

Indigenous Storytelling: Contesting, Interrupting, and  
Intervening in the Nation-Building Project Through Historical  
Canada's Heritage Minutes

by

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## **Abstract**

While Heritage Minutes are 60 second films that are well known in Canada for their celebration of the nation state, this thesis explores varied and polysemic readings of the Minutes that emerge when Indigenous media makers make use of the recognizable nationalistic media text to interject and make space for Indigenous stories about Indigenous peoples. My work aims to fill a gap in existing scholarship on Heritage Minutes that neglects to account for Indigenous involvement with Historica Canada to produce Indigenous led narratives. I center critical and Indigenous knowledges to guide and produce a complex and nuanced reading of Heritage Minutes through conversational interviews and close textual analysis to demonstrate ways in which Indigenous filmmakers contest dominant national narratives.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to recognize that Carleton University is on unceded and unsundered Algonquin territory.

I start this with a mention to my grandfather, Alamgir Shah, who passed away the day I started my Master's program. It has been a difficult two years and I really did not think I would see this degree to completion. I struggled, I grieved, and I kept on going. But I did not do it alone.

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## **1 Chapter: Heritage Minutes: Context and Contestation of a Nationalist Project**

Personal anecdote:

Like any other day, I am standing by the counter at my local Bridgehead coffee shop, waiting on a caffeine refuel. In conversation with the barista, who is a recent immigrant from Europe, I respond to his query about my plans for the day. I mention I am working on my thesis on Heritage Minutes. Glancing up in delight, he says to me, “oh my Canadian friends told me to watch the Minutes before I moved to Canada.” It is May 2, 2017.

### **1.1 The Backstory to the Heritage Minutes**

As the vignette above illustrates, Heritage Minutes constitute quintessential notions of Canadian identity and have the power to truncate essential lessons on Canadiana for an outsider. This Master’s thesis aims to critically analyze Heritage Minutes, specifically focusing on the relationship that they have with Indigenous identity. What do Heritage Minutes look like when re-imagined through Indigenous cultural producers as an intervention, or an interruption of dominant messages? How do Indigenous filmmakers and artists disrupt these settler narratives of the nation-state?

The Heritage Minutes, originally part of The Heritage Project, a combination of nationwide heritage fairs and Heritage Minutes, have become a cultural shorthand text about important Canadian moments in the nation-state’s history. Historica Canada, a registered national charitable organization describes the Heritage Minutes as “dramatic interpretations of pivotal events in Canada’s history.” It continues, “These 60-second vignettes commemorate notable Canadians, achievements in innovation, and instances of perseverance and bravery. They

are intended to entertain, educate and encourage further research into our nation's past” (Historica Canada, 2017).

Heritage Minutes were born from the momentum of on-going conversations on the loss of Canadian culture in the 1970s and 1980s from policy makers, historians, and Canadian nationalists in fear of encroaching US commercial culture industries. This followed a long history, including the 1949 Massey Commission, known more formally as the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. The Commission generated the well-known Massey Report, which detailed the heavy cultural influences of the United States vis-à-vis publishing and films (Report, 1951). As such influences continued, billionaire, philanthropist, and an Order of Canada recipient, Charles Bronfman launched The Heritage Project in 1986 through the CRB Foundation (Charles R. Bronfman Foundation) with the intention to promote Canadian nationalism and Jewish culture (Historica Canada, 2017). Bronfman brought into the organization CBC veteran and filmmaker Patrick Watson as the Creative Director and principal writer of the Heritage Minutes. Bronfman also invited “cultural nationalist intellectuals and broadcasters like...Tom Axworthy (political scientist, brother of Lloyd Axworthy [Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien]...former aide to Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Robert Guy Scully (television host and producer), and Robert Rabinovitch (President and CEO of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC])...” who shared common concerns about a rising ignorance of Canadian values and history by Canadian citizens (Hodgins, 2003, p. 182).

From its inception, the focus of the Foundation was to educate Canadians. Bronfman has been quoted saying,

Canada and Canadians have so few folk heroes. In fact, we seem to recognize few national heroes of any kind! Almost every country and every society has its heroes, but Canada, a country that lacked a flag for so long, has lacked heroes even longer. It logically followed that the enhancement of Canadianism would play a major role in the future of our proposed foundation (The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, 2017).

Initially privately funded by Bronfman, the Foundation attracted corporate sponsorship from Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE), Power Corporation, and Canada Post. In addition, Historica Canada (2017) explains that “[d]ue to the cultural and educational content of the Minutes, networks have never received payment for airing them. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has designated the Minutes as an ongoing dramatic series with 150 per cent dramatic time credit towards networks’ Canadian Content (CanCon) requirements” (website).

The blurring of corporate sponsorship as production credits and the meeting of Canadian cultural content requirements meant that a once privately funded nationalistic organization merged into the culture industry of the Canadian nation-state. This, of course, followed long historical precedents established by other private/public affinities that aimed to forward national identity, not the least of which was the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad; these alliances similarly reflected government favouritism as *quid pro quo* for servicing nation-building projects (Wagman, 2002).

In 1999, Bronfman with co-founder Lynton 'Red' Wilson (CEO of Bell Canada Enterprises) launched The Historica Foundation of Canada, the jewel of the foundation being the Minutes. The Royal Bank, Imasco Ltd., Bell Canada, the Toronto-Dominion Bank, and several



other major corporations as well as the CRB Foundation funded Historica at the time. In 2005, the Heritage Minutes were shelved due to “funding challenges and some other well-regarded projects, such as the Heritage Fairs (regional fairs across Canada to which high school students submitted projects) had become increasingly challenging to operate in both financial and logistics terms” (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 1 2017). In 2009, The CRB Foundation merged with Dominion Institute (DI), becoming The Historica-Dominion Institute.

The Dominion Institute, founded by Rudyard Griffiths in the early 2000s, had achieved a good media profile through well-timed public opinion polls on history and citizenship-related issues, and acclaim in particular for The Memory Project, which [continues to] operate in two ways: providing videotaped first-hand testimony of Canadian military veterans talking about their experiences at war; and arranging visits to schools and other public institutions where veterans could similarly talk about their experiences to a live audience (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 1 2017).

