students have resulted in the white privilege attitudes scale, thus adding empirical understanding to the concept (Pinterits, Poteat, & Spanierman, 2009). Yet the bulk of research regarding white privilege has been aimed at understanding lived interactions, such as those of social workers (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015), teachers (Manglitz, 2003; Torino, 2015), and in higher education (Inwood & Martin, 2008; Sankar, 2014). In this research, there are many suggestions for how white teachers and social workers can sustain equitable relationships with their non-white students or clients and address the issue of white privilege without causing undue pain. In these cases, maintaining right relationships boils down to opening dialogue around white privilege, allowing space for everyone to be heard, and encouraging critical self-awareness on the part of practitioners (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Sankar, 2014). These responses to white privilege are a major part

of the literature and constitute an area of research separate from, but interconnected with, the conceptual framework of white privilege.

Pertaining to the development of the concept, there has been a number of criticisms of McIntosh's work accusing it of not pushing the idea far enough. For example, one recent work has stated that by using McIntosh as the default way to teach undergraduates about white privilege, educators paint too simplistic a picture of whiteness and anti-racist education (Lensmire et al., 2013). Others assert that pedagogical discussions of white privilege must be based in critical whiteness or critical multiculturalism (Hikido & Murray, 2016). The concept of white privilege also has been articulated as part of a bigger picture, which includes rigorous analysis of white supremacy and the violent mechanisms through which systematic racism has been allowed to flourish (Leonardo, 2004). Blum (2008) also criticizes the concept for its philosophical incompleteness. Indeed, as we will see in the subsequent section, whiteness is a more comprehensive and nuanced theoretical framework for understanding the role of race in creating privilege. Yet the interrelatedness of the two concepts cannot be understated; whiteness is part of the mechanism through which white privilege is tacitly permitted to continue. Having said that, based on my reading of the literature, it would seem that discussions of white privilege tend on the side of practicality, while whiteness seems to be a much more theoretical conversation.

### **Whiteness**

Whiteness is complex, multifaceted, and pluralistic in its definitions, "The result [of several analyses of whiteness] is whiteness unfrozen, whiteness viewed as ensembles of a phenomenon complexly embedded in socioeconomic, sociocultural and psychic

interrelations. Whiteness emerges as a process, not a “thing,” as plural rather than singular in nature” (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1). The term whiteness emerges out of the chromatic typologies of race popularized by the social Darwinists but later refuted by modern thinkers through the assertion that race is a social, not biological, construct (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007; Hier, & Bolaria, 2006). Whiteness, however, is a unique chromatic typology because of its tacit normativity within Western society. In the way it has been taken up by many American scholars, the term whiteness refers to a location of structural advantage, a place from which white people see themselves, and a set of cultural practices (Frankenberg, 1993; Rodriguez, 2000). Rodriguez (2000) also reminds us that there is a piece of performance integrated into each of these elements. Whiteness is something that is performed, an action, as well as a disposition and a position from which one can view the world. It is the task of the critical scholar working with whiteness to disrupt the various colour-blind narratives that deny the existence of whiteness and white privilege. Frankenberg (1993) notes, “Naming whiteness displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance” (p. 6). It is this unmarked status that makes whiteness so difficult for many white people to understand. While attributes of other chromatic typologies of race, such as blackness, nativeness, or asianness, are prominently displayed in media as being other, different, or bad, whiteness is often presented as normal or not presented at all. Research and writing around stereotypes and the differences in media’s depiction of people of colour and white people serves as a disruption of the tacit dominance through normativity of whiteness (hooks, 1990, 1992; Stonebanks, 2008). Another way of disrupting the silence of whiteness is to identify its signifiers, such as the “everything is fine,” and “I don’t see

colour” mentalities, where people disengage and silence conversations of race and racism because of their inability to see it from the position of whiteness (Feagan & O’Brien, 2003; Garza, 2000). These attitudes, as well as a belief in the myth of meritocracy, or the idea that all people have equal opportunity and that structural disadvantages based on race are non-existent (Liu, 2011; see also McNamee & Miller, 2004), are all signifiers and markers of the disposition of whiteness. In other words, whiteness is a sort of ignorance and willing disbelief in the existence of white privilege.

Given all of this, for me and for our discussion here, the term whiteness refers to the performed characteristics traditionally ascribed folk in white bodies, as well as the disposition of willful ignorance that permits those performances to be normalized and seen as more inherently valuable than the performances of other ethnicities or racial typographies. I believe that in calling attention to own my white-seeming privilege I am able to redefine my whiteness in a more critical sense, as well as disrupt the silence that comes along with whiteness.

### **Racial Passing and Tribal Critical Race Theory**

Before continuing on to discuss the unique theoretical framework I have used in this project to describe my experience with race, white-seeming privilege, some discussion of two other contributing theory areas would be prudent.

**Racial passing.** Racial passing has been taken up in a variety of contexts, most notably in the study of literature (Ginsberg, 1996; Wald, 2000). Some writers, such as Kroeger (2003), take passing to refer to an intentional act of deception regarding one’s own identity, treating it as a subversive act against a society with overly rigid compartmentalization of racial identity. More generally, for Kroeger (2003) passing is

“When people effectively present themselves as other than who they understand themselves to be” (p.7). Much of the more recent work on passing centres around the experiences of an individual (Piper, 1992) or a particular group of people, namely African American (Hobbs, 2014; Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Otoole, 2002; Piper, 1992), Jewish (Harrisen-Kahan, 2005), and Hispanic (Bybee, 2015) populations. While some writing has been devoted to the phenomenon of white passing for Indigenous (Root, 1996; Valaskakis, 2005), the reverse, Indigenous passing for white, is not something that has been discussed in the literature. Two likely reasons for this are the emphasis on the intentionality of deception (Kroeger, 2003) in definitions of passing and the history of assimilation and erasure of identity that settler colonialism has forced on Indigenous people (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). It is likely that, because Indigenous peoples have had to actively fight to retain their cultures, languages, and identities, the idea of passing for another race is far less appealing for both individuals and researchers. That is not to say that Indigenous people have not, at times, passed for white; rather, that there may be historical and cultural factors that limit the amount of passing that happens as well as our willingness to examine it.

In this research, I have opted for the term ‘seeming’ instead of passing for several reasons. In Mi’kmaw tradition, the word passing holds unshakeable connotations of death. To pass is to end one’s physical journey and enter into the spirit world. As such, using the term seeming rather than passing is a way of honouring my tribal epistemology (Kovach, 2009). My use of the term seeming also more adequately describes the phenomenon under investigation. The deception I engage in everyday is not intentional but, rather, forced upon me because of my light complexion. If passing is indeed an act of

presenting oneself as different than one is, I am in no way passing. Yet people see me as white until I gently correct them, reminding them that I am a proud Indigenous person. Although racial passing is not the best lens to understand my experience with identity, it contributes to the theoretical understanding of identity as an overly rigid, compartmentalized, and divided concept. The rigidity of the labels we ascribe to our identities, and the privilege we lend to some of those labels but not to others, directly encourages people to lie in order to gain access to privileged identities through passing. That same rigidity generates the inability for people to see someone as other than what they look like, or seem to be. Both seeming and passing are terms populated by an intention to move beyond chromatic typographies of race and rigid binaries of identity into an appreciation of complex personhood or individual difference (Tuck, 2009).

### **Cinquain V**

Meditation on passing

*March 2, 2017*

Passing,  
Moving onward,  
Leaving physical space  
For the bliss of pure energy.  
Journey.

**Tribal critical race theory.** Critical race theory in education is a way of viewing race and racism with the understanding that racism is so ubiquitous in society that it is often invisible (Brayboy, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Further, critical race theory “confronts and challenges traditional views of education in regard to issues of meritocracy, claims of color-blind objectivity, and equal opportunity...[and] is activist in nature and inherently must contain a commitment to social justice” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 428). Critical race theory provides a binding theoretical thread for whiteness, white

privilege, and racial passing, situating those theories within a common conception of racism as an unseen but dominant force in society. Critical race theory, however, is only a starting point in that it treats race and racism as monolithic rather than appreciating the unique experiences of individual racialized groups. The desire for theory that articulates specific experiences of racism has led to the emergence of sub-categories of critical race theory, such as Asian critical race theory and Latino critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005). Each of these sub-categories emphasizes a different experience with racism, but they all situate themselves within the broader struggle for social justice posited by critical race theory.

Tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) can be viewed as another sub-category of critical race theory that attempts to make sense of the Indigenous experience with racism; however, it must be understood that TribalCrit replaces the emphasis on racism being endemic to society with an emphasis on colonialism being endemic to society (Brayboy, 2005). Brayboy (2005) states the main tenants of TribalCrit:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.

6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (pp. 429 – 430)

Even with a surface level reading of these points, one may be struck by the similarities they share with my earlier description of Indigenous knowledge. The emphases around story and settler-colonialism are particularly relevant to this work, as I have articulated story as my dominant way of viewing the world. Within the context of this project, TribalCrit should be understood as another binding theoretical thread. Whereas critical race theory joins together whiteness, white privilege, and racial passing through a similar understanding of the problematic prevalence of racism, TribalCrit adds Indigenous knowledge and knowledge of settler-colonialism into the bundle of theories which inform white-seeming privilege and binds those theories together in a common understanding of the reality of being Indigenous in a colonial state.

### **White-Seeming Privilege**

The purpose of this project is to examine the unique racial space occupied by Indigenous peoples with fair skin and, thus, some form of white privilege. The term that has been used to describe this privilege in popular and social media is “white-passing



privilege” (Ellingburg, 2015; Watanabe 2015a, 2015b; see also Jeffries, 2015), but I have already noted my objections to that term and will continue to use white-seeming privilege here.

There has been very little written about the phenomenon of white-seeming privilege and the uniqueness of the privilege associated with biracial or racially seeming individuals. The most comprehensive discussions of white-seeming privilege are given by those who experience the phenomenon themselves. One YouTube video blogger, Watanabe (2015a), has been thorough on the topic and has been cited by many other bloggers working on the topic (Julia, 2016). Working from the definition that white-seeming privilege is “When you are a person of colour... and other people perceive you ... as white” (Watanabe, 2015a), Watanabe states that there is a difference between white privilege and white-seeming privilege and that seeming-privilege is always superficial and conditional based on the context. She emphasizes the difference between the way young white people see themselves portrayed in the media (i.e., normalized) and the way people of colour, regardless of complexion, see themselves in these contexts (i.e., stereotypes that are internalized). In another video (2015b) where she talks about being mixed race, Watanabe describes the feeling of not “really” feeling like a part of either race to which she ethnically belongs. In the Indigenous context, this feeling of being misplaced can be seen in the comments of some Indigenous authors about the question of being a real Indian (Alexie, 1994; King, 2008, 2003). Watanabe’s discussion gives us some idea of the difference between the privilege white people and white-seeming people experience. Ellingburg (2015), an Indigenous woman with fair skin, also discusses white-seeming privilege in a 2015 blog post. Her discussion is more focused on the unique

Native American setting where she occasionally receives reverse racism from her Indigenous brothers and sisters for not looking native. She also discusses the privilege she feels as she walks through the world:

... because I am Indigenous and I do face a great deal of challenges specific to my nationality, I have often wrongly believed that I don't have white privilege. That isn't true, because the larger world views me as a white woman. When I'm out and about in the rural area I live in, white people assume I am their natural ethnicity. Police officers don't stop me on erroneous, trumped up charges. In fact, I could, hypothetically, see a police officer, and feel either more safe, or neutral. I can look at a TV and see people who look like me. In magazines, movies, and casting calls, white is considered normal or standard. (Ellingburg, 2015)

Ellingburg's depiction of white-seeming privilege more closely resembles my own experience, as represented in the first two sections of the poem *Well, You Don't Look Like an Indian*.

In this section, I have attempted to describe the theories that inform white-seeming privilege. These theories are a community; they do not necessarily agree on every point, but they work together and engage with each other in a respectful way. Critical race theory teaches us that racism is endemic to our society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and tribal critical race theory adds the point that colonialism is also ever-present (Brayboy, 2005). Whiteness describes the position from which white people see the world (Rodriguez, 2000), and white privilege reminds us that that position is filled with many invisible structural advantages (McIntosh, 1990). The literature around racial passing shows us that whiteness and nativeness are limiting social constructions that are

often subverted by those who exist on the borders between identity groups (Ginsenberg, 1996; Kroeger, 2003). These theories, along with settler-colonialism, pave the way for an understanding of what it means to be seen as white while being Indigenous. They show us that we cannot deny our white privilege, nor can we tacitly accept the deceitfulness of passing. In the coming sections, I will discuss my own lived experience with white-seeming privilege as well as the historical context of settler-colonialism that has enabled it.

### **Personal Accounts**

In trying to conclude this section, I turn to Wilson (2008) who reminds me that to repeat the main points of my discussion would be disrespectful to my readers, implying that their memory is weak. Instead, I will end where I began, with story.

I remember walking into the third year English class and seeing fifty students crammed into thirty desks. The classroom was only  $\frac{3}{4}$  the size of the others because one of the other teachers had made her home out of the back left corner. The didactic method the students were expecting was lecture; I think they thought that from my lips would spill the infinite and irrefutable truth of the English language, but the message I carried was that it was inside of them.

I was covering classes for a friend who was sick after having eaten a chocolate bar containing gluten, and I decided to design an interactive summary activity. The students would be given magazines I had found in the orphanage and told to work in groups to summarize the article in their own words. In retrospect, I recognize the folly of this activity was neither the idea itself nor my students' incompatibility with my teaching method but, rather, my inability to articulate the direction in terms they understood.

When I realized the activity had failed, I became sad and despondent, and the students became frustrated. One of the vocal male students in the back of the room stood up and called me a “mazunghu” or a “white person,” and I could tell from his tone that he meant it in the most dehumanizing way possible. I left the school in tears that day and was forced for the next several days to reflect and sulk while I convinced my travelling partner from Canada that she should cover my classes for me.

This story from my time teaching in Tanzania is one of the ways I “discovered” my whiteness and one of the first moments I saw myself as an oppressor. It is also a story of poor teaching and unreasonable conditions, but in my mind it is always referred to as the story of my whiteness. Though it was painful at the time, I thank that student for sending the quest of self-discovery that would eventually change my life. It is this story, and the many other stories of my white-seeming privilege and my Indigenous identity, that will lead our conversation in the subsequent sections.

Msit No’kmaq,

Wela’lioq.

**WEST WIND: STORIES OF EXISTENCE****Landless***December 17, 2016*

They called us a landless band  
But I thought that was weird cuz I know my land.  
My grandfather's beach with the bright golden sand  
Where thousands of cod were packaged and canned,  
And where the shed he built with his own hands still stands  
After 60 years of winters in Newfoundland.

That beach, along with the hill and the meadows my cousins still roam  
And the sacred places marked by crosses and stone.  
The shores and forests—our spiritual home  
Are our lands—they're just on loan.  
So please excuse the fervour of my tone,  
but these smoke stacks are like cuts on my heart—wounds unsewn.

## Qalipu Stories

### **A Prayer for Guidance II**

*January 28, 2017*

Kisu'lk,  
 Let my eyes see unclouded.  
 Let my ears hear the voices of my ancestors in the wind,  
 And guide my hands to write what they speak.  
 Guide my legs along the right road,  
 And my lips, so my words will do no harm.  
 Kisu'lk,  
 Guide my mind to tell these stories well.  
 And keep my heart strong.  
 Wela'lin Kisu'lk.  
 Msit No'kmaq

## Creation Stories

At some point, things began. What the beginning of existence looks like to you is largely dependent on what stories you believe. For example, there is an old story about two people living harmoniously in a garden until one of them develops a craving for fruit and is banished into an imperfect existence. I heard that story when I was young, but it certainly wasn't the only one. There is another story that is popular today about an explosion of incalculable magnitude that brought the entire universe into existence. I'll be honest, I've heard it a few times but don't really like it—there is no character development or conflict. I heard once that the Kainai (blood) tribe from Southern Alberta told a story similar to the big bang theory—I wonder if their version was more compelling. Thomas King likes to tell the story about the woman falling through a hole in the sky and landing on the turtle's back (2003), and I like it too, but it is not really mine to tell, so let's leave it be.