Griffiths once stated in an interview, “that historical amnesia has led to a dangerous absence of national mythology, without which "Canadians lose any sense of national identity or civic engagement"... Only through a revival of respect for our history...will Canadians develop "social cohesion” (Gray, 2002). For these men weaving together an official history of Canada, the notion of building collective memory spanning great distances was an alluring and necessary prospect. Scholars have noted the mobilization of such discourses for the purposes of nation branding as well as the branding of particular political parties/leadership in the case of the Harper administration (McKay & Swift, 2012; Aronczyk & Brady, 2015). In 2012, the Heritage Minutes were revived, primarily, due to as CEO Anthony Wilson-Smith puts it,

[i]n a word, opportunity. The federal government of the day felt it important to make Canadians more aware of the significance of the War of 1812 in our overall history. As part of promotions and activities, they offered our organization funding sufficient to revive the Minutes and allow us to create two new ones tied to the anniversary. (They placed no restrictions on content and gave us complete freedom to make the Minutes in whatever fashion we saw fit – so long as they dealt with the 1812 war.) The release of the Minutes – the first new ones in seven years – attracted immediate and favourable attention in the media and beyond, and the government swiftly confirmed funding for three more years (since renewed.) (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 1 2017).

In 2013, Stephen Smith (Chairman of the Board at Historica-Dominion Institute) announced a name change, going forward they would be known as Historica Canada. While the organization has undergone mergers and name changes, it will be referred to throughout this thesis as “Historica Canada” or “Historica”.

CEO of Historica Canada, Wilson-Smith, explains the Minutes currently are “funded specifically by the federal heritage department. They have in recent years done almost all of it” (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 10 2017). Historica also receives funding for the organization’s operations from

a variety of sources including the federal government, usually through the Heritage Department [and] the private sector, in the form of large companies that fund specific projects, or parts of projects alongside other sponsors. Over the years, those sponsors have included BMO, the TD Bank, and Enbridge, among others. Other levels of government, two of our more recent Heritage Minutes (on Indigenous themes) were

funded by the Ontario government. Telephone awareness campaigns. We raise money through a professional fund-raising company that solicits on our behalf. Contributions from our Board of Directors. We have an exceptionally accomplished Board (which includes nine members of the Order of Canada) and they are also very generous in financial terms. [T]he percentage of contributions from each of those sources that make up our annual revenue is difficult to break down, because it is a moving target that can vary dramatically at any given time. In terms of the overall size of contributions, I can be more specific: our budget overall for running Historica has run between \$12-15 million in each of the last five years (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 1 2017).

The Minutes have taken off on a path that Bronfman originally envisioned, with its recognizable sixty-second capture of a significant or noteworthy moment in Canadian history resonating with the general audience. Bronfman's initial concerns about Canadians not knowing their history has led to a database of historical snapshots celebrating the colonial history that has shaped what we have to come to know as Canada, the settler nation-state. For example, Historica Canada compiles, edits, and maintains The Canadian Encyclopedia database, content generated for the Encyclopedia is also aggregated from Heritage Minutes topics (Historica Canada, 2017). Daubs (2013), a reporter for *The Toronto Star* in an interview with Jeff Ruhl, a instructor who taught on topics of Canadian-culture, notes that the popularity of the Minutes has meant a selected topic can initiate a deluge of interest in mainstream culture. For example, Ruhl (Daubs, 2013) stated, “[h]e found that there was an “explosion of the Inukshuk” after a Heritage Minute on Inuit culture in the 1990s. By the early 2000s, they appeared on the sides of highways and trails in Ontario, and as government symbols, even a part of the logo for the Vancouver Olympics” (Daubs, 2013). However, as Indigenous activists and scholars have pointed out, this was

criticized as cultural appropriation for the sake of nation-building (Adese, 2012). While Heritage Minutes have been central in reproducing national identity, at times in tension with Indigenous concerns, this project traces out whether and how they have also been mobilized as challenges to it. With their visual and audio packaging offering access to a large audience, in what ways can the discursive powers of Heritage Minutes be galvanized to destabilize dominant nationalistic narratives?

Since the release of the first Minute in 1991, eighty-six episodes of Heritage Minutes have been produced, of which eleven directly speak about Indigenous peoples. In 1992, T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater, a Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk filmmaker and scholar from Six Nations, wrote, co-directed and co-produced *Peacemaker*, retelling the story of the Iroquois legend of the Tree of Great Peace, explaining the origins of the Iroquois Confederacy. During Historica's hiatus from making new Minutes in the mid-2000s, Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk scholar, multimedia artist, and performer, Jackson 2bears presented his multi-media performance piece, *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day* (2010), using the familiar format of a Heritage Minute to speak about on-going challenges faced by Indigenous communities. On June 21, 2016, National Aboriginal Day, Historica premiered two new Minutes, *Naskumituwin (Treaty)* and *Chanie Wenjack*. *Naskumituwin* dramatizing the making of Treaty 9 from the perspective of historical witness George Spence, an 18-year-old Cree hunter from Albany, James Bay. *Chanie Wenjack* re-enacts a story about a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy named Chanie Wenjack and his sister Pearl Achneepineskum during their time at a residential school in Ontario. In October 2016, Historica Canada released *Kenojuak Ashevak*, a Heritage Minute on the Inuit artist, narrated in Inuktitut, the first time a Minute was narrated in a language other than French or English.

According to Métis filmmaker, director, and writer Shane Belcourt, these new Heritage Minutes were an important departure from the audio and visual educational landscape that had previously neglected to inform Canadians about Indigenous peoples for many years. Belcourt notes:

[growing up in Ottawa in the 1970s]...there was zero knowledge or zero awareness of Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous issues ...compared to my daughter [who] is 9 years old and they have learned about residential schools...off of watching the Historical Minute and she is in Grade 4...One of her teachers is First Nations in Toronto. [When] they open up the [school] assembly...they [the teachers] say, ‘we want to acknowledge that this is traditional territory’. Like this is not the world I grew up in at all (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

It is a particularly opportune time to delve into this conversation about counter-narratives because much like 1992, Canada is looking at another milestone, 150 Years of Confederation. This can either be treated as a celebration of the Dominion of Canada or a critical engagement with settler-colonialism, depending on how you look at the national fanfare. In locating Heritage Minutes as a cultural product that engages in nationalistic memory work, it becomes apparent that the localizing of Indigenous bodies within Heritage Minutes appears to be heightened in big moments leading to the celebration of the settler state, which reinforces the conflation of Indigenous identity with the nation itself (Mackey, 2002). However, while the agenda of Heritage Minutes is ultimately to promote settler identity, there is an opportunity “to flip the script” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

The conversations that emerge in response to hegemonic narratives at heightened times of myth making are of particular interest to me as a Communication Studies scholar with a

background in Indigenous and Canadian Studies. Consider Chippewar's "Canada 150 Years of Genocide 1867-2017" stickers encouraging users to plaster public and private spaces to destabilize the emphasis on Canada's 150 nation-wide coordinated celebrations. Or Mohawk/Tuscarora writer Janet Rogers' and 2bears' "Confederation 150 Mixdown" podcast that acts as a reply and response to Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations using the 1967 poem *Lament* by Chief Dan George as inspiration. Counter-narratives provide an amplified platform to shake up homogenising memory-making practices. Foucault (1978) explains power and knowledge does not manifest in a master-slave or oppressor-victims dynamic but rather a productive space where resistance is a natural phenomenon occurring in response to the presence of power. He also notes that resistance is prescribed to some degree by the original discourse. In the visualities and the recognizable aesthetics of Heritage Minutes, exists the opportunity to enact what Michele Raheja (2010) refers to as 'visual sovereignty', "...a way of reimaging Native-centered articulations of self-representation and autonomy that engage the powerful ideologies of mass media but do not rely solely on the texts and contexts of Western jurisprudence" (p. 197).

## **1.2 Alter-narratives and Decolonization**

While speculation percolated in the early years of The CRB Foundation as a device of propaganda, the Heritage Minutes in attempting to create notable Canadian historical moments have themselves become a part of Canadian media culture history. Scholars have contributed to critical examination of the role of the Minutes and public education (Lester, 2002; Hodgins, 2003; and Rukszto, 2005). In 2002, Norman Lester, a Francophone journalist with Radio-Canada, published *Le Livre noir du Canada Anglais/The Black Book of English Canada*, depicting a Canadian landscape that was far from just and egalitarian; instead it called out to state and market collusion. Lester's (2002) work looked to the Heritage Minutes as one venue

through which nationalist propaganda promoted elite Anglo ideologies while obscuring other historical narratives. In his 2003 dissertation, *The Canadian Dream-Work: History, Myth and Nostalgia in the Heritage Minutes*, Peter Hodgins maps out how nostalgia and propaganda work together through the Heritage Minutes to create metanarratives about the Canadian nation-state. Katarzyna Rukszo's dissertation in 2005, *The Other Heritage Minutes: Satirical Reactions to Canadian Nationalism* examined parodies made in reaction to Heritage Minutes seeking to understand the nuances of meaning-making related to national identity.

While analyses have provided critique on the function of Heritage Minutes in reproducing dominant discourses about Canadian identity, there has been little scholarly work done discussing the counter-narratives that have emerged from Indigenous filmmakers and artists in relation to Heritage Minutes. Although Heritage Minutes have fallen to criticism and scrutiny in promoting a homogenous Canadian mono-history, previous commentators have neglected to take into account the role of Indigenous artists and filmmakers who have spoken through the recognizable nationalistic format and aesthetics of the Minutes to offer what I am calling an alter-narrative. I define alter-narratives as creative spaces that alter temporal and spatial relations, in this particular example, through Heritage Minutes, while providing alternate readings of the settler national mythologies by the Minutes. Throughout this thesis, I use the word 'alter-narrative' to signal to pluralities of stories that exist in tandem to what colonial logic would have you believe is a singular narrative. The alter-narratives disrupt notions of time, space, and relation to self and community by de-emphasizing a sole truth. How then do articulations of Indigenous identity in Heritage Minutes differ when produced by Indigenous filmmakers? In this thesis, I argue that 2bears, Doxtater, and Belcourt utilize the recognizable platform of the

Minutes to reshape commonly held knowledge of Indigenous peoples while also noting the limitations of working with this media text.

What real challenges can be posed to the nation-state and its violent colonial past, which extend into the present through continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples? I address these questions through a close textual analysis of the *Peacemaker*, *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day*, and *Chanie Wenjack* and conversations with media makers. I demonstrate that 2bears, Belcourt, and Doxtater's work continue to complicate understandings of the Canadian 'present'; offering complex readings of time and space; their work weaves together the convergence of past, present, and future, through alternate storytelling. I do this by focussing in on two themes that emerge through their engagement with Heritage Minutes: (i) challenging temporal and spatial relations while placing land at the center of the conversation and (ii) refusing the colonial narrative and restructuring the center of power. I began this thesis with the assumption that I would only find narratives of discord and limited agency of how stories were told through Heritage Minutes. I imagined that only *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day* would provide me with narratives of resistance. I was wrong. In speaking with the Indigenous media makers who worked on producing and directing Indigenous themed Minutes, I was given an opportunity to note the alter-narratives that emerge through their storytelling. In these stories lay bare the maps of motivation for these Indigenous filmmakers to engage with the settler institution. Below is a roadmap for the subsequent chapters.

### **1.3 Thesis Roadmap**

The chapters in this thesis are organized in a manner that will help guide the reader through a broad theoretical standpoint and then into more detailed analysis. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to *Historica Canada*, Heritage Minutes, and a brief overview of the selected



Minutes and artistic interventions that are the focus of this thesis. Chapter 2 covers a literature review and methodologies section informed by Indigenous thinkers and critical scholars like Leanne Simpson (2008; 2014), Audra Simpson (2014), Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), and Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (2013). I turn to Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of the 'imagined community' to understand how common histories are used as mechanisms for nation-building. In reading Leanne Simpson & Kiera Ladner (2010), I find myself understanding the gifting that has happened: Indigenous filmmakers and artists gifting their Honour Song on to the media landscape like the tradition of Nishinaabeg and Nehiyaw nations. Chapter 2 concludes with a breakdown of interdisciplinary methodological approaches discussed by Leanne Simpson (2014), Jo-ann Archibald (2008), Margaret Kovach (2009), and Norman Denzin, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, & Yvonne Lincoln (2008) to gather information and situate myself as a researcher. In Chapter 3, I shift over to a textual analysis of Jackson 2bears' *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day* (2010), a Live Cinema/Scratch Video performance artwork that interrupts the settler myths of peaceful relations with Indigenous peoples. Through publicly accessible content i.e. 2bears' professional website, his 2012 PhD dissertation *Mythologies of an [Un]Dead Indian*, and his chapter in S. Loft & K. Swanson's (2014) edited volume, I examine how time, space, land, and humour emerge through his technological alter-narrative pointing to the malleability of the *Minutes*. Moreover, the visualities of *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day* foster a space to deconstruct the signifiers of nationhood, in particular through flags. 2bears' work uses the iconography of the Canadian national flag juxtaposed against that of the Mohawk Unity Flag and Six Nations flag to indicate that nationhood is a claim to space. Chapter 4 brings the focus to the Heritage Minutes. I conduct textual analysis of two Minutes that were written, produced, and directed by Indigenous media makers: *Peacemaker* (1992) and *Chanie Wenjack* (2016). I speak