I could tell you the story I believe, about the thunderbirds and Kluscap shrinking the animals, but that story takes four days to tell, and I'm not sure either

of us have that kind of endurance. That doesn't leave us with much, but I'm not so sure it matters. You believe what you believe about the beginning of the universe, and not believing my creation story doesn't necessarily prevent you from understanding and respecting my worldview, nor the rest of my story.

### **We are Birds of Fire**

We are the stars which sing,  
 We sing our light;  
 We are the birds of fire,  
 We fly over the sky.  
 Our light is a voice;  
 We make a road for spirits,  
 For the spirits to pass over.  
 Among us are three hunters  
 Who chase a bear;  
 There never was a time  
 When they were not hunting  
 We look down on the mountains.  
 This is the song of the stars.

(Leland, 1884, p. 379; quoted in Whitehead, 1991, p. 4)

### **L'nu - The Mi'kmaq**

If you take nothing else from my writing, take this: stories hold power. The story you believe about how my people lived before contact with Europeans will directly influence the story you believe about my people after European contact and, ultimately, the way you perceive my people today. As I have read it, there are two dichotomous stories, or ways of viewing the same story, about the Mi'kmaq before contact with Europeans.

First, we have the narrative that has been dominant for the last 500 years; the narrative that my people were savages living in the wilderness waiting to be saved and were not using our land. This is the narrative made apparent through official government policies, such as Terra Nullius in Canada and Manifest Destiny and Norman Yoke in the United States (Brayboy, 2005; Palmater, 2011),

and later through our designation as wards of the Canadian government (Killen, 2016). We share this narrative with the many other nations of Turtle Island, as well as all the colonized people in other lands. As Tuck and McKenzie (2015) have recently pointed out, the narrative of colonization is both shared globally and specific to place. I went to school in the late 1990's and the early 2000's, and by that time I think teachers were becoming a bit more sensitive about "the Indian issue." Thus, the narrative of Indigenous peoples as "savages" was replaced by the narrative of Indigenous peoples as "history." In that, my people remained savages. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) weigh in on this erasure of Indigenous peoples, articulating it as one of the three structured antagonisms associated with settler colonialism. In their own words:

Settler colonialism wants Indigenous land, not Indigenous peoples, so Indigenous peoples are cleared out of the way of colonial expansion, first via genocide and destruction, and later through incorporation and assimilation (Wolfe, 2006). The settler colonial discourse turns Indigenous peoples into savages, unhumans, and eventually, ghosts... The goal of settler colonialism is to erase Indigenous peoples from valuable land (see McCoy, 2014; Paperson, 2014). (p.66)

That is to say that the role Indigenous peoples were expected to play by colonial agents was simply to disappear. This desire for the erasure of Indigenous peoples is made abundantly clear in statements by historical figures such as Duncan Cambell Scott, "Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian left in Canada" (quoted in Palmater, 2011, p. 28). This erasure was the narrative I heard in my own education. The story I learned about my people when I went to elementary school was largely that we were a part of history, something that *had been*. I remember watching several videos in grade six that depicted the



traditional lives of the Mi'kmaq. There were four of these videos, one for each of the seasons. I watched the actors move their camps, fish with spears, smoke their salmon, pick wild berries, and get married. I remember being rather captivated with these videos at the time, thinking that it might be nice to live in those "simpler times." As an adult, I learned that those videos were a ubiquitous part of the Nova Scotia schooling experience and contribute to the popular image of my people as historical savages and present day ghosts.

A second narrative, however, has recently emerged in the popular consciousness of settler Canadians. It is a narrative that has always existed within our communities but one that is only now seeping through the barriers of Western thought. Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste has identified this re-writing of history with focus on the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples as a central tenet of the decolonizing process (Battiste, 2013). In the specific context of the Mi'kmaq, historian Daniel Paul has done a comprehensive re-writing in his aptly titled book *We Were Not the Savages* (2006). He begins his narrative by describing our pre-contact society, particularly the founding principles of our culture, "The supremacy of the Great Spirit, respect for Mother Earth and power people" (p.7). He continues, "The nature of [our] society, which included sharing and free expression, was so advanced in the establishment of equitable human rights principles that greed and intolerance were all but unknown" (p.7). In other words, the central tenets of this counter narrative are that the Mi'kmaq were a strong, spiritual people with a special relationship to the land. Indeed, many of the accounts written by my Mi'kmaw Elders emphasize this narrative of our people—our strength, the balance of our traditional lifestyles, the depth of our spiritual practice (Battiste, 2013; Knockwood, 1992). This is the story I want to believe, but I also need to acknowledge the humanity of my ancestors. They

were people; they probably made mistakes, hurt others, and broke their own laws. It is beyond our capacity as human beings to be perfect, and to truly honour our relations we ought to see them for the imperfect humans they were. Thus, the story I believe is that we were a strong, spiritual, diverse nation with many problems but the time, patience, and wisdom to listen to those problems and solve them communally.

A recently published curriculum resource called *MiKmawe'l Tan Teli-kina'muemk: Teaching about the Mi'kmaq* (Bernard, Rosenmeier, & Farrell, 2015) starts our story thus:

The Mi'Kmaq are the [I]ndigenous people of Mi'kma'ki, the Mi'kmaw homeland which includes all of present-day Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Central and [E]astern New Brunswick, the Gaspé Peninsula and Newfoundland. For at least the last 13,000 years our ancestors have called Mi'kma'ki home. (p.15)

These basic geographical and temporal facts remind us of the longevity of traditional Mi'kmaw society. Bernard, Rosenmeier and Farrell (2015) continue the story by describing our close connection to the land and our ties to other Indigenous communities, such as the Abenaki, the Wolastoqiyik, and the Innu. These connections form the basis of the Wabanaki confederacy and show the emphasis of the traditional Mi'kmaq around maintaining right relationships (Bernard, Rosenmeier, & Farrell, 2015; Sable and Francis, 2012; see also Stonechild, 2016). There is a plethora of documents available that describe the traditional lifestyles of my ancestors. Some of them attempt to paint a vivid picture of the traditional way of life but end up being paternalistic reductions steeped in unchecked anthropocentric bias, again making us look like savages (Cajete, 2000). For example, Robertson (1977) describes our traditional fishing

methods, discussing the use of various tools in order to catch different sorts of fish. While this may seem innocent enough, it fails to capture the philosophy around our fishing practice—something more adequately described by Elder Kerry Prosper (2016). In my view, to offer description without story, philosophy, and prayer is almost always paternalistic and reductionist. So long as anthropologists and historians with appreciation only for that which can be proven through Western empirical methods write the stories of my people, something will always be missed. To quote again from Paul (2006), “Until the lion has his historian, the hunter will always be the hero” (Unknown author, quoted in Paul, 2006, p. 3).

**Tanka XXXI**  
Fishing  
*January 2, 2017*

Thank you creator  
For the bounty of your land.  
Whether spear or line  
I honour our brother fish  
As my grandfather before.

### Initial Contacts

Five hundred years of colonial occupation is not easily condensed into a few thousand words; however, I must remind the reader that I am not a historian but a storyteller. My goal is not to give an exhaustive history of my people<sup>3</sup> but, rather, to tell the story in such a way that the settler-colonial context of my white-seeming privilege can be made clear. My focus here will be devoted to the historical route of my own ancestors and, thus, the history of the Nova Scotian Mi'kmaq until the royal proclamation in 1763 and then the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland, following my ancestors' migration from Cape Breton to St.

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<sup>3</sup> For more complete histories see Paul (2006), Upton (1979), Jackson (1993), and Whitehead (1991).

George's. In outlining my people's history with settler-colonialism, I have seen the inevitability of the erasure of our Indigenous identities, but rather than allow this history to overwhelm me with sadness, I use it as a point of celebration. After 500 years of colonization, my people continue to reclaim their erased past and walk through the world with heads held high and eagle feathers in their hair. This is another testament to what Upton (1979) calls our passive resistance, our longevity, and our resilience, or as Vizenor (as cited in Tuck, 2009) puts it, our survivance.

**Tanka XXXII**  
Survivance  
*January 2, 2017*

Passive resistance  
Does not seem so passive here.  
Every breath resists,  
Pushing against the silence  
Of polite conversation.

Jackson (1993) states that first contact between Europeans and the Mi'kmaq may have happened as early as 1504 when a Basque fishing boat may have stumbled across Cape Breton. Whitehead (1991) also puts the first European contact with the Mi'kmaw nation somewhere in the 1500's with a Portuguese settlement being established in Cape Breton by 1521 and Mi'kmaw place names appearing on Portuguese maps by 1550. While these descriptions discount the well document fact that Vikings visited Newfoundland and interacted with Indigenous groups there (most likely the Beothuk) around 500 year earlier (Janzen, 1997), in the story colonization the 16<sup>th</sup> century is as good a place to start as any. The initial contacts between Europeans and the Mi'kmaq were non-violent trading endeavours between fishermen from Europe and the Mi'kmaq living along the coast (Leavitt, 1993; Upton, 1979). While fishing boats

from various European countries occasionally landed in Cape Breton during the sixteenth century, they made more frequent voyages to the coast of Newfoundland for profitable fishing, primarily of cod (Leavitt, 1993). In some ways, the cod that the Europeans prized so highly serves as a good metaphor for colonization as a whole—the relentless resource extraction eventually led to the collapse of the cod stocks, an environmental disaster from which we are only now recovering. As settlers continued to establish themselves throughout Mi'Kma'ki, the cod stock was not the only thing to be devastated. Leavitt (1993) accessibly tells the story:

The very first fishermen and traders who came to Mi'Kma'ki brought new diseases with them. The Micmacs [sic], who had never suffered these diseases, had no immunity to them. Epidemics spread quickly, often several diseases at once... during the first hundred years after the Europeans arrived, 75 percent of all Micmacs [sic] died, those who were left found their world crumbling around them. (p. 34)

Estimates of the Mi'kmaw population before the sixteenth century extend as high as 100,000 (Upton, 1979), and by 1900 that population had dropped to 4,000 (Canadian Census Office, 1902). Writing these words makes my heart ache. As I imagine my ancestors dying of the measles and pneumonia, I cannot help but think of my uncle having his foot amputated from poorly managed diabetes or the many overweight people living in the North and their many health related problems. The Colombian Exchange is ongoing in that European diseases are still killing Indigenous people. By robbing us of our traditional hunting grounds, the various colonial governments that have oppressed the Indigenous people of this country have created an impoverished socioeconomic reality where cheap foodstuffs heavy in refined sugars are readily available and healthy alternatives

are prohibitively expensive (Cajete, 1999). This situation, combined with the prevalence of alcoholism, drug use, and chemically polluted tobacco products (all of which are bi-products of settler society), has led Aboriginal people to experience a plethora of health problems. In Canada, these include higher rates of obesity across all age groups, elevated prevalence of diabetes, and almost double the rate of respiratory problems (Statistics Canada, 2016). These cheap foods and cigarettes are the modern small pox blankets—killing us with feigned kindness (Boyden, 2001; Cajete, 1999).

By the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of fishing and trading in Mi'Kma'ki was being done between the French and the Mi'kmaq. As more French people began to settle in Mi'Kma'ki, particularly after the establishment of Port-Royal in 1605 (Paul, 2006), the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and the French developed further. Paul (2006) describes these encounters thus:

The harsh climatic conditions the ill-prepared French found in North-Eastern North America in the early stages of their colonization efforts seemed to present them with an insurmountable barrier. Those who first tried to settle in Mi'kma[w] territory suffered terribly from the cold temperatures and disease and died off in large numbers. Eventually, in a display of compassion, but to the People's long-term detriment, the Mi'kmaq would provide the French with the knowledge and skills they needed to survive in the new environment. (p. 53)

Other accounts that the French and the Mi'kmaq got along well and enjoyed a mutually profitable trading relationship are numerous (Leavitt, 1993). Upton (1979), however, reminds us that the French held the same intent of acculturating the Mi'kmaq to European society as the English and were only less successful because they lacked the numbers and resources to do so effectively. As Paul

(2006) indicates, it was through Mi'kmaw compassion that the French were able to survive. One manifestation of the relationship between the French and the English was the Catholic baptism of Grand Chief Membertou in 1610 (Battiste, 2016b). In a recent chapter, Jaime Battiste (2016b) described this event as Chief Membertou's way of consecrating the legal relationship between the Mi'kmaq and the Holy See. Despite the trauma of residential schools, many in the Mi'kmaw community still have a strong relationship to Catholicism—a fact shown through the well-celebrated feast of St. Anne, the patron saint of the Mi'kmaq.

My own family has a deep connection with the Catholic Church in no small part due to the devotion of my Grandfather. At the end of my grandfather's physical journey, a priest was called in to the St. John's hospital to guide him into the spirit world. My eldest uncle was there with him. The priest turned to my uncle and said, "Now son, let us pray for your father so that he may join God in heaven." My uncle took no time in his reply, "No sir, I will never pray for my father, I will only pray to him." By all accounts my grandfather was a saintly man of devout faith who often told his children to, "Do what they say, not what they do" in reference to the church.

### **The English and The French**

While the French held a relatively non-violent relationship with the Mi'kmaq, they had significant difficulties with other European nations, specifically the English. Although this contentious relationship only occasionally brought the nations to war with one another, there was almost always a bitter rivalry being played out by way of a race to acquire new lands (Paul, 2006). Such was the case in 1613 when the English pillaged and burnt the French settlement at Port-Royal despite the two nations officially being at peace with one another (Paul, 2006). According to Paul (2006), this event may have given the English the impression

that the Mi'kmaq would easily submit to English rule. This was, of course, not the case (Paul, 2006). The raids on Port-Royal put a damper on official French settlement in Mi'Kma'ki, and until 1632 when the English officially signed over Acadia and Quebec to France, there were only small scale settlements of the land from both the French and English (Paul, 2006; Upton, 1979).

The relationship the English developed with the Mi'kmaq was often violent, frequently oppositional, and always distrustful (Leavitt, 1993; Paul, 2006). While the French endeavoured to maintain friendship, trading relationships, and even married with the Mi'kmaq (Upton, 1979), the English sought to buy or take land, removing the Indigenous inhabitants. This is an excellent example of what Tuck and McKenzie (2015) identify as the primary goal of settler-colonialism—the erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to facilitate the acquisition of new land.

Paul (2006) estimates that by the end of the 1600's the Mi'kmaw population, still in decline, was somewhere around 50,000 total; however, it is unclear whether this number includes the Mi'kmaq living in Newfoundland. While it is widely acknowledged that there were several exoduses of Mi'kmaq from Cape Breton to Newfoundland (Bartels & Janzen, 1991; Jackson, 1993; see also Pastore, 1998), estimates of how many Mi'kmaq lived on the island at any given time are few and even more rough than the estimates of how many Mi'kmaq lived in the rest of Mi'Kma'ki. The first and only major French colony was established in Newfoundland in the 1660's at Placentia on what is today called the Avalon Peninsula (Jackson, 1993). According to Jackson (1993), there were immediate references to Indigenous peoples occupying the area—in Jackson's view likely Mi'kmaq from Cape Breton or Port-Royal. The most significant reference to Mi'kmaq in Newfoundland until later in history comes from 1704



when, "The French governor of Placentia reported the appearance of a part of about 20 or more [Mi'kmaw] families" (Jackson, 1993, p. 20).