with T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater, Shane Belcourt, and CEO of Historica Canada, Anthony Wilson-Smith, to learn more about the subsequent outcomes of an Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaborative project. In speaking with the media makers, I inquire about their experiences articulating Indigenous stories from within settler institutional platforms. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the connections made through the works of 2bears, Doxtater, and Belcourt. I conclude with an examination of other pathways this thesis could have taken, in order to explore limitations and leave open the possibility of expanding this project for future inquiry.

## 2 Chapter: Literature Review and Methodology

### 2.1 Literature Review: Nationhood, National Identity, and the Two Row Wampum

[I]t starts from our perspective that we think that Canada is a great country continually trying to get better, but part of that process as it would be with any person is [that it] involves acknowledging less proud moments, mistakes made in the past, things that need to be rectified. A constant sort[ing] of inventory of strengths and weaknesses and things. So the Minutes seek to reflect that. We still try to reflect the heroes, myths and things (Anthony Wilson-Smith, CEO Historica Canada, Personal Communication, May 10, 2017).

Within the Heritage Minutes landscape, there is one nation-state given recognition: Canada. David McCrone & Richard Kiely (2000) define the modern nation-state as "...a bounded and self-contained social system within which most meaningful social, economic and cultural relations [take] place..." (p. 22). The visuals of each of the Heritage Minutes, in its sixty-seconds, presents a compelling narrative that counts on viewers to acquiesce to popularly held national myths (Mackey, 2002; McKay & Swift, 2012) about the settler nation-state. However, there are alternative readings that emerge as I turn to Stuart Hall's (1980) work on encoding and decoding that reconstitutes these national myths which attempt to contain the experience of diverse voices and varied social and political locations through what Benedict Anderson (2006) calls an 'imagined community'. Anderson (2006) defines an imagined community as a collective being, overcoming geographical mass and individual difference to identify as one people, one nation, and one culture. As with imagined communities, we can understand national myths as central to national identity (Sarup & Raja, 1996). Daniele Conversi (1999) states, "[m]yths have a unique capacity of conveying a sense of belonging and continuity through successive

generations...[m]yths powerfully carry and disseminate the distinction between in-groups and out-groups..." (p. 560). In other terms, imagined communities are delimited by membership and political boundaries and actively work to constitute outsiders (Anderson, 2006; Sarup & Raja, 1996); this places Indigenous peoples, the original inhabitants of the "motherland, fatherland" of settler societies, as a living anomaly or contradiction to national narratives (Sarup & Raja, 1996, p. 130). Myths become a tool by which metanarratives about the nation-state come to be seen as 'organic' or natural. Roland Barthes (1984) explains that myths signal an obvious yet often unrealized truth: they are facilitated by the viewpoints of those who occupy the center of privilege and power. But power is not static. As Michel Foucault (1991) explains,

Overvaluing the problem of the state is one which is paradoxical because...it is a form of analysis that consists in reducing the state to a certain number of functions, such as the development of productive forces of the reproduction of relations of production, and yet this reductionist vision of the relative importance of the state's role nevertheless invariably renders it absolutely essential as a target needing to be attacked and a privileged position needing to be occupied. But the state, no more probably than at any other time in its history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor to speak frankly, this importance: maybe after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicised abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think (p. 103).

While Foucault (1991) draws an important conclusion about misconceptions of state power as monolithic, this is not to dismiss the legitimate powers of the nation-state in containing and policing bodies occupying its geographic boundaries. Instead what Foucault (1991) implies is that the state is not an over-determining entity and that power is diffused and reproduced in its

relationship with discourse. We can think about the implications of this for human agency and relational power dynamics. Foucault's (1991) analysis also does not specifically take into account the nature of settler nation-states whose very existence is predicated on the violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, which is reinforced through an important relationship between power, knowledge, and discourses constituting imagined communities and national myths. Despite violent acts of dispossession, Indigeneity and nationalism are conflated as non-mutually exclusive. As Audra Simpson (2014) points out, the difficulty in looking to literature on nationalism is that they situate Indigeneity as "something entrapped within the analytics of 'minoritization', a statistical model for the apprehension of (now) racialized populations 'within' nation-states" (p. 18). In short, theoretical ruminations of nationalism cannot imagine fortitude for political organization existing within Indigenous communities.

Ironically, these limited readings of nationalism do not delve into the rich political histories and structures behind treaty making, or nation-to-nation negotiation. I sought out stories about the wampum belt to show the distinction between Indigenous conceptualizations of nations and reconciliation vs. the settler state's practices around framing nationhood and reconciliation. I specifically turned to Haudenosaunee understandings of nationhood because two of the filmmakers I discuss further in my analysis employed explicit references to Haudenosaunee cultures and broken treaty promises in *Heritage Minutes*. Chief Irving Powless Jr. (1994) highlights the understanding of these negotiations through his discussion of the Kaswentha/Gaswenta/Two Row Wampum Belt,

...made of white and purple beads. The white beads denote truth. Our record says that one purple row of beads represents a sailboat. In the sailboat are the Europeans, their leaders, their government, and their religion. The other purple row of beads represents a

canoe. In the canoe are the Native Americans, their leaders, their governments, and their Way of Life, or religion as you say it. We shall travel down the road of life, parallel to each other and never merging with each other. In between the two rows of purple beads are three rows of white beads. The first row of white beads is “peace,” the second row, “friendship,” and the third row, “forever.” As we travel down the road of life together in peace and harmony, not only with each other, but with the whole circle of life—the animals, the birds, the fish, the water, the plants, the grass, the trees, the stars, the moon, and the thunder—we shall live together in peace and harmony, respecting all those elements. As we travel the road of life, because we have different ways and different concepts, we shall not pass laws governing the other. We shall not pass laws telling you what to do. You shall not pass a law telling me and my people what to do.

Robinder Kaur Sehdev (2010) highlights the works of Indigenous scholars Dale Turner and Susan Hill who emphasize that “...the three rows are not separated by three rows of purple beads, they are *bridged* by the three rows. This bridge that links the two paths is comprised of peace, respect and friendship; these are the basis of all subsequent treaties” (p. 111-112). She goes to further explain that a wampum belt is not a one-time transaction but rather a promise for continuous maintenance of the mutually growing relationship. While treaty promises may get damaged, it does not dissolve the responsibilities of both parties who entered into the original agreement. Sehdev (2010) explains that in fact, as a mechanism for reconciliation or repair, an addendum was created, The Covenant Chain of Silver, to remind parties, Haudenosaunee and newcomers, to reprioritize their commitments to upholding treaty. This language of reconciliation is dependent on there being prior conciliatory terms of conduct.

The settler nation-state veers away from the promises made through treaty. Jennifer Henderson & Pauline Wakeham (2013) in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress* observe that settler history, more specifically this turn to apology and redress, is a means to buffer the ego and reputation of the nation-state, facilitating an environment where the nation-state draws on its archives to form a linear timeline, allowing the nation to both tread on Indigenous communities and draw on history to explain away acts of trespass. In this sense, narrative building requires the ability to reconstruct a linear explanation, playing up certain components while downplaying or erasing events, actions, and agreements. By grounding 'history' in material reality i.e. records, photographs, videos and various other archival resources, the nation-state distances itself from past actions, dismisses contemporary grievances, and projects a conflict-free futurity that somehow envelops and absorbs Indigenous communities into the nation-state.

Henderson & Wakeham (2013) provide complex readings of the culture of apology and redress, examining the language of reconciliation and the ways it obscures the on-going colonial enterprises. They explain that the culture of redress and reconciliatory practices function as a quick symbolic gesture that once given, provides settler powers the ability to determine what is required to be forgiven and less so about engaging directly with Indigenous communities about the material realities of cultural genocide and dispossession of lands. Historical justice projects are brought to the forefront to further legitimize citizenry within the boundaries of the settler nation-state. Thus, redress and reconciliation can act as another form of soothing the insecurities of the nation-state and draw Indigenous communities into the fold of the nation rather than coming to terms with the fact that indeed, the nation-state must deal with multiple independent Indigenous nations rather than one homogenously labeled group of people to address grievances.

There is, however, an unintended outcome of the culture of redress: emphasizing selective historical events as noteworthy to advance the on-going colonial project leaves open the facilitation of spaces where state-sanctioned memories are open to reinterpretation by Indigenous communities. Glen Sean Coulthard (2006/2014) while commenting on the dangers of the politics of recognition which obscures continued land dispossession and cultural assimilation tactics, signals that the act of recognition needs to happen on “[their] own terms, without the sanction, permission or engagement of the state, western theory or the opinions of Canadians” (p. 154).

While proponents of reconciliation may want to situate past acts as in/of the past, there is an opportunity for Indigenous voices to dispute this settler recollection of history and to call into question the limited ways culture is defined within the framework of the colonial or modern nation-state. David Garneau’s (2015) exploration of the practice of conciliation as opposed to reconciliation through artistic interventions facilitates a conversation of dialectic existence, where Indigenous claim to space and agency are not consumed by the nation-state to further a singular narrative but instead is survivance, a term 2bears (2012) paraphrases from Anishinaabe writer and scholar, Gerald Vizenor’s (1999) work, explaining that it is “a term that signals among other things the ongoing struggle of Indigenous peoples for whom colonialism is anything but ‘post’, and instead something that directly effects our present lived reality” (p. 7). Indigenous media makers are able to challenge and subvert ‘common’ nationalistic cultural memories and the mono-history proposed by nationalistic agencies as its national identity. Through his collaborative art installation, Garneau (2015) demonstrates a live enactment of conciliatory practices situating “[a]rt [as a] site of symbolic dissonance where hegemonies are revealed and challenged in fragments” (p. 77). In these moments, a blurring of the lines between



memory and history occur that offer a gateway for new means of memory-making and re-situating the dynamics of power.

## 2.2 Pushing the Boundaries of Refusal to Visual Sovereignty

Through ethnographic research with the Mohawk community of Kahnawà:ke, Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2014) elaborates on the challenges of exercising sovereignty as a nation within another nation when settler structures employ institutional and jurisdictional monopoly over territory. She points out that in exercising sovereignty is the inevitability of clashing with settler parameters of sovereignty, creating levels of tension between Indigenous nations and the settler state. She explains that rather than seeking to find recognition or acknowledgement from the settler structure, there is a measure of success in the act of 'refusal'. Simpson (2014) defines refusal as

a political and ethical stance that stands in contrast to the desire to have one's distinctiveness as a culture, as a people, recognized. Refusal comes with the requirements of having one's *political* [original italics] sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing: What is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so? (p. 11)

In refusing the gaze of the settler, in casting aside settler laws of boundaries and borders Simpson (2014) proposes a change in the dynamics of how nationhood is enacted. She further argues that other sovereign political structures can co-exist within a larger sovereign state but that it is not a path without great challenges. For example, she tells the story of three Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke who upon attempting to return home after an International Climate Change Conference in Bolivia on their Haudenosaunee passport, encountered difficulties. Rather than

allowing Canada to issue them emergency documents i.e. passports, they waited in detainment until logistics were figured out for them to fly back using their Iroquois Confederacy passports. Having emergency documents issued to them by way of a Canadian passport would have resulted in ceding away their own Haudenosaunee citizenship. These acts of embodying nationhood speak to the nature of highlighting that Indigenous nations exhibit models of governance that preceded settler state structures and continue to assert self-governance.