The Mi'kmaq extended their relationship with the French into a military alliance sometime around 1652 (Paul, 2006). This union led the Mi'kmaw nation into war with the English and their allies, the Iroquois, for the majority of the next century. While there are, no doubt, many tales from this period of violence worth telling, it is not my want to participate in the recounting of military history. It is important to remember where we come from, whether that is a violent place or not, but we need not always take up those stories. Sometimes the hatchet should stay buried. We have enough violence in our history without telling the stories of our brave warrior ancestors. Having said that, it is important to note that Paul (2006) makes reference to Newfoundland as a staging ground for Mi'kmaw attacks against English shipping and trading posts until 1705 when a large number of English soldiers were moved to the Island.

Peace echoed throughout Mi'Kma'ki again on July 13, 1713 (Paul, 2006; Upton, 1979). The signing of the treaty of Utrecht by the French and the English transferred European control over parts of Mi'Kma'ki to the English. The Mi'kmaq in the concerned areas were not involved in the signing of the treaty and were deemed new English subjects in the subsequent interpretation of the document (Paul, 2006; Upton, 1979). The Mi'kmaq resisted this notion and continued to war with the English for the better part of the next 50 years until the official war was finally ended in the 1760's (Paul, 2006). By that time, however, the decimation of our people from two centuries of disease, war, and settler-colonialism left a scar on the land and in our hearts that would take seven generations for our nation to heal.

**Tanka XXXIII**

On loss

*January 2, 2017***Generations Lost.**

The wind scatters their ashes

With songs of mourning.

Their loss is why we must stand,

Tall as oak and proud like bear.

**The Covenant Chain Treaties**

As Mi'kmaw people, our Elders teach us that the first treaties we made were with the land (Metallic, 2016). In this we see some of what treaties meant to our ancestors. They were sacred, political, and legal agreements made in mutual good faith between two parties, often sealed with ceremony. The European concept of a treaty involved an oppositional and exploitative negotiating style and careful legal language often meant to do more harm than good (Paul, 2006). These differences in the way agreements were perceived made mutual understanding impossible and inevitably led to conflict and debate.

The major treaties the Mi'kmaq made with the British are often referred to as the covenant chain treaties (Battiste, 2016a; Paul, 2006) and were created in time period from 1725 to 1786 (Battiste, 2016b). While there are other treaties, such as the Jay Treaty with the United States government (Paul, 2016), these are the treaties that have stood the test of time and provide the legal basis for the continued relationship of peace and friendship between the Mi'kmaw nation and the British Crown (Battiste & Marshall, 2016).

I believe these treaties are particularly important to the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland because of the unique history of the Island. Newfoundland remained a British colony until 1907 and a dominion within the commonwealth until it joined confederation in 1949 (Hillmer, 2013), and because when

Newfoundland did join confederation Premier Smallwood purposefully decided not to include the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq in his considerations (Jackson, 1993), I believe the most recent legal document relating to my grandfather's rights as a Mi'kmaw man are the covenant chain treaties, particularly the royal proclamation of 1763 (Jackson, 1993). The legal closeness of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq to the covenant chain treaties is not something that has been taken up by historians and warrants further examination. As I have made abundantly clear, I am neither historian nor legal expert; I am only a storyteller, and as I have interpreted the story, this is the case. I eagerly wait to be proven wrong.

The covenant chain is comprised of three separate treaties. The first two are called the peace and friendship treaties, and the third is known as the Royal Proclamation but also includes the negotiations leading up to it. The dates often ascribed to Treaty 1 are 1725 and 1726 (Battiste, 2016b). Paul's (2006) view on the intent of this treaty from the English perspective is worth quoting at length here:

...The British motivation in approaching the northeastern Amerindian Nations during 1724 and 1725 with a treaty proposal was a desire to lull these nations into a false sense of security until an opportune time arose when they could dispossess them of all they owned. (p. 85)

He continues:

On December 15, 1725, delegates from several of the Amerindian nations of northeastern North America gathered in Boston to negotiate a peace and friendship treaty with the English. This treaty was meant to end the war between the parties, but for many of the First Nations it brought no more than a short interlude in hostilities. (p. 85)

From this description, we can discern that the treaty could have been a political maneuverer on the part of the British to better position themselves toward the

fulfillment of the ultimate goal of settler-colonialism—the erasure of Indigenous peoples. As alluded to previously, the Mi'kmaq of the time would have seen the treaty in the traditional way, as sacred, political, and legal agreements made in mutual good faith. Thus, Paul's interpretation of the treaties is ultimately supported by the facts of history. The actual Treaty 1 document states that the English had ownership of Acadia through the Treaty of Utrecht, that the Mi'kmaq should not bother any settlers, settlements, or the creation of new lawful settlements, that in the event of a quarrel neither party should take revenge, and that each party would release their prisoners (Paul, 2006; Upton, 1979). As well as questioning the intent of this treaty, Paul (2006) has called into question how well this treaty was explained to the Mi'kmaq. After the signing of the treaty, many Mi'kmaq immediately stated that they had not been adequately consulted in the treaty process and began to take the necessary actions to defend their territory (Paul, 2006; Upton, 1979). The result of the first treaty was anything but peace and friendship, and both parties engaged in horrible acts justified through the flimsy excuse of war (Upton, 1979).

In 1749, the English made an attempt to renew Treaty 1, but according to Paul (2006) it “reveals the single-minded resolve of the British to dispossess the Mi'kmaq and other Eastern Nations of their freedom and lands” (p. 111). Although some Wolastoqiyik chiefs signed the treaty, the Mi'kmaq remained at war with the English until Treaty 2 was developed in 1751 and signed in 1752 (Paul, 2006; Upton, 1979). In the years leading up to the second treaty, the fighting between the Mi'kmaq and the English became particularly brutal, with some estimates of the Mi'kmaq population being only around 20,000 total (Paul, 2006). Realizing the senselessness of the violence with which he was surrounded, Chief Jean Baptiste Cope approached the British in September of 1752 as a

representative of the Mi'kmaw Grand Council to negotiate a peace treaty (Battiste & Marshall, 2016). The actual provisions of the treaty seemed to be a reiteration of the previous treaty of 1725 with several notable additions. In the words of Battiste & Marshall (2016):

The English text of the treaty of 1752 renewed the existing treaties... As well, the British Crown never purchased any Mi'kmaw land, for past or future settlement, only promising, in October of each year, to provide provisions that would be given to Mi'kmaw families to reaffirm the peace. It also acknowledged to the Mi'kmaq their free liberty to hunt, fish and trade, and their agreement to allow the safe return of any shipwrecked goods of his Majesty's subjects. (p. 148)

The first line of this quote reminds us of an important fact. While only the written treaty exists in physical form today, there is an oral history of the treaties that documents the way it was interpreted by our ancestors (Augustine, 2016; Battiste, 2016a). This oral history of interpretation has rightfully been given significant weight in some legal battles around First Nation treaty rights but has been notably absent from others. In the words of Battiste and Marshall (2016), we also see the historical justification for the modern celebration of Treaty Day on October 1<sup>st</sup>, as well as the undisputable right of the Mi'kmaq to hunt and fish freely on their lands. This clause of the treaty has been used in several important legal cases as part of the modern effort to protect the Mi'kmaw right to hunt and fish (Battiste, 2016b; Brown, 2016; Henderson, 2016).

There is a certain degree of debate about whether Chief Cope signed the treaty of 1952 on behalf of all Mi'kmaq or only those living in his territory. Regardless of this distinction, the consequence was the same. In the years after Chief Cope signed the treaty there were a complicated series of violent slights

against the peace by the English, French, and Mi'kmaq (Upton, 1979). The result was a continuation of war. According to Paul (2006), this period of war was marked by several attempts by the Mi'kmaq to regain the peace that were met by significant resistance on the part of the English. In 1755, after the refusal of the Acadian Deputies to swear an oath of allegiance to the British Crown, the infamous Acadian Expulsion began (Paul, 2006). The Mi'kmaq stood by their French allies with many Acadians hiding among Mi'kmaw villages until the end of war in 1763 (Paul, 2006). The English did not respond favorably to this allegiance and engaged in ever more violent acts against the Mi'kmaq.

When the cessation of military action finally arrived permanently it was 1761. Paul (2006) describes the event thus:

On July, 1761, a "Burying of the Hatchet Ceremony" was held at the Governor's Farm in Halifax. During the ceremony, treaties of peace and friendship were signed between Governor Jonathan Belcher, president of His Majesty's Council and Commander-in-Chief of the province, and the Chiefs from the Mi'kmaw nations called "merimichi," "Jediack," "Pogmouch," and Cape Breton, on behalf of themselves and their people. (p. 163)

One immediately notices that the scope of this peace was provincially located in Nova Scotia. Because of the strong French presence in Cape Breton and the relative isolation of Newfoundland, the Mi'kmaq living in those areas were comparatively devoid of interference from the English until the royal proclamation of 1763. Reading the proclamation today, one is struck by the scope of rights granted to the Mi'kmaq; however, Jackson (1993) reminds us of the reality of the situation:

Immediately following the Treaty of Paris the British government formulated the Royal Proclamation, a statute intended to grant the Micmac [sic] a measure of protection against the loss of tribal land. However, the provisions and penalties of the proclamation were never properly enforced, the alienation of Indian land continued unchecked, and occasional hostilities arose. (p. 24)

The immediate results of the Royal Proclamation and the removal of the French were poverty and alienation, and it was within this context that “the Major Newfoundland emigration took place” (Jackson, 1993, p. 25). Jackson (1993) summarizes this population movement thus, “Over the closing decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is estimated that as much as half of the Cape Breton population crossed the Cabot Strait” (p. 26). It is in this great emigration that I believe my ancestors moved from Eskasoni to St. George’s, where eventually my grandfather would be born (Bartels & Janzen, 1991; Jackson, 1993).

### **The Newfoundland Mi’kmaq—Personal Stories of Erasure**

Earlier, I discussed the erasure of Indigenous peoples as the primary goal of settler colonialism. In Newfoundland, this erasure, in my view, was one of identity and was temporarily successful in my own family. Based on the stories I have heard from my uncles and aunts, my grandfather rarely spoke of his Mi’kmaw ancestry, and when he did he was often not heard. In my mother’s generation, despite holding on to traditional ways of life and some specific cultural practices, our family largely identified themselves as “Newfoundlanders” and occasionally as jack-a-tars, although that term was somewhat derogatory. It was only after our family began to research our past in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s that we rediscovered our Indigenous heritage and began to identify ourselves as such. Today, the once successful erasure of our Indigenous

identities has been displaced by a resurgence of culture, language, and tradition that is still in its infancy. It is my belief that because of the dominating presence of settler colonialism in our past, the erasure of Indigenous identity in my family was inevitable, unavoidable, but not irreversible. Bellow I will examine four of the ways colonialism uniquely manifested itself in Newfoundland—ubiquitous falsehoods, intermarriage, the changing of surname, and the rise of a nationalistic Newfoundland identity.

**Ubiquitous falsehoods.** One of the most commonly held assumptions about the reason the Mi'kmaq came to Newfoundland is that they were hired to hunt and kill the Beothuk. According to some conversations I have had, this was once a fact taught in history classes, although I can find no reference to such a statement existing in history books in the literature. Jackson (1993) dismisses this claim stating, "The allegation has no basis in fact but has been repeated since the last Beothuk died" (p.33). Paul (2006) also discusses the myth as a form of deception on the part of the English:

An excellent example [of English deceitfulness] is the false allegation made by the English that the Mi'kmaq were responsible for the demise of Newfoundland's Beothuk, a lie so concocted that it endured for centuries... There has never been one shred of evidence to support such a gross allegation. In fact some experts now believe that the Beothuk were part of the Mi'kmaq family. (p. 74)

As I have said repeatedly throughout this work, stories hold power; they determine the way we perceive our reality. The prevalence of such a damning myth certainly contributed to the erasure of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq from popular consciousness. By stating that the Mi'kmaq were only brought to Newfoundland to commit acts of war, one not only eliminates the claim of the



people to relationship with the land but also creates an image of them as savage, warlike, and violent. With the popularity of such a narrative, it seems unlikely that anyone who had heard it would proudly identify as Mi'kmaw. When I start to talk about this project with people who are not well versed in Indigenous history, I often get the comment, "I didn't know there were Mi'kmaq in Newfoundland; I thought it was just the Beothuk." In this it is clear that there is still a dominant narrative of non-existence around my people; a narrative I hope this work succeeds in disrupting.

**Intermarriage and the changing of surname.** The second and third contributing factors in the erasure of Indigenous identity in my family were the changing of surname and the commonality of intermarriage<sup>4</sup>. Ryan (2012), in one of his several paragraphs about the Mi'kmaq in a 256-page book on the history of Newfoundland, notes:

The Mi'kmaq increased their numbers during the late 1700's and gradually spread along the Island's west coast. Especially in the area of present day St. George's, Stephenville Crossing, and further north. Their surnames generally disappeared as the women married French fishermen, although a few surnames survived such as Alexander and Sylvester. The Mi'Kmaq had adopted surnames by now and very often chose English or French first names as their surnames. (p. 111)

By adopting English and French surnames, my ancestors allowed themselves to be seen, on paper, as no different from the European settlers. When combined with other factors, this legalistic form of assimilation eventually led to an erasure of Indigenous identity. A more substantial factor in the erasure was the

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<sup>4</sup> The term intermarriage is highly problematic in that it necessarily asserts the normalcy of marrying within one's own racial, cultural, or religious group. I use it here for lack of a better alternative and to stay consistent with the texts from which I quote.

intermarriage between the settlers and the Mi'kmaq alluded to in Ryan's passage. Marriage between the French and the Mi'kmaq had been common throughout most of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Leavitt, 1993; Ryan, 2012), and after the migration from Cape Breton to Newfoundland, intermarriage with the English was also common in some areas (Jackson, 1993). Jackson (1993), one of the few authors devoted to a complete telling of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq story, is worth quoting at length here. He begins, "The major Micmac settlement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was Bay St. George" (p. 97). Here it is worth reminding the reader that my grandfather lived and fished for most of his life in St. George's, which is on the opposite side of the Bay. In the middle is a small Island called Sandy Point, which was settled by the English as a trading post sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Handcock, 2000). Jackson (1993) quoting the journals of Chappell discusses the intermarriage in the region thus:

One of Chappell's observations concerns intermarriage: 'by frequent intermarriages with European settlers at Sandy Point, the race became so intermingled, that, at the time we visited them, the number of pure Indians did not exceed fifty, exclusively women and children.' Until 1904 the west coast was the French shore and off limits to English settlement. Nevertheless there [were] a small number of English families, 32 in 1828, concentrated at Sandy Point directly opposite a Micmac campsite. By 1850 they were outnumbered by an influx of French settlers: Acadians, Immigrants from St. Pierre and others directly from France. (pp. 97-98)

This description of the frequent intermarriages is geographical and temporally linked to my own family and directly contributes to the white-seeming privilege I exist with today. My grandfather, Nolan Bennett, was born in 1921. His father, Edward Benoit, was baptised in 1880, and his father Maxime Benoit, born in

1840, was married in 1872. According to the research my family has done, Maxime was wed with an English woman named Bridget King who was at least part Mi'kmaw and, thus, participated in the aforementioned intermarriage. Maxime's father George, born in 1799, may have had some Mi'kmaw ancestry on his paternal side, but my family has traced our Benoit lineage back to France, so it seems more likely that our native ancestry is maternal in nature. My grandfather's mother, Mary Russle, also had Mi'kmaw ancestry in her grandmother Julie Ducet. Julie Ducet married a French settler named Patrick Leblanc, continuing the trend of intermarriage in my family. What I have articulated through the names of my ancestors, Jackson (1993) states generally:

Elsewhere in Canada the mix of French and Indian blood gave rise to the Métis. In Newfoundland people of that same mix were known as Jack-a-tars, the English term originally used to denote a sailor... *They disappear from the written record during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.* This is not to say they actually vanished, but in the colonial record they are overlooked or ignored, *presumably absorbed by European culture through marriage between French men* (with surnames like le Banc, le Jeune and Benoit) and Indian women [emphasis added]. (p. 98)

**Tanka XXXIV**  
Disappearance or Erasure  
*January 2, 2017*

My Ancestors' names  
Clearly etched in history  
But a smudge mark shows  
Where part of them was erased.  
"Disappeared from the record."