However, this refusal does not come without cost as colonial concepts of nationhood and citizenship trickle down to the dispossessed inhabitants who are now assigned reserved space within the bounded nation-state. Tensions emerge horizontally as members struggle to understand in/out group relationships as ascribed by membership lists based off how citizenship is framed within settler logic. Simpson (2014) delves into political borders and brokering lateral nation-to-nation relations through the act of refusal challenging the limited ways in which the settler nation-state conceives of sovereignty. Her work around refusal can be extended to take into account the value of refusal in other realms. Much like restructuring the parameters of nationhood and sovereignty, lies the value in applying similar tactics of refusal in visual media practices (Garneau, 2012). I find that Simpson's (2014) arguments in mapping refusal juxtaposes well with Jolene Rickard's (2011) work on visual sovereignty. Rickard (2011) says that she has come to view sovereignty as an Indigenous tradition whose work is strategically never done. The emergent space of sovereignty within aesthetic discourse is not marked or theorized and needs to be articulated as a framing device to interpret the work of Indigenous artists. The incorporation of expanded ideas of sovereignty in combination with contemporary analysis of Indigenous art has the potential to shift consciousness within Indigenous communities and surrounding colonial settler nations. Internally the

recognition that visual expressions of Indigenous artists are as crucial to the sovereigntist's agenda as legal reform is within the debate (p. 478).

The act of refusing settler narratives mediates an opening for alter-narratives to occur, reviving community relations and the opportunity to de-escalate lateral discord. Leanne Simpson as cited in Glen Sean Coulthard's (2014) *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* explains that "[r]esurgence does not "literally mean returning to the past...but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishing of the past to support the well being of our contemporary citizens" (p. 156). This particular conceptualization of Indigenous resurgence will be a useful framework to help my analysis of the Minutes and *Heritage Mythologies*.

Rickard (2011) encourages looking at the pliability of sovereignty and how it could "serve as an overarching concept for interpreting the interconnected space of the colonial gaze, deconstruction of the colonizing image or text, and Indigeneity" (p. 471). Michelle Raheja (2010) suggests that in situating 'sovereignty' beyond the legal applications, there lies "a germinal and exciting site for exploring how sovereignty can be a creative act of self-representation that has the potential to both undermine stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and to strengthen...intellectual health of communities in the wake of genocide and colonialism" (p. 194). Playing with the borders of sovereignty as a concept allows for fresh interpretations of Indigenous nationhood while still holding onto the importance of land. Increasing the scope of definition for sovereignty allows for an expanded lens through which to mobilize self-determination. For example, Kahente Horn-Miller (2010) looks to Karoniaktajeh's invention of the Unity Flag in order to map out how visual signifiers can act as an agent for collective action and community building. She situates the Unity Flag as a symbolic marker of nationhood, a signifier that while holding value for the Mohawk community becomes an emblematic figure to

represent struggle against domineering forces. The notion of flags as representative of nationhood is something that I will expand on in Chapter 2 on *Heritage Mythologies*.

Visual representations then become a powerful mode through which to speak to and for one's identity. They work at multiple levels to signal to complex relational truths. Jackson 2bears (2012/2014) enacts visual and cultural sovereignty through the interplay of digital technologies, humour, and storytelling. This vehicle of humour opens up the pathway to talk about colonial narratives of Indigeneity often employing the trope of the 'stoic Indian', devoid of embodying humour. Drew Hayden Taylor in Ute Lischke's (2015) article, "*Whacking the Indigenous Funny Bone*": *Native Humour and its Healing Powers in Drew Hayden Taylor's Redskins, Tricksters, and Puppy Stew*, cites Paula Gunn Allen to illustrate the role of humour in Indigenous cultural identity, revealing that, "[h]umour is widely used by Indians to deal with life. Indian gatherings are marked by laughter and jokes, many directed at the horrors of history, and at the continuing impact of colonization, and at the biting knowledge that living as an exile in one's own land necessitates" (p. 67/236). This perceptive device of humour enables Indigenous culture producers to build in nuanced readings that play with the boundaries of sovereignty. For instance, Raheja (2010) discusses the use of humour in the film, *Atanarjuat*, which invites some viewers (Inuktitut speakers) to be included in an inside joke while signalling through linguistic sovereignty, audiences who would be kept out of the loop. It is an extension by which refusal is expanded; in making content unavailable for some, there is symbolic demarcation of boundary occurring in which those who reside within the sphere of linguistic borders gain access to knowledge, while others outside of it must remain content with what has been made accessible to them. In the act of laughing in response to the inside joke, community is re-asserted. Raheja's (2010) analysis signals the practice of multiple realities existing simultaneously. Through

creative storytelling practices, Indigenous filmmakers and artists tackle complex social, political, and economic issues brought on by colonial hijackings of Indigenous lands. Using media to refuse the colonial lies through storytelling productions helps to mobilize Indigenous political and cultural resurgence while re-presencing their individual and community identities. Through a decolonial (Doxtater, 2004; Smith, 1999; Morgensen, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012) lens, the re-imagining of Indigeneity sheds light on new pathways of remembering that challenge the normative discourses of the colonial project and the settler nation-state.

### **2.3 Research Methodologies**

Anishinaabe-kwe activist and curator Wanda Nanibush states (as cited in Simpson, 2010):

[w]hen a person is asked to remember they are also being asked to create. All memory is partly an act of fiction. Our memories are not a storehouse of facts retrievable in a whole state. Instead, memory is vague, not completely retrievable and not always trustworthy. In Indigenous storytelling traditions, memory and history are conflated. The insight is that history is an interpretive event as much memory is a story we construct. Oral history marries performance to culture and identity. This is where art entered the everyday in our ancestral art traditions and why artists today are at the forefront of rethinking our identities and cultures. They make the connection between history-making and performative storytelling to remind, but never telling exactly what to remember (p.172-173).

Taking a cue from Nanibush, in this section, I primarily focus on why storytelling is an important component of decolonizing settler mythologies and engaging in cultural resurgence. My information gathering began with a focus on listening to Indigenous filmmakers who were involved in the making of the selected Minutes. I center the works of Indigenous media makers

who have worked on Heritage Minutes. As Margaret Kovach (2009) highlights, Indigenous and decolonizing research methodologies start with shifting the power dynamics of the center. Rather than looking to how Heritage Minutes carried out metanarratives about the Canadian nation-state, I instead focused on having conversational interviews with Indigenous filmmakers and artists to hear their personal narratives in working with the Heritage Minutes and processes of storytelling as practice. I found textual analysis to be the best fit for analyzing the media texts as it offered me an opportunity to engage with the Minutes, both as a viewer and analyst of the text. In this dual role of viewer and critic, I was able to formulate questions that helped to gather information that went further than a surface reading of the Heritage Minutes. In addition, acknowledging my own assumptions about the Minutes helped to highlight the biases I carried with me into the project. It made me take note of the alter-narratives or rationales used by media makers working with the same visual texts. What I wanted to avoid was re-centering settler narratives in the process of doing this project. For example, Hodgins (2003) in his analysis of *Peacemaker* makes the error of reading the media text through his own set of assumptions without taking into account the intention of the filmmaker or alternate ways that the Minute could have been interpreted. In speaking with filmmakers, I come to understand that these interjections and interventions with the Heritage Minutes are what Simpson & Ladner (2010) call, an Honour Song, “[which] in Indigenous traditions are sung to publicly honour and acknowledge all the beautiful things, all the good, these individuals...have brought to the people...Indigenous and Canada” (p. 6). I elaborate on this further in a future chapter.