**Nationalistic Newfoundland identity.** Intermarriage, changing surnames, and derogatory myths all contributed to the erasure of Indigenous

identity in the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq; however, it is my opinion that the rise of a national Newfoundland identity contributed the most to this culture loss. In a chapter on the ironically named "Newfoundland Natives' Society," David Dawn (2011) discusses how around 1840 "there was an increased desire for identification as 'Newfoundlanders' with some sense of patriotism, a race of people—unique" (p. 153). He qualifies this statement with the assertion that before 1840 many of the residents of Newfoundland saw themselves as British, Irish, or French and fully expected to return to their homeland or move on to the quickly industrializing Eastern United States (Dawn, 2011). The temporary residence of much of the population spurred a sense of indignation in the permanent residents. According to Dawn (2011), the temporary population had no interest in bettering the colony, and many permanent residents were resentful that, despite the 1832 constitution, they were still being governed by British elites. In the political world these concerns manifest themselves in the formation of the Newfoundland Natives' Society (Dawn, 2011; Cadigan, 2009), which sought "the advancement of the colony through the political will of native born Newfoundlanders" (Dawn, 2011, p. 155).

The Newfoundland Natives' Society is something of a footnote in the history of Newfoundland—a small political movement in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to distance those born on the Island from the Irish and English immigrants. It was localized in St. John's, and it is unlikely that my ancestors in St. George's ever heard or cared about it. It is, however, a marker of the rise of a national identity; a national identity that, despite more than sixty years of confederation, still exists in the popular consciousness of many residents. In my opening narrative, I made reference to this point stating that, when I was in high school, if you asked me about my identity I would have said I was a musician, a punk, or maybe a

Newfoundlander. The narrative I have told here is only one piece of the puzzle; I encourage my Qalipu brothers and sisters—status or not—to find their own stories and share them as I have. Through the telling of our stories, we displace the narratives of our erasure and replace them with the reality of our survivance (Tuck, 2009).

**Colonization in Newfoundland.** As with much of Newfoundland's history, the manifestation of colonization in the province was distinct from the rest of Canada. Throughout much of Canada, the order of colonization was to kill, displace, control, or remove Indigenous peoples to make way for English and French settlement. In Newfoundland, while some initial contacts were violent—particularly with the Beothuk who were ruthlessly exterminated by 1829 (Pastore, 1997)—colonization was a subtler phenomenon, particularly on the West Coast where fishing and land were not as lucrative. The four manifestations of colonization I have described above all contributed to the erasure of Indigenous identity in Newfoundland. There are, however, other manifestations of colonization:

[T]he Newfoundland Mi'kmaq suffered territorial losses as Europeans settled on their land. They experienced the suppression of their language and culture through church and other agents. The resulting internalized shame led, in turn, to further cultural loss. The omission of the Indian Act in the 1948... contributed to the process of ongoing loss for the Mi'kmaq. The Newfoundland Mi'kmaq did not exist on paper. (Hanrahan, 2012, p. 62)

Indeed, as I have articulated above, the internalized shame and disappearance from written records mentioned by Hanrahan were significant factors in the erasure of Indigenous identity in my family. If one had to characterize the

particular flavour of colonization experienced in Newfoundland, the words disappearance and shame resonate.

### **Meditation on Colonization in Newfoundland**

*February 24, 2017*

Shame.  
 Hide  
 Yourself  
 With white lies;  
 White-name-white-skin-mask.  
 False truths to protect what we love,  
 And in conformity there is peace—but at a price:  
 The loss of culture and language.  
 But was there a choice?  
 Disappear  
 They screamed  
 Be  
 Gone.

### **Resistance Through Existence**

I started this section not knowing why I needed to tell the story of my people but knowing that I did. I was unsure what connection the story of my ancestors would have to white-seeming privilege. In the process of researching and writing this story, I have found answers to the questions I held. The story I have presented here is ultimately a narrative of settler colonialism, where the role my people were expected to play was one of erasure—to disappear so that white settlers could take our lands and use them for selfish purposes (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). As we have seen, in my family this forced erasure partially succeeded in silencing our Indigeneity by way of assimilation, resulting in a devastating loss of culture, language, and Indigenous knowledge. It is in this context of settler colonialism and partially successful forced erasure that my white-seeming privilege must be understood. The white privilege I hold in society is undeniable, but in being seen as white, I am misplaced in the settler-

Indigenous dichotomy and, thus, the erasure of my Indigeneity continues. This is the tension of my privilege, and in order to fully appreciate that tension, one needs to know the story of my people's colonization and erasure.

Though I have shared many stories here, there is one more that must be shared. Several weeks ago the Minister of Aboriginal affairs came to Halifax and wanted to speak with Indigenous students. I went to the meeting hoping to find out exactly when her government planned to remove the 2% funding cap that has crippled the Indigenous people of this country for the last 10 years. I walked into the room cautiously and quietly, greeting people in hushed tones and discovering relationships I had not known before—everyone knows someone who knows someone. The students present at that meeting made up several different tribes and several different universities, but we spoke a united message. We wanted space to be ourselves, we wanted support in learning our Indigenous knowledges, and we did not want to compromise our identities for academic success. Whether the minister heard us, I do not know. What I do know is that no matter how hard people may try (and they will), no one is taking away the culture of anyone in that room—this generation will not be erased.

Msit No'kmaq,

Wela'lioq.

## **White-Seeming Privilege: Lived Experiences**

### **Introduction**

Throughout this talking circle, I have given glimpses into white-seeming privilege. I have dropped hints, told stories, and created an outline of a multifaceted concept aimed at articulating the complex experiences of people living in the racial shadow zones (King, 2008). In the following section, I will attempt to colour in the outline of white-seeming privilege, providing a more complete and nuanced theoretical space for the subsequent discussion of my own experience with the phenomenon. This section will be divided into two parts. In the first, I will attempt to give a theoretical overview of the concept of white-seeming privilege with the intent of moving beyond those surface level understandings articulated in the literature review section. The second part will be devoted to an analysis of several of my own experiences through the lens of white-seeming privilege. It is my hope that, through this section, the reader will gain a fuller understanding of white-seeming privilege and how it manifests itself in my lived reality.

### **Theoretical Description**

The term ‘theory’ is a Eurocentric one that emerged out of the empirical traditions of the European enlightenment and continues to be one of the defining constructs in Western discussions of research (Creswell, 2014). The theories that inform white-seeming privilege are, by nature, mostly Western concepts and thus give the discussion a certain hue reminiscent of the critical tradition. It is here that I must emphasise the trans-systemic nature of the concept of white-seeming privilege (Battiste, 2013). As I have constructed it, white-seeming privilege is a concept that can be articulated through the



lens of Western academia, as I attempt to do in the first part of this section; however, it is also an Indigenous concept that can be articulated through the personal storytelling I have included throughout this work. It is when these two eyes (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012) are fully opened that the concept of white-seeming privilege can be seen most clearly.

**Settler colonialism.** As I described earlier, tribal critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005; Haynes Writer, 2008) provides a central thread around which the other theories that inform white-seeming privilege are wrapped. In other ethnic contexts, critical race theory may provide such a binding thread, but where Indigenous identities are involved, situating the conversation in the assumption that racism is endemic to society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) is not enough. If we are to understand the lived realities of Indigenous people, we must acknowledge racism is only a symptom and a contributing factor to settler colonialism (Brayboy, 2005). In this regard, the starting point for understanding an individual's white-seeming privilege is to understand that individual's history with settler colonialism. In the previous section, I described my ancestors' experiences with settler colonialism and the resultant erasure of their Indigenous identities (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). It is worth reiterating here that the settler colonialism my ancestors experienced is still being played out in my life when my Indigenous identity is not seen. To not be seen is a denial of my Indigenous identity and, thus, a continuation of the erasure perpetuated by settler colonialism. It is only through self-identification that I am able to disrupt that erasure, and even then there is the ever-present refusal of self-identification represented by the phrase, "Well, you don't look native." These manifestations of settler colonialism in my life are the reasons that any

understanding of the privilege I maintain in society from the colour of my skin must be contextualized within, but not lessened by, the understanding that settler colonialism is endemic to society (Brayboy, 2005).

One prominent example of the continued structural violence of settler colonialism in my own life is the status system (Maddison, 2013; St. Denis, 2007). As discussed previously, the status system is the mechanism through which the federal government determines who is legally an Indian and who is not (Palmater, 2011). Being a status Indian gives an Indigenous person access to certain rights guaranteed to all our people through the treaties, but it is a colonial system of structural violence that was designed with the intent of assimilation (Maddison, 2013; Palmater, 2011; St. Denis, 2007). As I write these words, this colonial mechanism is being allowed to determine the Indigeneity of 101,000 Qalipu Mi'kmaq, of which I am one, through an enrolment review and appeal process (Qalipu First Nation, 2017).

By the time I finish this thesis, I may no longer be an Indian in the eyes of the federal government and, regardless of the outcome of my own appeal, tens of thousands of Indigenous people will be denied their treaty rights because of the continued presence of settler colonialism evident in external determinations of Indigenous identity (Maddison, 2013). The existence of the status system, though only one example of the prevalence of settler colonial ideology, adds another layer to the complexity of white-seeming privilege. In my own experience, my status card has allowed me a fail safe in disrupting the erasure of my Indigenous identity. When someone doesn't believe I am an Indigenous person because I "don't look native," I can show my status card. By removing that ability from any of my brothers and sisters currently under review, the federal

government leaves us with only the strength of our internal convictions and Indigenous knowledge to disrupt the erasure of our Indigenous identities. I've made my peace with the enrolment review; I will not let the federal government tell me who I am. But it is clear that this process is nothing more than another example of the endemic nature of settler colonialism in our society and, particularly, in the Canadian government.

**Racial boundaries and false dichotomies.** With an understanding that settler colonialism is engrained in the fabric of our society, it is possible to move forward with our analysis of white-seeming privilege. The three theory areas of white privilege, whiteness, and racial passing are deeply connected in the way they inform white-seeming privilege. All three of these theories indicate that there is rigidity in racial identity (Hier & Bolaria, 2006; Kroeger, 2003; St. Denis, 2007; see also Hartigan, 1997; Simmons, Lewis, & Larson, 2011; Villaverde, 2000)—a fact forced upon us through racialization and racialized identity formation processes (Simmons, Lewis, & Larson, 2011; St. Denis, 2007). White privilege and whiteness, in their attempt to disrupt their own silence and normativity within society, create rigid dichotomies between whiteness and otherness that do not account for those on the borders. McIntosh's (1990) article on white privilege describes various activities made easier by one's whiteness but does not acknowledge the fact that many people who have those privileges only gain access to them by making compromises about who they are, or by passing. In subsequent articles McIntosh (2012) has articulated white privilege in less dichotomous terms:

Seeing privilege and oppression in terms of myriad variables allows us to map our experience both above and below the hypothetical line of justice. Nobody is only privileged or only disadvantaged. Different types of privilege and disadvantage

can add to, subtract from, multiply, or divide one's chances for a decent life. (p. 197)

This appreciation of the complexity of individual experience is a step in the right direction but still fails to acknowledge the spectrum of racial identity. Rather, the intersectional analysis of privilege described by McIntosh (2012), as well as by Ferber (2012), is one reliant on the contextualization of one's racial privilege within various layers of other dichotomised privileges, most notably gender. By contrast, racial passing acknowledges these dichotomies, the negative way they affect people's lives, as well as people's attempts to negotiate rigidly divided racial and gendered battlegrounds (Bettez, 2011; Kroeger, 2003). Situating our understanding of these racial boundaries in the history of settler colonialism complicates the issue by adding another problematic dichotomy to racial privilege (St. Denis, 2007). This added layer is most evident in the common notion that settlers are white and Indigenous people are not white. The prevalence of these interlocking false dichotomies results in a dominant narrative about who is and isn't Indigenous, and when individuals do not fit into that dominant narrative, they are forced to internally navigate the multitude of messages they receive about their race, identity, and Indigeneity.

A particularly powerful example of this dominant narrative can be found in the media. There is a dearth of research literature around the topic of how Indigenous people are portrayed in the media (Bickham, 2005; Bonin & Kirchof, 2012; Chaudhri & Schau, 2016; Diamond, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2010; King, 2003; Meek, 2006). This research is far too abundant to make generalizations about without offering a complete review, but for the sake of our argument here, let us say that there is a stereotypical image of what an

Indigenous person ought to look like in the minds of the general public. This assumption, though a sizeable logical leap, is supported by cultivation theory (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999), which asserts that the media people consume, specifically the television they watch, directly affects the way they perceive the world in their tendency to see the world as more like the realities depicted in the media they consume. In other words, the natives that people see on TV influence the way people perceive natives in real life by creating an image to which the real thing is compared.

Due to the rigidly defined typographies of race ascribed to settler and Indigenous identities, this popular image of Indigenous folk likely does not include physically recognizable elements of whiteness. Thus, Indigenous folk with fair skin do not see themselves represented as Indigenous—at least not in the media, dominant narratives, and popular consciousness. The prevalence of these dominant narratives is unquestionable and even filters into Indigenous communities where the notion of a “real Indian”, or an Indigenous person who is somehow more authentic than others, is ubiquitous enough to warrant comment by several prominent authors (Alexie, 1994; King, 2003; St. Denis, 2007; see also Diamond, 2009). For the fair-skinned Indigenous person, these dominant narratives are alienating and leave us with the task of finding a way to make our Indigeneity known. For me, this has taken the form of vocal self-identification, a deep connection to my Indigenous knowledge and family history, and the practice of traditional spirituality. Other people I know in similar situations prefer to engage in traditional hunting, or wear small but powerful symbols of their Indigeneity. No matter how we do it, white-seeming Indigenous folk have to deal with the added

burden of making their Indigeneity known, less they allow the erasure of their identities to persist.

**Whiteness.** Thus far, I have attempted to articulate the problems for white-seeming Indigenous folk arising from the rigidly defined racial divisions that pervade the Western imagination. But there is another layer of complexity in white seeming—the saturation of white ideology. Whereas whiteness is an ideological disposition prevalent in Western society that enables the tacit perpetuation of white privilege (Rodriguez, 2000), it is not uncommon for white-seeming Indigenous people to possess markers of such an ideology. Indeed, as Cornell West has said, “We all have a little bit of racist in us” (2015). In other words, white racist ideology permeates Western thought, and even the most critically minded of us still have subconscious racist notions embedded within our thinking.

In modern Indigenous thinking, the notion of decolonization has called on individuals to see the racist and colonial influences in their own lives and eliminate them in favor of more equitable, sustainable, or traditional alternatives (Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012). Yet, as Brayboy (2005) reminds us, settler colonialism is still endemic to society and, as alluded to by West (2015), Battiste (2013), and Smith (2012), that means it is present in our own minds, spirits, bodies, and hearts as well as in the economic systems within which we interact.

Settler colonial ideology, racism and, by consequence, the disposition of whiteness are unavoidable within our consciousness because they are all endemic to our society. For some individuals, this creates a desire to be seen as white (Kroeger, 2003). For others, this creates the opposite desire: to be seen as anything but white (Bettez,

2011). This leads us into the realm of racial passing: the willing creation of a fiction regarding one's identity (Kroeger, 2003). In my experience, for the white-seeming individual the presence of an ideology of whiteness within one's consciousness leads to intense questioning regarding one's identity. It is partially because of the existence of whiteness within my consciousness that I was reluctant to self-identify as Indigenous after I initially gained my status. Of course, a bigger part of my reluctance was the liberal guilt I felt after hearing the many damage-centred narratives from our First Nations communities (Tuck, 2009). As shown in my introductory narrative, it took me a long time to fully accept my Indigeneity, and part of that was likely the desire to be white or, as I would have put it then, to be normal.

**White privilege.** The term I have used to describe the phenomenon in question is white-seeming privilege, but as of yet I have only skirted along the sides of the privilege issue. The reason for this is that white privilege, and by extension white-seeming privilege, is a highly contentious issue that demands sensitivity. As I have discussed previously, the prevalence of belief in the myth of meritocracy creates unwillingness for anyone to hear that his or her achievements have been gotten through any kind of innate advantage (McIntosh, 2012). White privilege, however, is becoming a more recognized term and is disrupting the myth of meritocracy's tacit dominance in popular consciousness (for example see Macklemore's songs *White Privilege* (2009) and *White Privilege 2* (2015)).

One thing that has not reached public understanding yet is that privilege is allowed to continue largely through its silence and the perpetuation of race as a social construct (Hier & Bolaria, 2006). As noted above, when we call attention to whiteness,

and to some degree white privilege, we effectively nullify the primary means through which it reproduces itself. Additionally, the dominance of rigid racial boundaries, itself a symptom of society's reluctance to relinquish race as a "real" concept, contributes to the perpetuation of whiteness and, thereby, white privilege. Would white privilege exist if, as a society, our understanding of race incorporated the fact that there is no biological basis for the distinctions we have so tightly woven into the fabric of our social consciousness? The answer is, as with most questions, possibly.

Regardless of the reasons for its continued existence, white privilege, like settler colonialism, racism, and dispositions of whiteness, is endemic to the fabric of society. Its existence is a simple fact, one it is not the place of anyone with white skin to dispute. Yet it must be stated that the way people experience white privilege is highly individualized and dependent on an infinite number of factors related to the specific context of an interaction or interactions (Ferber, 2012; McIntosh, 2012). In this regard, white-seeming privilege is a term that seeks to describe, more accurately and in non-dichotomous terms, one specific context of white privilege—that of a person unintentionally passing for white and receiving privileges associated with being white. As previously mentioned, in my case the added factor of being Indigenous complicates this by positioning the unintentional passer on the wrong side of the settler-Indigenous false dichotomy. As such, white-seeming privilege must be understood as a type of white privilege where the individual's privilege is situated within context of their identity and potential and historical oppressions. Wantanabe (2015a), in a video describing white-seeming privilege under the name white-passing privilege, quotes an unnamed video commenter as saying:



When it comes to any kind of passing privilege it is always superficial on top of being conditional. Some people see you as the normalized group doesn't mean that all of a sudden you don't lack representation, your culture is never made fun of around you, you didn't grow up internalizing stereotypes about your identity.

White-passing people are still constantly affected by all those problems where as white people are not.

She affirms the reality of this viewers comment through her own experience, "Yup. Just because I occasionally pass as white doesn't mean I didn't grow up hearing all the negative stereotypes and associations with being Asian." (2015a). My own experience with white-seeming privilege treads more on the side of privilege than not. Looking back over my story, one may be taken with the richness of my experiences at such a young age, and I am certain that those experiences were in no small part facilitated by my light skin. I have been incredibly fortunate in my life to be blessed as I have, and I know that fortune is part of my white privilege. But that doesn't mean it didn't hurt when people referred to natives as drunks, when my university friends would adopt a low thoughtful voice and talk about the white man taking their land, or when I told someone I had status and the first question they asked was whether or not I had my tuition covered. These personal experiences will be taken up in more depth later, but suffice it to say that white-seeming privilege is a type of white privilege that is understood in the context of the theories described above: settler colonialism, whiteness, racial passing, (tribal) critical race theory, and Indigenous identity.

**Definitions.** By way of a conclusion, I believe it is important to offer a succinct definition of white-seeming privilege. Though I am skeptical of definitions and wonder

how helpful they are compared to the longer descriptions I tend to favour, I know they are an important part of the Western knowledge creation process. I also hope that sharing a definition of white-seeming privilege will allow it to be used by others more easily.

Generally, white-seeming privilege is a type of unintended racial passing where the result is a simultaneous existence of white privilege and a compromise of self-identified identity. This phenomenon is facilitated by rigidly defined boundaries of race as well as the endemic nature of racism in society.

White-seeming privilege in the Indigenous context, as well as within the context of this work, must be situated in an understanding of settler colonialism. Therefore Indigenous white-seeming privilege is when an Indigenous person with fair skin unintentionally passes as white, and therefore a settler, thereby experiencing an erasure of their Indigenous identity. This phenomenon is facilitated by rigidly defined boundaries of race, settler-Indigenous roles, as well as the endemic nature of colonialism in our society.

These definitions are far from perfect, but they encapsulate, to the best of my ability, the rich and diverse theoretical landscape that conceptually informs white-seeming privilege. Before continuing on to an examination of my own experience, I feel it is important to offer a counter narrative to white privilege. As such, here are a few of the effects of white-seeming privilege in my everyday life based on McIntosh's (1990) article.

**White-seeming privileges:  
A passive aggressive disruption**  
*January 9, 2017*

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time...  
*If I live on a reserve, but if I do it is unlikely that the community will recognize me until I explain my ancestry.*

2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live...  
*But my address may now be the deciding factor in whether or not we are seen as Indians by the federal government.*

3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me...  
*But it is unlikely they will see my Indigeneity until I self-identify, and there will usually be a host of uncomfortable questions when I do.*

4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed...  
*But whether or not I pay taxes at that store is determined by a colonial government's assessment of my Indigeniety, which I have little control over.*

5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented...  
*But the degree to which they are misrepresented is dependent on the context, and it would be a rarity to see anyone with white-skin acknowledged as Indigenous in fictional media.*

6. When I am told... *by my Elders...* about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is...  
*And even then there is a sorrowful story that goes along with our survivance.*

7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race...  
*But the representation of my race in those documents may not reflect reality, and it still remains to be seen whether that material will include discussion of "mixed-race" folk.*

9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair...  
*But the last time I checked Superstore didn't carry goose, moose, or bannock, nor did HMV carry Eastern Eagle.*

11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them...  
*But they will not be seen as Indians in the eyes of the federal government. I can't protect them from that.*

12. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters,  
without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty,  
or the illiteracy of my race...

*But if I wear a suit and tie and speak coherently and calmly, people assume I  
am white.*

13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on  
trial...

*Because my skin colour and gender make that possible—there are always  
awkward stares when I identify my pronouns, access needs, and tribal  
affiliations.*

14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my  
race...

*Because most of the time people don't think of me as part of my race, but  
rather part of theirs.*

17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies  
and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider...

*But if I bring up anything about my people without identifying myself, I am  
immediately challenged.*

18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be  
facing a person of my race...

*Likely not, and even if they were, they likely wouldn't recognize me until I told  
them who my grandfather was.*

20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls,  
toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race...

*But they are often stereotypical and demeaning, and when Indigenous folk are  
depicted, they are rarely given light skin.*

21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling  
somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard,  
held at a distance, or feared...

*But most of the organizations I belong to are part of the Indigenous  
community.*

22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having  
coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race...

*Until I mention that I am Indigenous; then the "free ride" assumptions start.*

23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race  
cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen...

*But there are certain bars in which I would have to “pass” in order to get a drink.*

25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones...

*But I probably should—as should we all.*

26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin...

*But as I do I am left with the faint memory of when my people used bear grease for this purpose and lament the industrialization and colonization that has left me clinging to my roots like a mountain climber holding on for dear life.*

### **Personal Experiences**

Brayboy (2005) has stated that from an Indigenous intellectual position, story and theory are one and the same. In this regard, where previously I have attempted to describe white-seeming privilege in Western terms, using theory, I will now attempt to do the same in Indigenous intellectual terms, through story. But rather than simply telling my stories, as I have already done, I will use them to further explain white-seeming privilege. In this, I must acknowledge that I am moving away from the Indigenous intellectual position in the purest sense. I maintain, however, that by showing the relationship of my own stories to my thinking, I honour the presence of the Indigenous self within my thought. Thus, in the following section I will examine several stories I have already told in order to highlight different aspects of white-seeming privilege. It is my hope that these stories call back the theories I have discussed previously, as well as their interactions and interrelations.

**Mi'kmaw studies.** As one may recall, during my high school years I did not readily identify as an Indigenous person but, rather, opted for subcultural labels like punk or musician. These labels and my Indigenous identity were put on display through the recounting of my experience in grade 10 Mi'kmaw history. In the following excerpt from

that story, we gain a window into my early experience with white-seeming privilege:

In 2006, when I was taking Mi'kmaw Studies 10, I had a vague notion of myself as a Mi'kmaw person, but it was not a fully formed part of my identity. To a certain degree, my peers only recognized me as "part native," more so because I lived close to the reserve and sometimes saw them outside of school than because I looked or acted native. At that time if you asked me about my identity I would have identified myself as a punk, as a musician, or perhaps as a Newfoundlander, but probably not as a Mi'kmaw or an Indigenous person, which is how I identify now. (p. 20)

In this section, I articulate my understanding of my Indigenous identity as "a vague notion." Exploring this through the lens of white-seeming privilege proves illuminating in several capacities. First, the vagueness of my Indigenous identity can largely be attributed to the settler colonialism, assimilation, and erasure experienced by my ancestors and outlined in the previous section (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). As I have previously stated, this understanding of settler colonial context is foundational to any conversation of white-seeming privilege, and here it serves to situate our conversation. All of the privileges I experience as a result of my light skin must be balanced with the fact that I only vaguely knew myself as an Indigenous person—evidence of the cultural and linguistic devastation of settler colonialism (Battiste, 2013; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Second, my inability to see myself as an Indigenous person can be viewed as a symptom of an ideology plagued by rigid false dichotomies of race. Part of my thinking at that time was that my Indigenous ancestry was in the past and because my skin was light, I didn't speak my language, and I didn't live on a reserve, I was not an Indigenous person. I had a vague

notion that somewhere in the distant past I had Indigenous ancestors, but I did not feel a deep connection to that past. In other words, I perceived myself as lacking racial and cultural markers of Indigeneity. In my young mind, it was impossible to be both white and native, and it was quite clear from the colour of my skin and the flavor of my speech that I was white. This ability to consider myself as white can be understood as a white privilege because, as I have outlined elsewhere, there is normativity to whiteness and access to that normativity, and the privileges associated with it, is unique to people with light skin (Bettez, 2011; Ferber, 2012). Given the aforementioned context of settler colonialism, however, this privilege is better understood as white-seeming privilege. Finally, I would like to highlight that at the end of this section, I articulate a new understanding of myself as an Indigenous person. This transition should be viewed through the lens of survivance (Tuck, 2009). Even after suffering 500 years of colonization (Paul, 2006) and living in a society where both racism and settler colonialism are ubiquitous (Brayboy, 2005), it is still possible to reclaim an Indigenous identity and disrupt the dominant narratives of non-existence related to Indigenous peoples.

**The Ojibwa bartender.** A second point worth examining from the story of my white-seeming privilege is my interaction with an Ojibwa bartender during my university years:

One night at our favourite dingy bar, when we were the only ones there, Rabbit and I started talking to the bartender about Indigenous issues and she mentioned that she was part Ojibwa. When I said that I was Mi'kmaw, she looked at me very strangely, like I had said something that couldn't possibly be true. I pulled out my

card to show her and she said, “Oh, well you don’t look native. ” Those words stung the more I thought about them, and they continue to sting whenever I hear them. (p. 26)

The bartender’s challenge to my Indigenous identity can be seen in several ways and helps to explore the contextualization of white privilege unique to the white-seeming experience. Although in many situations my white skin has the potential to give me access to privilege, one situation in which it often does not is interacting with other Indigenous people. Indeed, as I attempted to illustrate in my poem *Well, you don’t look like an Indian*, the most painful experiences associated with being white seeming are the constant challenges to identity. When these challenges come from other Indigenous people, they can be seen as a disruption of someone’s attempts at racial passing or as an attempt to protect their culture from imposters. While these challenges are difficult to accept and have caused me a great deal of emotional turmoil over the years, I respect them. As is made clear through Tuck’s (2009) discussion of survivance, the only way Indigenous culture has been able to survive this long is through constant resistance (see also Battiste, 2013; Paul, 2006; Tuck & Wang, 2014; Upton, 1979). These challenges to my identity from my Indigenous brothers and sisters are, in fact, evidence of Indigenous people’s resilience toward assimilation. That is not to say that these challenges are not rooted in an ideology of rigid racial division and colonial thinking but, rather, only to acknowledge that the intent of these challenges from the native community is toward its continued survival. When these challenges to my identity arise from the white community, as they more often do, there is no redeeming line of reason. Perhaps they can be seen as an attempt to disrupt someone’s white privilege, but what they end up being is



evidence of the ubiquitous nature of the white settler/non-white Indigenous dichotomy in popular consciousness. How people from the dominant population in society feel justified in challenging anyone's self-identified labels is beyond my ability to understand; however, these challenges are indisputably real and have been identified by both Ellingburg (2015) and Watanabe (2015a) as part of the white-seeming experience.

**Elder Goose.** A third section of my original narrative worth looking at more closely is my interaction with Elder Goose during my time in Mistissini:

We spoke briefly about the school and teaching but somehow landed on the topic of my Indigenous identity and how I didn't really feel right about taking advantage of some of the treaty rights that came with my status such as the exemption from income tax while working on a reserve as well as band-funded education. She was patient in listening to me but, when I finished, she told me the story of how she had lost her status when she married her husband who was of settler decent. She said her daughters hadn't had status during the first few years of their lives. This was because of the discriminatory policy the government had put in place through the Indian Act and the White Paper. She told me about the day she and her daughters regained their status from the amendment to the Act and how they cried together. For them, it wasn't a financial struggle, either. They owned many businesses and were financially stable, but it meant that they were recognized as a part of the community—they were always Cree, but now they were Indians too. (p. 33)

This conversation was a huge turning point for me. It represented the first time I truly felt like a member of a physical Indigenous community while being away from my family,

and it opened my eyes to the universal nature of the identity struggles through which Indigenous people journey. In addition to the significance of this passage to my personal development, it also illuminates several facets of white-seeming privilege.