As a Communications scholar with a background in Indigenous Studies and Canadian Studies, my personal interest in issues of national identity and cultural productions is both a useful and appropriate lens through which to approach this project. This project has been shaped

through an interdisciplinary lens; I look to storytelling and visual sovereignty and the politics of refusal to map out alternate readings of selected Heritage Minutes. I ground this project through a Foucauldian and decolonial lens, and in doing so, I re-examine my opinions of the state as a rigid structure impermeable to intervention. I read Kovach (2009), Leanne Simpson (2008/2010/2014), and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) to help me make sense of colonial power structures and the pushback and refusals that emerge as counter-point to dominant narratives of memory and nation-making. Kovach (2009) explains that a valuable component of qualitative research methodology is its recognition given to the subjectivity of the researcher. Smith (1999) explains that quantitative research assumes that the researcher is capable of objectivity in conducting research. In the process of doing this thesis, I find myself shifting in reaction to the living words given to me during conversations. I am affected and changed as I speak to filmmakers. In the course of the thesis, you will see me use the filmmakers' first names when referring to their works and our conversations. This is an active demonstration of the relationship building that occurred through the course of the interviews. The walls of formality in research practices are being called to question through this act and in using their first names, demonstrating the ways in which we spoke to one another.

As I navigate this thesis based on my social location as a non-Indigenous researcher, I turn to Indigenous methodological practices as a guiding principle, which refuses the austerity of objective and distant research processes, in which the researcher is located as expert and the subjects are seen as objects to be observed for analysis. Jo-ann Archibald (2008) points out that

[t]he stories I really remembered were ones that I did not set out to consciously try to remember, and they came from both oral and written sources. They were ones with which I instantly and strongly connected on an emotional level first. But I also connected with

them physically, intellectually, spiritually. When I say that I connected with them physically, I mean that I reflected on behaviours and actions of mine that needed changing or that needed to be practised more (p. 93).

She speaks to the relational exchanges that occur in conducting research through a decolonial framework. In seeking out a dialectic relation with research participants, the researcher (I) am invited to a knowledge making process in which I too am held accountable for my actions. As a queer WOC (woman of colour), my understandings of my identity have evolved in the process of working on my thesis. The ways in which I look to my body, my communities, and my inquiries to unmap colonial violence to my own performance of 'self', the hours spent talking to filmmakers, reading Indigenous and decolonial literature, attending community events, have fundamentally demanded re-orientating myself. Not only in understanding the complexities of being an immigrant and a guest on Indigenous lands as Malissa Phung (2011) examines in her work around the complexities of being a settler from non-Eurocentric social locations. But also in looking back to my own mixed ancestries and the impacts of on-going colonial violence that continue to shape my knowledges of community and identity.

As Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith (2008) explain, "interpretive research practices turn the world into a series of performances and representations...creat[ing] the space for critical, collaborative, dialogical work. They bring researchers and their research participants into a shared, critical space, a space where the work of resistance, critique, and empowerment can occur" (p. 5). In doing so, I am called to look past the bounded borders of Western epistemes and see other ways that Indigenous research methods reject the colonial notion of expertise. Kovach (2009) explains "[t]he purpose of decolonization is to create space in everyday life, research, academia and society for an Indigenous perspective without it being neglected, shunted aside,



mocked or dismissed” (p. 85). As Denzin, Smith, and Lincoln (2008) and Leanne Simpson (2014) explain within decolonial research, it is important to situate yourself in the research to demonstrate where you are coming from and what your motivations are. In doing so, they signal to the accountability and the dialectic relationship between the researcher and the people they are working with on building a body of knowledge. As I navigate these conversational spaces, I am confronted by the challenges of how I should conduct myself as I converse with research participants. Kovach (2009) makes clear that,

because qualitative research is interpretive, the stories of both the researcher and the research participants are reflected in the meanings being made...for example the use of a self-reflective narrative research process, in conjunction with a philosophy that honours multiple truths, is congruent with a research approach that seeks *nisitohtamowin* (a Cree word for understanding) or ‘self-in-relation’ (p. 27).

Archibald (2008) speaks to the healing nature of storytelling, that through the sharing of experiences, people are drawn in to make connections and hold accountable, broader systems that shape their everyday. For example, through a re-telling of a traditional Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg story, *Kwezens makes a lovely discovery*, Leanne Simpson (2014) shares the story of a young girl who learns about sweet water. Simpson (2014) talks of Kwezens going to the forest to gather wood on a winter day and coming across a red squirrel sitting atop a tree branch. Based on the time of year (early spring), she notices that the squirrel is not hoarding nuts or building a nest or looking after its young. Instead the squirrel is sitting and nibbling and sucking on a piece of bark. Curious, she mimics the movements of the red squirrel and learns about the sweet water buried in the heart of the tree. She crafts a makeshift container and collects this sweet water to take back to her community. Upon returning she is enthusiastically besieged with questions from

her mother about her newly gained knowledge. In tasting the sweet water, her mother tells her that they will prepare the night's meat with the sweet water to make the most of the sweetness. In heating up the sweet water, they learn that it coagulates to become even sweeter when exposed to heat. The following day, she takes members of her community and attempts to recreate what she had learnt the day before. She encounters difficulty but her mother does not sway in her belief of Kwezens' knowledge. The sweet water eventually trickles out of the tree after multiple failed attempts and the community rejoices and communally makes thickened sweet water (maple syrup). Going forward, every spring the community returns to the special trees that gift them with sweet water.

In reading this story, I am left to look at how previously I understand the role of the expert in the production and maintenance of knowledge within a Western context. In the reading of Kwezens, my understanding of the role of the expert is shifted. In the sweetness of having your truth (your experiences) heard and believed is what colonial discourses of knowledge production erase away violently.