First, I mention that I was uncomfortable taking advantage of some of the more economically focused treaty rights. Two main reasons for this stand out in my mind. Upon reflection, I believe I felt guilty for my light complexion. After having been educated about the effects of colonization and the embedded nature of white supremacy in Western society, having traveled to several developing nations and worked with people who were economically impoverished, and having lived on a reserve for several months, I was all too aware of my own privilege. Part of me thought that if I took advantage of my treaty rights, it might take money away from someone who really needed it. In actuality, our treaty rights are in no way tied to our present suffering but, rather, to the foresight of our ancestors and the sacred agreements they made with the Western governments of this land in order to protect their descendants (Battiste, 2016b; Metallic, 2016). A second reason for my unwillingness to take advantage of my treaty rights was the lack of authenticity with which I was still struggling, as illuminated in the conversation I had with Rabbit after the incident in the bar. I did not feel like an Indian because I didn't have the skin colour, I didn't have the language, and I didn't have the damage-centred narrative of struggle (Tuck, 2009). Having these arbitrary factors determine my perception of my own Indigeneity is another example of the pervasiveness of settler colonial thought and false dichotomies of race. In this, my white privilege became a personal moral battleground. At the time of this conversation, I knew my white privilege intimately—I saw it everyday when my students came into the classroom. It

was partially because of this intimate knowledge of my own white privilege that I was unable, or unwilling, to see my Indigeneity and my claim to the rights guaranteed to me in the treaties my ancestors signed. In terms of the concept of white-seeming privilege, this struggle around my own white privilege and Indigenous identity can be viewed as both a privilege and a balance to that privilege. To borrow McIntosh's (1990) format again:

I can work my way through the education system, come out on the other end as a teacher, make a professional salary, and because I work on a reserve, qualify for an income tax exemption...  
*But it somehow feels like I shouldn't have any of that.*

In other words, the settler colonial thoughts embedded in my own mind made me feel a deep and profound guilt for being so well off. This guilt does not erase or diminish the privilege I received as result of my white seeming, but it does contextualize that privilege.

A second point in this story related to white-seeming privilege is the complexity around Elder Goose's own identity. Elder Goose had her status revoked under the Indian Act because she married a settler. Consequently, her daughters also lost their status (Palmater, 2011; St. Denis, 2007). She and her daughters both regained their status under the Bill C-31 amendment to the Act. Here we see the assimilatory intent of the Indian Act and the ridiculousness of having an external control over one's identity (Palmater, 2011). Even after losing her status, Elder Goose stayed with her community, working tirelessly for its improvement as a teacher, a community leader and, eventually, a business owner. But none of that mattered to the federal government, for whom the complexities of Elder Goose's identity were black and white; she had married a settler and, thus, had given up her Indian status. There is a parallel here with the present review process in my own band

described above (Qalipu First Nation, 2017). Ultimately, all Indigenous people in this country are subject to the whims of the federal government when it comes to the implementation and guarantee of their treaty rights through the status system. For white-seeming Indigenous folk, this becomes a problem when the notion that status is something we Indigenous people need to fight for and protect results in a divided community—or the “real Indian” effect discussed above. In her autobiography, Maria Campbell (1983) describes the way settlers divided her people, the Métis:

Despite the hardships [of a new land], they [Métis] gave all they had for this one desperate chance to be free, but because some of them said “ I want good clothes and horses and you no-good Halfbreeds are ruining it for me,” they lost their dream... they fought each other... the white man saw that that was a more powerful weapon than anything else with which to beat the Halfbreeds and he used it and still does today... they try to make you hate your people. (p. 51)

The divisions within the community Campbell describes arise from the cultivated desire for consumer goods, a symptom of the pervasiveness of settler colonial thinking. Though she is describing the historical context of the Métis migration westward, she acknowledges that this still goes on today. Indeed, in my experience, for the white-seeming Indigenous person, this division within the community is an omnipresent concern. First, by existing with white privilege, one gains access to an undeniable assortment of economic advantages purely by virtue of skin colour. This can cause jealousy and resentment in the Indigenous community toward fair skinned individuals—something those individuals have to navigate, often without understanding why. Further, when conversations about status enter into the equation, another dichotomous group of

haves and have-nots is created. As depicted in the first section of my poem *well, you don't look like an Indian*, as well as the aforementioned bar scene, Indigenous folk sometimes look on a white-seeming person with skepticism when they have status. This adds an additional complexity to the navigation attempts of white-seeming Indigenous people.

After my conversation with Elder Goose, I felt like an Indigenous person. Her message to me was not one of division but one of unity and common experience. In picking apart our interaction and looking for evidence of white-seeming privilege, I feel as though I may have diluted her teaching. As such, I would reiterate here that Elder Goose taught me that we are all in this together. All Indigenous people in Canada, regardless of skin colour, status, or privilege, are fighting the same battles, and we are stronger when we stand together. The division in our community is a product of colonization and settler mentality seeping its way into our consciousness. Since our conversation, I have come to realize that those of us with the kind of privileges I have access to need to work for our communities, fighting the uphill battles that need to be fought against the Eurocentric establishment. In my mind, we must always think of our communities and the next seven generations. This is how I have come to navigate my privilege and my identity.

### **Conclusion**

Here you have seen the complexity of my person struggle with identity. I do not claim that these complexities are true for anyone other than me, but I do recognize the fact that they may be. The result of this discussion is a complicated and nuanced description of white-seeming privilege, explained through both theory and story and

situated in the personal narrative of my ancestors' colonization. I have attempted to give clear accounts of how the phenomenon of white seeming interacts with various interconnected theory areas, as well as shed light on it through the lens of my own experience. In the process of doing this, I have been able to put forth a definition; however, we must also recognize that definitions are a means of control in that they limit and structure our thought (Cajete, 2000). As such, it is my deepest hope that as time passes more people will come forward with their stories of white-seeming privilege and disrupt the narrative I have presented here.

Msit No'kmaq,

Wela'lioq.

**NORTH WIND: SPEAKING TOGETHER**

**Cinquain I**

Speaking Together

*September 20, 2016*

We speak  
(in) near silent tones  
Together to define  
the space in which we live and think  
as one.

**Tanka VI**

Trans-Systemic Knowledge

*September 5, 2016*

Two ideas joined,  
To give birth to something new.  
Unsettled reader.  
An Indigenous artist  
Two parts of a unique whole

## Methodology

Everything that has taken place in this talking circle has emerged from the unique interplay between the two philosophical paradigms that make up my methodology and, more broadly, my self. As this project has sought reconciliation between two, normally dichotomously opposed, halves of my identity, its methodology must reflect that reconciliation in the organic development of a sustainable relationship between Indigenous and Western research paradigms. The approach I have taken to this is through the exploration and combination of the Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008) and arts-informed research (Cole & Knowles, 2001, 2008). The intent of this section is to describe the various meeting points between these two orientations in the context of the current project. As such, this section will first discuss Indigenous research methods and philosophy. The discussion will then shift toward arts-informed research as a manifestation of Western thought that lends itself to the blending of ideas from different intellectual traditions. I will then explore several ideas that bind together Western and Indigenous paradigms of thought, including trans-systemic knowledge (Battiste, 2013), Métissage (Donald, 2012; Lowan-Trudue, 2012), and Indigenous artistry and creation (Cajete, 2000; Kelly, 2010, 2014, 2015). Finally, the specific way these philosophical underpinnings manifest themselves in this project will be showcased.



Methodology is a Western term that describes the philosophy behind one's research (Grix, 2002); however, in recent years methodology has become one of the areas most open to interpretation and the addition of new ideas in the Western practice of knowledge creation. Thus, many Indigenous scholars have attempted to articulate their traditional worldviews through the terminology of methodology (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). While these attempts are incredibly helpful in teaching the Western world about our traditional knowledges, something is lost in the translation of Indigenous philosophies from their original languages and social contexts. Thus, although the conversation here will focus on the modern literature around Indigenous research methodology—and to a certain degree become overly concerned with semantics—we must honour our ancestors, whose thoughts are still alive in the languages of our people and in the places they named (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 2000; Sable & Francis, 2012).

### **Indigenous Methodologies and Theory Principles**

**The centrality of story.** Story and storytelling are continuously articulate as being central to the Indigenous way of understanding the world (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2000; King, 2008; Kovach, 2009, 2010; Thomas, 2005). It is in this tradition that I have put forward my own story in the hopes of producing new knowledge but also with the humble intent to share. At its core, my work is the telling of a story in the Indigenous tradition and, like all stories, something is gained in both the telling and the listening. By

articulating my research methodology in Western terms as well as the Indigenous terms of story, relationship, talking circle, and relational accountability, I methodologically capture some of the dualistic nature of my identity as a white-seeming Qalipu Mi'kmaw. In an effort to maintain methodological congruence, it is important to reflect this dualistic nature in every step of the research process (Richards & Mores, 2013).

**Description of Indigenous methodologies.** Indigenous methodologies are the philosophical underpinnings used in the generation of Indigenous knowledge (Wilson, 2008). Both Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2009) have commented that trying to fit Indigenous thought into the Western academic terms of methodology is problematic. As previously mentioned, by attempting to articulate Indigenous ideas out of context and language, something of their meaning is lost. Wilson (2008), however, has been particularly vocal about the necessity of putting our concepts into Western terms so that they might gain validity as research methods and so that Indigenous cultural knowledge might eventually be seen as equal in value to Western empirical knowledge. As such, I will endeavor here to articulate Indigenous methodologies, axiologies, epistemologies, and ontologies with particular reference to the way I have framed my writing—as a conversation or story sharing within a talking circle (Knockwood, 1992).

Recently, Indigenous scholars have begun to articulate a unique paradigm of thought regarding research, creating a space for voices other

than the dominant Western one on what constitutes knowledge (Denzin, Lincon, & Smith, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Margaret Kovach (2009, 2010; personal communications, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2016) has been explicit about the different terms associated with Indigenous research and what they mean. First, there is the umbrella term Indigenous research that covers all research dealing with Indigenous peoples, including the research 'done to' Indigenous peoples where the goal is primarily exploitative. Such research was common in the 1990s and earlier, particularly in anthropology where Indigenous peoples were treated as an object to be studied (Wilson, 2008; see also Martin, 2003). The Indigenous response to this objectification was to generate Indigenous research methodologies that better reflected the unique epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies of Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2009, 2010; Wilson, 2008). This paradigm of thought is incredibly complex but, ultimately, serves as a way of bridging the gap between Indigenous knowledges and the strict frameworks demanded by Western academia. Kovach (personal communications, March 4, 2016) has been clear that for Indigenous peoples who are rooted in their community and have a strong sense of their personal Indigenous knowledge, this research paradigm is intuitive and authentic. Kovach has also said that the incorporation of Indigenous theory principles is a valid way of orienting oneself Indigenously without claiming the kind of community ties and obligations associated with the Indigenous research paradigm. The difference between Indigenous

methodologies and Indigenous theory principles is not in philosophy but, rather, in the practice and subject. Community-based research dealing with Indigenous peoples must be situated in the Indigenous research paradigm so that the proper Indigenous protocols are observed. If, however, an Indigenous researcher wants to investigate something other than Indigenous peoples while still maintaining an Indigenous philosophical orientation, they may consider using Indigenous theory principles while situated within a Western methodology. In the current study, I have attempted to integrate Indigenous theory principles and Western methodology in order to generate trans-systemic knowledge (Battiste, 2013)—or, a sort of two-eyed seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012) reflective of the dualistic nature of my own identity and thinking.

**Ontology and epistemology.** The way I have come to understand ontology, or one's perception of reality, is closely related to the way I have come to understand epistemology, or one's way of viewing knowledge, in that they are both relational (Wilson, 2008). For Indigenous peoples, the world is made up of a series of relationships, and our ontology is defined by the interconnected nature of all living beings (Cajete, 2000; Graveline, 1998). One manifestation of this is a storied understanding of the world (Kovach, 2010), where story is the dominant way one makes sense of the complex relationships between things. Furthermore, relational epistemology is

defined in terms of one's own relationships and knowledge of those relationships (Wilson, 2008).

The nature of the research I have done here is a sort of self-inquiry (Kumar, 2013) or autobiographical story sharing (Kelly, 2010), which I have framed in terms of narrative, poetry, and story within a talking circle. The subject matter of the research is my 'self' or my own story; the way I apply Indigenous ontology and epistemology in this study is toward deeper understanding of my 'self' and my relationships with Indigenous identity and white-seeming privilege. Here, two authors can be helpful in articulating the Indigenous sense of self—Jo-Ann Archibald and Fyre Jean Graveline. Jo-Ann Archibald's (2008) vision of holism as a context for Indigenous storywork situates the self at the centre of a circle from which family, the community, and the nation radiate outward. This metaphorical circle also divides the self into four component parts: the intellectual, the spiritual, the emotional, and the physical. Similarly, Graveline's (1998) model of the self-in-relation situates the self at the centre but articulates various lenses through which the self is seen, such as the family and the world. *Figure 1* depicts this concept of self-in-relation on the outside of the talking circle, representing the inward nature of my research as well as the outward path through which understanding diffuses. Modern Indigenous scholars have repeatedly articulated the Indigenous way of understanding the world as being through one's relations and knowledge of the relationships to each of them (Archibald,

2008; Cajete, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Stonechild, 2016; Wilson, 2008). In this regard, the first step in generating knowledge of any kind in the Indigenous tradition is to look toward the self and then radiate that understanding outward. This is why I have focused my study on myself and tried to examine my relationships to Indigenous identity and white privilege through the stories—positive, negative, theoretical, and practical—that have shaped who I am—that are ‘all that I am’ (King, 2003).

**Axiology and methodology.** An axiology refers to one’s values with regard to the research practice. My own axiology is heavily influenced by Shawn Wilson (2008) who articulates his Indigenous axiology as:

Built upon the concept of relational accountability . . . right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy: value judgments lose their meaning. What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship—that is, being accountable to your relations. (p. 77)

As discussed throughout this work, relational accountability is a central concept in determining why I must maintain an Indigenous conceptual framework in my research. As I have discovered through my narratives and stories, to deny my Indigenous heritage, even through silence, is to dishonour my relations and to perpetuate the erasure of my own Indigenous identity. Everything I write here is connected to my family, community, and nation. As such, I seek to honour them with every word. In a more practical sense,

honoring relational accountability means that the research I engage in must be useful to my community on some level, that everything I say must be true, and that I must seek to honour the relationships I have with the people about whom I have written.

There are multiple understandings of the term methodology ranging from a stand-in for the term method to an umbrella term for the philosophical underpinnings of one's research (Grix, 2002; McGregor & Murnane, 2010). My understanding is closer to the latter: I see methodology as having an interconnected relationship to axiology, epistemology, ontology, and rhetoric. In this regard, methodology is an umbrella term under which all the other terms fall, but all the other terms also funnel into it. This idea of methodological congruence implies that one cannot divorce any of these philosophical elements from one another; they are interconnected and, even in enacting the methods themselves, one must live one's philosophy (Richards & Morse, 2013). In the writing process, it was necessary to remember my relations with every word and ensure that every word is something of which they can be proud. Cora Pillwax-Weber (2004) has identified the key principles of living relational accountability in the research process as respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. Although I have not worked with other Indigenous people, the demand for respect, reciprocity, and responsibility is no less. I still have a moral obligation to ensure that my inquiry is genuine and respectful of all my relations, as well as the obligation

to give back in some capacity to those who help me. In this regard, my intent is that by sharing my story, others may be able to grow or better understand the complex world in which we live. As long as this story sharing is done respectfully and with the right orientation, I have lived up to my responsibility as an Indigenous person. However, had I used narrative inquiry as my only theoretical framework and not paid homage to the Indigenous ideas and thinkers that I have discussed here, no matter how sound my framework, I would not have been being respectful to my relations and would have failed in my responsibility to uphold relational accountability.

### **Arts-Informed Research**

Though the dominant lens I use for viewing the world is that of the Indigenous philosophical tradition, this research process must reflect the dualistic nature of my identity as a white-seeming Qalipu Mi'kmaw. Thus, it is necessary for me to position myself both within the Indigenous paradigm and the Western paradigm as a way of honouring the voices of both my white and Indigenous self. Under the umbrella of the Western academic tradition, there are many methodological positions ranging from the positivist and post-positivist traditions, where empirical evidence and the scientific method are the order of the day, to research positioned within the critical paradigm, which embraces human subjectivity and moves research into the realm of political action (Creswell, 2014). In my own thinking, I have sometimes



conceptualized the diversity of methodology within the Western tradition as a spectrum. On the left of the spectrum rest the more “traditional” or “conservative” approaches, often lumped together under the term quantitative. On the right of the spectrum sit the approaches that seek to understand through explorations and descriptions of quality rather than quantity. These methodologies are often labeled qualitative. The further one travels to the left of the spectrum, the more certain philosophies embrace human subjectivity. Thus, at the far end of the spectrum there are paradigms such as the arts-informed and the critical where any semblance of objectivity is abandoned in favour of a rigour determined by internal consistency (Cole & Knowles, 2001). It is in this abandonment of objectivity toward understandings of complex personhood (Tuck, 2009) and the appreciation of representing findings in diverse forms (Cole & Knowles, 2001) that I find a voice for my white self as research. The term that I feel best represents the methodology I have described above is arts-informed research (Cole & Knowles, 2001, 2008).

Arts-informed research is a sort of qualitative research that is influenced by artistic ways of knowing and concepts (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Arts-informed research is one branch of a wider epistemological shift in social sciences research toward an honouring of individual experience and subjectivity. Like many things, arts-informed research resists simplistic

definitions. As such, one of the most thorough characterizations of the term comes from a description of what it *does*:

Arts-informed research is changing the face of social science research. It is opening the possibilities for modes, media, and genres to represent the human condition. Emerging from the productive fusion and tensions among qualitative inquiry and the fine arts, arts-informed research infuses elements, process and forms of arts with the expansive possibilities of scholarly work. (Cole, Neilsen, Knowles, & Luciani, 2004, p. vi)

Furthermore, Cole and Knowles (2008) describe arts-informed research as a way of:

Enhance[ing] understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible. The methodology infuses the languages, processes, and forms of literary, visual, and performing arts with the expansive possibilities of scholarly inquiry for purposes of advancing knowledge. (p. 59)

There are several important emphases in these descriptions—including the point on knowledge transfer, which carries specific connotations in Indigenous communities—however, the core is that arts-informed research combines art and scholarship in order to make research more accessible and

generate new knowledge. In the present study, I have used three forms of art, in both the Indigenous and Western traditions, to describe and make meaning from my unique lived experience with white-seeming privilege.

As part of the previously mentioned epistemological shift away from objectivity, there are several terms for specific research processes and philosophies within the central movement. Arts-based research is differentiated from arts-informed research with regard to the former's emergence from the arts (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Art-based research is understood "as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both research and the people that they involve in their studies" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). In contrast, arts-informed research can be articulated as "...influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59). Though these terms are very closely related, and share many interrelated aspects, it is clear to me that my research falls within the category of arts-informed research. Whereas art-based and arts-based research have their theoretical bases in the arts (Cole & Knowles, 2008; McNiff, 2008), arts-informed seems, in my mind, to be more receptive to the kind of mixing and matching I am attempting here. As my methodology is trans-systemic in nature, it cannot be said to have its base in either arts-informed or Indigenous research; however, neither can it be said that my research is not based in these paradigms. Here we encounter a non-dualistic understanding (Ross, 2014) in that these two statements are both true and

untrue—or rather they contain shades of truth and falseness. In positioning myself within either paradigm, I would be indulging in the cognitive imperial practice of compartmentalizing and, thus, placing artificial limits on the scope of my understanding (Battiste, 2013). As previously stated, Indigenous peoples see the world in terms of relationships and holism (Archibald, 2008; Graveline, 1998; Wilson, 2008), and rigidly defining paradigms is somewhat counter to our understanding of the universe (Cajete, 2000). All things are related: we are all part of a single whole. This is true of plants, animals, humans, as well as philosophical concepts. While previously I have articulated, with some rigidity, the parameters of the Indigenous paradigm of thought, I have done so to set the groundwork for the blending or layering of arts-informed research and Indigenous theory principles. In the blending of these approaches, I have attempted to work trans-systemically so that both my inner voices are honoured and have the space to explain themselves without being metaphorically interrupted or devalued by paradigmatic restrictions.

### **Meeting Points**

Thus far in this section, I have described my methodologies separately, reflecting the dualistic nature of my own identity; however, somewhere in the process of writing, re-writing, listening, and understanding, two voices became one. In order to reflect this reconciliation of the self methodologically, it is necessary to discuss the meeting points of Indigenous and arts-informed

methodologies. There are several terms that make sense to discuss as meeting points within the context of this project. In each of the following terms, there is a shade of truth about the joining of an Indigenous research paradigm and arts-informed research: (1) Trans-systemic knowledge (Battiste, 2013) and two-eyed seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012), (2) Métissage (Donald, 2009), and (3) Indigenous artistry (Kelly, 2014, 2015) and the metaphoric mind (Cajete, 2000). In the following paragraphs, I will describe each of these concepts, how they function as a joining of Indigenous research and arts-informed research, and how each can be applied to the work I have done here. When we define or label an idea, we begin the process of creating rigidly defined barriers that enclose and limit its existence within our minds. Thus, here I have resisted the standard approach of labeling one's research with the most fitting term and instead selected several that I feel reflect the nature of my work. In each of these terms, I hope the reader finds shades of truth—shades that when put together generate a beautiful and complex image of the philosophy behind my work.

**Trans-systemic knowledge and two-eyed seeing.** Simply put, trans-systemic knowledge is knowledge that “reach[es] beyond [the] two distinct systems of knowledge to create fair and just educational systems and experiences...” (Battiste, 2013, p. 103). I envision trans-systemic knowledge as a bridge that binds together two diverse paradigms. That is, more or less, what I have attempted to do here. While I acknowledge that Western

research and Indigenous research represent two separate paradigms of thought, in my own life and research they coexist trans-systemically, like a bridge binding together two communities through mutual access. Two-eyed seeing is another concept that seeks to describe the dualistic existence of Western and Indigenous knowledges. To use the words of Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall:

... Two-Eyed Seeing is the gift of multiple perspective treasured by many Aboriginal peoples and ... refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all.  
(Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p. 5)

For any Indigenous person living and working in Western society, two-eyed seeing is an essential skill. Without the ability to see the world through the lens of our traditional knowledge, we would lose our sense of who we are and miss out on the benefit of the generational wisdom passed down through our communities. Likewise, if we were to ignore the knowledge of Western society, we would be left behind the times economically and intellectually. By working with Indigenous and arts-informed methodologies, I see myself as opening both my eyes as widely as possible in order to fully capture the complexity of white-seeming privilege. Both knowledge systems work

together in order to articulate new understandings and generate new knowledge.

**Métissage.** The process of simultaneously occupying space in Indigenous and dominant methodologies is also described by the concept of *Métissage* (Chambers et al., 2008; Donald, 2012; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012). This concept is described as a “way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities... a creative strategy for the braiding of gender, race, language and place into autobiographical texts” (Chambers, Donald, & Hasebe-Ludt, 2002, pp. 1-2). Indeed, what I have attempted to do is offer my story in multiple ways so as to better represent my layered and evolving understanding of my own identity. In this regard, the concept of Métissage, which has been used by some Métis scholars to decolonize their own research perspectives (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012), describes both the layering of my identity and the layering of my research methods. Métissage serves as an accurate metaphor for the methodological positioning I have created for myself through the layering of my approaches. Métissage is another important Indigenous concept helps me to bridge the gap between paradigms.

**Indigenous artistry and the metaphoric mind.** In his book *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (2000), Gregory Cajete, a pueblo educator and author, discusses traditional Indigenous philosophy as being a sustained creative relationship between human beings and their surroundings. Although the notion of a relationship between humans, plants,

animals, and the cosmos has been taken up by other authors (Graveline, 1998; McGaa, 1990; Stonechild, 2016; Tuck & McKennzie, 2015; Wilson, 2008), the notion of creativity embedded in Cajete's discussion is a novel one and adds much to our conversation here. He describes the creativity inherent in human existence through a description of the metaphoric mind. According to Cajete (2000), the metaphoric mind is the evolutionarily older part of the human mind that predates language. The metaphoric mind is juxtaposed with the rational mind, which is the part of our mind that deals in compartmentalization and language. The metaphoric mind functions as a more holistic interpreter, it "... communicates and relates to the world in the more holistic structures of oral stories, linguistic metaphors, images and intuitions" (Cajete, 2000, p. 29). In Western society, it is typically the rational mind that dictates intelligence and valuable thoughts, whereas "In Native societies, the two minds of human experience were typically given a more balanced regard" (p. 28). The metaphoric mind is the mechanism through which Indigenous peoples came to understand their reality, and this fact remains true for the modern Indigenous thinker. This is evident through the centrality of story to our ontologies (Kovach, 2009). Our stories are the way we see the world—they do not break apart experiences into pieces but, rather, appreciate their fullness and complexity.



**Cinquain VII**  
The Metaphoric Mind  
*March 6, 2017*

Nothing  
Brings forth something.  
Creation from darkness;  
The last act of magic we know  
Give life.

One of the strongest connections between arts-informed research and Indigenous research is the use of the metaphoric mind. Modern artists, and by extension arts-informed researchers, often see the world holistically and without the compartmentalizing force of language. Theirs is a direct experience with reality, as is the experience of Indigenous peoples with nature. Indeed, Cajete articulates the similarities between the artist's way of coming to know as similar to that of traditional Indigenous thinkers:

A parallel [to non-linear thinking] in western thought is the artist, as artists also do this kind of meandering. The value of effort, the coming to know, is found in the journey, in addition or rather than, the end result. Consequently, this is why Western artistic traditions find greater affinity with indigenous thinking than does the scientific mind-set. There is a kind of natural connection between these processes, an intersection. (Cajete, 2000, p. 81)

In the present work, my artistic process has been shaped by language because of the mediums I have chosen; however, in both my storytelling and my poetry the first step to creation is an envisioning. This envisioning is a

sort of meditative activation of my metaphoric mind, where I think and pray about what it is I need to say. Kelly (2014) describes her own artistic process similarly as a circle and draws on the wisdom of Lister Sinclair: the artist sees, knows, shapes, and shows (Kelly, 2014). Kelly's vision of the artistic process is holistic and complete; she says to see is to know and by shaping we come to know as well. Indeed, the first step for artists, Indigenous or otherwise, is often to connect to the creative potential of the universe (Cajete, 2000). All this is to say that there are clearly shared philosophical roots between arts-informed research and Indigenous research, and it is in their union that I find elements representative of a reconciliation of self.

### **On “The Doing”**

The research I have conducted in this thesis has been autobiographical. It is, thus, through connection with my own thoughts and experiences that I have been able to generate new understandings of white-seeming privilege. Along the way, I have used three distinct methods, as well as the overall metaphorical form of the talking circle, to shape the process of meaning making. The various narratives and stories I have written serve a dualistic function. First, as a storyteller in the Indigenous tradition there is always something gained in the telling and sharing of one's story. This is a uniquely Indigenous process of meaning-making that comes from the idea of speaking and listening with one's heart—a process through which we connect to our deepest thoughts. In other words, through the process of telling my

story, knowledge has been gained and shared throughout this text. In a traditional talking circle, one would not write down one's words; however, as Elder Knockwood (1992) has shown us, traditions can sometimes be adapted for artistic, political, or academic reasons. Following Elder Knockwood's lead, I have written down the stories I wish to share in our talking circle. This is my narrative approach to arts-informed research. The writing of my stories allows for the kind of reflective thinking that is common in the qualitative paradigm and, thus, there is a second glimmer of knowledge gained through a different lens. To supplement the meaning of the original narrative, I have included poems from the journals I have kept over the years. Poetry has recently been used to great success as a method of autoethnographic inquiry, especially in questions of identity (Leavy, 2009; Ricci, 2003). Poetry is, for me, a free form of expression and a way for my heart to speak directly without the burden of being placed into colonial boxes (Cariou, 2014). The poems are intended to serve as a counterbalance to the narrative. The narrative has been written in the prosaic language of Western academia, but the stories are Indigenous in nature. My way of mitigating this juxtaposition is to use poetry as a meeting point. In the poems I have included, you see the place where my heart meets my mind and where both are set free from the tyrannical rule of cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2013). Together, these three art forms create a rich description of my lived experience; each is incomplete without the other two.

These three methods all take place seamlessly and without much distinction within the overarching artistic form, the talking circle. Cajete (2000) describes the Indigenous ceremonial approach to art as a process of transformation for both materials and artist, “The sacred level of art not only transforms something into art, but also transforms the artist at the very core of his or her being” (p. 46). By representing the academic inquiry I have conducted as a conversation between my white self and my Indigenous self, I have attempted to reflect the complexity of my own identity and to metaphorically capture my personal transformation. One personal goal of this project was the reconciliation of self—or to create a conversation between my two selves. I came into this project wanting to know more about the unique position I occupy in society as a fair-skinned Indigenous person, and part of that process was thinking about what it means to be both white and Indigenous. The talking circle artistically captures the duality I feel in my own identity, as well as the reconciliation that has happened within my own mind, body, spirit, and heart as a result of my life’s path and this project. I discuss the reconciliation of self in slightly more detail in the final section of this work. Though I have attempted to highlight the joining of my two selves through the title of this final section, *Speaking together*, I do not expect everyone to see this transformation clearly. In this, I must follow the wisdom of Cajete (2000), “This [Indigenous] way of doing and relating to art makes the process and context of art-making infinitely more important than the

product” (pp. 46-47). I have attempted to show my transformation through the artistic form, but it is difficult to make clear in academic writing. Furthermore, as Cajete indicates, the product is not as important as the process and, with respects to my personal transformation, it isn’t completely necessary that the reader be able to see it as fully as the author experiences it. What is important about Indigenous stories, Indigenous art, Indigenous poetry, and Indigenous people is that they exist—that they continue to exist in the face of 500 years of colonization. The conversation that has happened in this talking circle exists. It is because it exists that it is beautiful. It exists as a disruption of the dominant narratives around what it means to have white skin and what it means to be Indigenous. It also exists as documentation of my personal journey to understand my whiteness, my Indigeneity, and where the two meet. Above all, it exists as a story, and I invite you to follow the words of Thomas King with regard to that story:

Take [this] story, for instance. It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Tell friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life any differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now. (King, 2003, p. 29)

There are layers of meaning in each of our stories, and as we begin to understand the complexities and value of each person’s narrative, we move away from the simplistic, yes-or-no, data-based, empirical way of knowing the universe and toward the more beautifully intricate, realistic understanding

that has been passed down through generations of Indigenous people. It is in this spirit of embracing the complexity of humanity-in-relation that I have conducted this project.

Msit No'kmaq,

Wela'lioq.

## What Has Been Learned

### Looking Back

Now it is true that the genius of African culture is surely its repetition, but the key to such repetition was that new elements were added each go-round. Every round goes higher and higher. Something fresh popped off the page or jumped from a rhythm that had been recycled through the imagination of a writer or a musician. Each new installation bore the imprint of our unquenchable thirst to say something of our own, in our own way, in our own voice as best we could. The trends of the times be damned. (Dyson, & Glasper, 2013)

The above quotation is from a record by Robert Glasper called *Black Radio 2*, and although the speaker, Dyson, is discussing individuality and creativity in the black community, I believe the repetition he describes applies to my project as well. In moving forward, it is important to acknowledge the path we have traveled. Thus, to begin this section I will briefly review our path through this talking circle.

We began in the east with statements of intentionality from both participants. From my Indigenous self we heard the stories that brought me to this point. They were stories of awakening, stories of lived Indigeneity, and stories of whiteness. Those stories helped you, the reader, to know me and to form a relationship with me. Later, those stories helped me to illuminate white-seeming privilege. When the talking stick was handed off, my white

self shared his ideas about who we are and why we are here. Those words gave us the first introduction into the theories that inform white-seeming privilege. As the wind shifted to the south, both my white self and my Indigenous self built on those ideas, going higher and deeper through the words of other authors. My Indigenous self told the story of my *coming to know* (Cajete, 2000), while my white self discussed the theoretical literatures that inform white-seeming privilege. As the wind shifted to the west, we moved from preparing into doing, and my Indigenous self told the painful story of my ancestors' experience with settler colonialism. In the west, my white self returned to white-seeming privilege in order to go deeper into both the theory and the lived reality of the term. As the cold north wind blew, we were left with only a few words. In the previous section, we discussed the methodology that has given birth to this work. In this section, I will discuss what has been learned through the process of researching this topic, as well as the implication of the findings for Indigenous and academic communities. Within the north wind I have spoken through both voices as one, the Indigenous and the white—the reconciled self, a topic also discussed in these final words.

When I started this project, my intent was to look at storytelling pedagogy as a concept. I had read works by both Indigenous (Archibald, 2008) and non-Indigenous (Kuyvenhoven, 2009) writers on the power of story to transform education, and I felt empowered to dig deeper into that



transformative power. As I look back, I believe I have stayed true to my original intent. This is still very much a work about story; however, it has become about the infinite plurality of stories existent within the self rather than the practical stories we use to educate. At its core, this work posits that personal narrative disrupts dominant narrative, and it is with that central purpose that we can examine the implications of this research for the Indigenous community and for scholars.

### **Reconciliation**

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) completed its final report (TRC, 2015). It is an extremely powerful document that puts into writing many beliefs the First Nations community has held for generations. It is also a document that values personal story and oral tradition above all else. Embedded within the pages of the final report are countless stories from residential school survivors, intergenerational survivors, former teachers, Indigenous youth, and many others. In the months and years since its completion, there has been a flurry of activity across the country to address the 94 calls to action made in the report. Though these calls to action are often aimed toward government, they are also implicitly directed at all Canadians, and many have taken up those calls. It is in this spirit of reconciliation that I find the first implication of my writing.

According to the TRC, reconciliation is “an ongoing process of establishing and maintain respectful relationships” (TRC, 2015, p. 16). The standard interpretation of this definition is that the relationships are between settlers and Indigenous people, but it is also stated later that reconciliation must be aimed inward, “Together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation; we must learn how to *practise* reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves...” (TRC, 2015, p. 21). In some ways, the aim of this project has been to reconcile my own identity. One of the major outcomes of this process, from a personal perspective, has been the strengthening of my Indigenous knowledge. It is in that Indigenous knowledge that I find my strength to self-identify, even while the federal government tries to take away my status. As my mother often tells me, “you know who you are; the government can’t change that” (G. Downey, personal communications, January 20, 2017). Were it not for my continued engagement with my Indigenous knowledge throughout this project, I am not certain that I would know who I am with such conviction. Settler colonialism attempts to erase the Indigenous people who occupy the land, and it continues to attempt to erase Indigenous identities quietly through its endemic presence in our society (Brayboy, 2005; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). The dominance of Western ways of knowing in academia is yet another symptom of settler colonialism’s endemic nature (Cajete, 2000; Graveline, 1998, 2003; Wilson, 2008). In the past, Indigenous people who wished to conduct research

with their people were encouraged to do so in ways that limit their subjectivity due to the normativity of the positivist and post-positivist paradigms (Cajete, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Wilson, 2008). In these kinds of academic endeavours, there is very little growth for the community, and the key benefits are economic on the part of the researcher (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Wilson, 2008). However, through the emergence of the Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), traditional Indigenous knowledge has been allowed into the research process, and young Indigenous researchers, such as myself, have been given the chance to wrestle with our Indigenous knowledge, thereby strengthening our Indigenous identities and refusing their erasure. In my view, this is a profound reconciliation. Where once there was a complete denial of value, there is now a relationship—one that directly benefits both Indigenous communities and academia.

**Cinquain VI**  
 On The Reconciliation of Self  
*March 6, 2017*

Two halves  
 Becoming one,  
 Living in relation,  
 And learning from each other's Strengths;  
 One whole.

Apart from the research process, the content of my research also holds implications for reconciliation. For the white-seeming individual, the reconciliation of self is a necessity. By definition, those who are white

seeming share a physical appearance with the way settlers are often imagined and, in the context I have described, also carry Indigenous identities. As such, they have historical ties to both the oppressor and the oppressed. In theory, each white-seeming individual must at some point, consciously or otherwise, reconcile their dichotomous histories. The way I have opted to do this is through an acknowledgement of my white privilege and through telling the stories of my own struggles with identity and my ancestors' struggles with settler colonialism. It is in the theory of a white privilege situated in an understanding of settler colonialism, or a white-seeming privilege, that I find my reconciliation of self—a unified voice found within deep understanding. This acknowledgement of my white-seeming privilege gives me a position from which I am capable of understanding my own Indigeneity and privilege as well as moving forward in helping my communities, both academic and Indigenous. This is how I have found my peace, and in sharing my story I hope that others will be better able to find their own way. As more stories are told, a more complicated and complete view of what it means to reconcile will emerge, and we will move closer to the sustainable relationships described by the TRC.

### **Implications for Education**

If we step outside the confines of Western scholarship and turn to thinkers who see education as a concept rather than a compartmentalized discipline bureaucratically presented in universities across Europe and North

America, we see that, "...Education, in the true sense, is the understanding of oneself, for it is within each of us that the whole of existence is gathered" (Krishnamurti, 1992, p. 17). In this quote, and in the majority of his work, Krishnamurti emphasises that true education is about the journey inward toward a deeper understand the self, not the gaining of technical proficiencies as has become the norm in Western education. Likewise, Al-Ghazzali, an 11<sup>th</sup> century Muslim scholar, states:

[T]here are two kinds of eye, an external and an internal; ... the former belongs to one world, the World of Sense, and ... internal vision belongs to another world altogether, the World of the Realm Celestial; ... each of these two eyes has a sun and a light whereby its seeing is perfected. ... *He who never fares to that [latter] world, but allows the limitations of life in this lower world of sense to settle upon him, is still a brute beast, an excommunicate from that which constitutes us men* [emphasis added]. (Al-Ghazzali, 1924, Quoted in Tawil, 2001, p. 29)

Despite the strong language and masculine pronouns, Al-Ghazzali articulates the true purpose of education to be the journey inward, not one's ability to function in the world or one's technical proficiency. The seldom considered truth of Indigenous leaning is that the education we speak of is not the kind of technical proficiency in marketable skills and business acumen the modern curriculum demands, rather, Indigenous learning engages the student in holistic learning (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2000; Graveline, 1998),

supplementing their spiritual journey inward to understand the relationships between themselves and all living things with the practical knowledge of how to walk in the world without damaging those relationships (Graveline, 1998). What I have attempted here is to model the sort of serious self-inquiry, or the examination of one's inner landscape (Kelly, 2010), that is, in my mind, the true project of Indigenous education.

The current model of education exists in large part due to the obsession with efficiency developed during the industrial revolution and the market revolution (Apple, 1979; Robinson & Aronica, 2009). But education built on a foundation of exploitative capitalism becomes concerned primarily with its own reproduction (Apple, 1979; McLaren, 2007). Nothing makes this clearer than when teachers and scholars state that we must make our students able to be “successful” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The underlying ideology in those statements is that our students must be *economically* successful—that happiness and success are somehow related to the various economically marketable skills we teach them such as grit, the use of technology, problem solving, and raw calculation ability. The irony of the argument around 21<sup>st</sup> century learning theory is that the authors often acknowledge that we have no conceptual framework for understanding what jobs will look like in the next ten years. Yet rather than trying to change their educational focus to develop students who are capable of serious inward inquiry and finding some peaceful existence in the world, they continue to perpetuate neoliberal

ideology, directing education toward the reproduction of a globalized, competitive, exploitative economic system (Apple, 1979; McLaren, 2007).

The research I have conducted considers education in this holistic sense. It is an examination and expression of my Indigenous knowledge. In order to do this accountably, the traditional scope of education must be honoured—that is, the understanding of one’s place in the world and their relationships to all living things. I think this question of scope is the most overlooked aspect of an Indigenized curriculum—the new buzzword for integrating Indigenous knowledge into the Western curriculum. My thesis work is, in some ways, an example of what an Indigenous curriculum that honours the scope and topic of traditional education would look like (Cajete, 1994, 2000; Kelly, 2010).

### **Meditation on Indigenous Education**

*March 6, 2017*

Learn.  
 Self,  
 Other,  
 Relation;  
 There is nothing else.  
 Our existence is a journey,  
 A quest for spirit, to learn and grow and become whole.  
 There is no spirit in your school  
 And so it fails us.  
 A closed book.  
 Silence.  
 Not  
 Smart

In a practical sense, the concept of white-seeming privilege holds several implications for teachers. First, it provides a framework for those

teachers struggling with their own identity to situate themselves within the conversation around Indigenous knowledge and reconciliation. Second, as previously mentioned, it provides an example of what a serious inquiry into self through an Indigenous lens might look like. The value one sees in this self-inquiry is largely dependent on one's concept of education, but as I have said, Indigenous education is education concerned with the investigation of self and the self-in-relation (Cajete, 2000; Graveline, 1998). Third, the concept of white-seeming privilege challenges dichotomised constructions of race and Indigenous identity. In a country where the Indigenous population is increasing exponentially (Saul, 2014), it is important for teachers and students to have alternative ways of constructing Indigenous identity. By adding white-seeming privilege to the discourse, hopefully discussions of race become a little less difficult for folk who don't fit into the standard definitions of race. Finally, as our country moves from understanding reconciliation into the process of educating the public, it will become increasingly important to have examples and stories of reconciliation in order to illustrate the way things ought to be. I hope that through my stories I have provided an example for those wishing to understand reconciliation, as well as its barriers, both within the self and within society.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

It is my deepest hope to see the stories I have told here inspire others to tell their own. As I have said repeatedly throughout this work and



throughout others (Downey, Submitted), personal narrative disrupts dominant narrative. Toward that end, I encourage others—Indigenous, settler, or somewhere in-between—to share their stories in hopes of creating a more complex and complete vision of the world, a world less defined by what the popular myths are and enriched by a diversity of experience. Having stated my encouragement for others to share their own stories, there are several areas that warrant further exploration with relation to the concept of white-seeming privilege.

First, the concept of white-seeming privilege, at present, is entirely based on my own experience. While there is incredible value in this kind of autobiographical work because of the richness of story it allows, there is a need to expand the concept of white-seeming privilege to include the experiences of others. Specifically, qualitative research examining white-seeming privilege in Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who experience the phenomenon would be of considerable value. There would also be value in people who have experienced white-seeming privilege sharing their own stories autobiographically, as I have done.

Second, in order to disrupt the dominant narratives of white/non-white or privileged/underprivileged dichotomies, there is a need to represent white-seeming privilege more widely. Here, I believe it is the task of arts-informed researchers to explore the complexities of race and privilege in such a way

that they become accessible and valuable to a wide range of audiences, particularly Indigenous peoples.

Third, through I have made ties to education here, they are largely theoretical and based in my own experiences. As such, I would recommend that the implications of white-seeming privilege in education be taken up more rigorously, particularly as an extension of the scholarship around autobiographical and lived curriculum (Kelly, 2010; Kumar, 2013; Pinar, 1994, 2012).

Fourth, it is important for me to mention the direction of research related to my people, the Qalipu. Since the band formed in 2008, almost nothing has been written academically about the Qalipu, and little of the available material is comprehensive or treats our people with the respect we deserve. There is a need for a comprehensive history to be written as well as documentation of the Indigenous knowleges specific to our band and our land. Several of these efforts are already underway and are largely being directed by the leadership of the band itself. We do not, however, lose anything in having multiple perspectives of any of these topics. As such, I encourage my Qalipu brothers and sisters to continue to do research with and for our people, so that our stories may be known more widely.

One final area of research close to my heart that must be taken up is the effect of the present application review process on the Qalipu people, particularly those who will lose status as a result. I have already made my

opinions on this topic clear, and as I write these words I am still unsure what the result of my own appeal will be; however, I am aware that regardless of what my letter says, many of my brothers and sister will lose their status. The stories of these people who lose their status must be made accessible to the public, and they must be treated more seriously than a news report. In this regard, I strongly recommend that research be undertaken with this population in order to capture and reflect on the effect of the government's denial of their Indian status and to push politically for the reinstatement of their status. To my brothers and sisters, I send this message: keep paddling your canoe; they cannot tell you who you are. These are the words I will hold in my heart as I open my letter; I give them to you.

### **Conclusion: Making it About Hope**

The purpose of this section is to reflect on what has been done and comment on where it might be applicable or relevant. In this sense, I have outlined two major areas where I consider this work to be of value: 1) in the study of reconciliation, particularly the reconciliation of self, and 2) in the study of education, particularly efforts to Indigenize the curriculum and Indigenous education more broadly. I have also made recommendations about where the concept of white-seeming privilege may be applied in future studies, as well as recommendations about the future of research with my people, the Qalipu. These things have been done in the spirit of hope. As much as I have spoken about the endemic natures of settler colonialism and

racism in Western society, on a more fundamental level, I believe that hope is endemic to the common human experience. We all have hopes and dreams for the future—we dream of a more comfortable life for our loved ones, a more just and equitable society, and a better future for our children. Indigenous peoples are as diverse in their hopes as they are in their identities; however, there is commonality in the existence of that hope. In my mind, hope is so important to us because it is a survival (or rather, survivance) tool. As a result of settler colonialism, our traditional ways of life came to a crashing end. Ever since, each generation of Indigenous people has been called on to create new ways of life. This creation process requires a radical and imaginative hope (Leer, 2006), something that I believe has become engrained into our worldview. Now is a pivotal time in our human history: we stand on the verge of environmental disaster looking out at the horizon with eyes clouded by easily accessible distractions, but we must not lose our hope. Hope is how we make sense of the world when everything has been robbed of us and how we will move forward when all our markers of reality are gone. Indigenous people have had their reality changed constantly over the last 500 years, but we have not lost hope. Nor will we lose hope in the coming environmental disasters. In this, Indigenous people will serve as guides for the rest, who seem so sure of their realities and have long since forgotten the creativity needed to redefine them.

**Tanka XXXV**

On Hope

*March 6, 2017*

Animals speak truth,  
But their pleas fall on deaf ears.  
I pray we wake up,  
But there'll always be a way  
So long as we imagine.

In closing, I would like to recount the words of Mi'kmaw Elder Stephen Augustine who, at the 2014 knowledge keepers forum, discussed the concept of “making things right” using the analogy of a canoe overturned in the river:

We make the canoe right and... keep it in water so it does not bump on rocks or hit the shore... [when we tip a canoe] we may lose some of our possessions... eventually we will regain our possessions they will not be the same as the old ones. (S. Augustine quoted in TRC, 2015, p. 206)

The TRC's interpretation of this metaphor, although applied to the context of residential schools, holds true for our discussion of hope:

The Mi'kmaq [*sic*] idea for ‘making things right’ implies that sometimes, in certain contexts, things can be made right—but the remedy might not allow us to recapture what was lost. Making things right might involve creating something new as we journey forward.

(TRC, 2015, p. 206)

The violent histories of settler colonialism and the continued attempts at Indigenous erasure cannot be forgotten, but they can be made right. If we move forward with creativity and hope, our society may come to appreciate

the complex personhood and personal narratives of individuals. We must try to 'make it right' through reconciliation, both on a societal level and an individual level. We must decolonize our thinking and see beyond the simple dichotomies presented to us in the media and in popular consciousness. We must allow personal narratives to disrupt dominant narratives and appreciate each individual for their complexity and the unique perspective they bring to this world. Above all, we must hope.

Msit No'kmaq,

Wela'lioq.

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