I find Simpson's (2014) retelling story of Kwezens to be illuminating in understanding the ontological differences about expertise and knowledge in Indigenous methodologies and Western research methods. Simpson (2014) demonstrates that this experiential learning would not come to be without Kwezens being out on land and interacting with multiple non-human agents who embody and perform important knowledges. In addition, Simpson (2014) disrupts the location of the authoritative figure that is integral to Western epistemologies. Kwezens' words are seen to be sufficient and trusted. Her memories and experiences are marked as valuable information. Kwezens in relaying information to her mother and her community is accepted as a bearer of knowable truths. This knowledge comes as a gift given to her by the red squirrel and in

sharing this knowledge with her community; we see the emergence of multiple holders of knowledge and expertise. As Kovach (2009) points out this is done quite differently than in the hierarchies within Western research methods that cling to locating the human expert in the center. Through her learned interaction Kwezens is able demonstrate her knowledge of a specific practice while gaining confidence in her ability to convey information (a story). Kwezens is enfolded as a knowledge holder within her community. Smith (1999), Denzin, Smith, and Lincoln (2008), Shawn Wilson (2008), and Kovach (2009) explain that Western research methods look to learning from subjects as a potential site of extraction and violence, a cultivation of information that may leave potential metaphorical dents in a person or community. In counterpoint, Indigenous research paradigms reject knowledge as belonging to any one being but rather that “knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge” (Wilson, 2008, p. 38).

This research is informed by the work described above in that it values the gift of stories, and it seeks to understand how multiple forms of knowledge can be conveyed through and embodied in them. Moreover, as with the story of Kwezens above, I learned to be confident in my own knowledge and embodied learning as a participant and active agent in the storywork in which I engaged.

#### **2.4 The Stories Behind the Interviews**

I was very fortunate that I was able to reach out and arrange interviews with T’ohohoken Michael Doxtater, Shane Belcourt, and Anthony Wilson-Smith, three participants who were involved in the creation of Heritage Minutes. While multiple attempts were made to interview Mohawk filmmaker Jackson 2bears, who remixed Heritage Minutes in his *Heritage Mythologies* as described in subsequent chapters, his busy schedule made it difficult to

coordinate a meeting. This was certainly another element that played a factor in how the project was shaped. While it would have been a tremendous honour to sit with 2bears to hear his personal insights into the development of *Heritage Mythologies*, he has also written extensively on cultural resurgence and Mohawk identity in publicly accessible texts that inform my reading of his work.

My initial introduction to Métis filmmaker Shane Belcourt came about in December 2016 when Belcourt visited Ottawa to present a retrospective screening of his short films at the Galerie SAW Gallery. I approached him post-screening and introduced myself; we spoke informally for a while about his current and future film projects. I also told him about my thesis work and eagerness in speaking with him about his experiences in the making of the two Heritage Minutes released earlier in the year. He was very kind and accommodating as I told him of my work and told me to contact him at a future time. Upon getting Ethics approval from my university's research ethics board for conversational interviews, I reached out to Shane in hopes that we would be able to coordinate a meeting in real time. Serendipitously, Shane was scheduled to speak at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual New Sun Conference at Carleton University on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Shane reached out to me the day he arrived in town, and we were able to meet up in person to sit down for a conversation. What I learned from doing this first conversational interview is that you cannot anticipate a rigid structure, but rather as you get to know research participants, you build bridges of conversations that then segue into a meaningful interaction. Shane and I bonded over our shared experiences of growing up in a mixed heritage household, years spent in Ottawa, and the realities of being raised in cities where the demographics are composed of folks from here, there, and everywhere and how that impacts your sense of identity.

Speaking to Mohawk filmmaker T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater was a series of surprises. Michael is the first Indigenous filmmaker to work on the Heritage Minutes and had a personal connection to my second committee member, Dr. Kahente Horn-Miller. Kahente introduced me to Michael via email correspondence. Michael lives a few hours away from Ottawa and to keep things more flexible due to the nature of arranging meetings when they span geographical distances, we decided on doing a video Skype call although I only recorded the audio of our conversations. Michael's interview began with my sharing of who I was, where I came from, and why I was doing what I was doing. Making my histories and experiences known ensured that walls of formality would not exist between us. I was not expecting to be asked about myself so I stumbled in hesitancy at first, as I had been so sure that I would be the one to ask the questions. Unbeknownst to me, this was not the tone that Michael wanted, and I quickly adapted my style. And in turn, Michael shared with me some wonderful stories along with an impromptu song and guitar performance. It was a lively and engaging interaction that took the interview in directions I could not have anticipated. Michael gave me more richness and context than I could have imagined all woven with a strong thread of mischievousness and humour. I am thankful for our conversation and have promised to remain in touch and to meet in person when he comes to Ottawa.

Arranging the interview with Historica Canada CEO Anthony Wilson-Smith was a bit of a struggle as there had been lapses in communication between Anthony and myself. I had almost given up hope of speaking with Wilson-Smith and began instead communicating with a historian at Historica Canada, Joanne Archibald (not to be confused with the Sto:lo scholar, Jo-Ann Archibald). In sending out lists of questions and requests for resources, Joanne inquired if I was interested in speaking with the CEO of the organization. To which I explained that I had made

initial contact and had received affirmation of an interview with Wilson-Smith but that nothing more had come of it. In a matter of days, Joanne arranged for a telephone interview with Wilson-Smith. The interview had an air of formality in contrast to my two prior interviews with the filmmakers. The language was more structured and fewer deviations occurred over the course of the conversation. Wilson-Smith assured me that with his history as a journalist, he was very aware of the difficulty in keeping track of all the information one hopes to acquire in the span of an interview and was receptive to being reached out to again if any further clarification was needed.

In doing these conversational interviews, I have come to learn about how important it is to resituate yourself as the researcher in relation to your participants. These are folks who have taken time out of their day to speak with you. While specific outcomes may gently guide your work, there has to be pliability and responsiveness to how the participants want to shape the conversation. I have been guided by what Jo-ann Archibald (2008) refers to as the four R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, as I have navigated in the research work but also in the ways that I now engage with community.

I end this chapter with a personal story.

On June 30, 2017, I went to Parliament Hill to give support to my friends who had organized in tandem with the Bawating Water Protectors to perform ceremony on the Hill. To give context, I had major fear of going to #reoccupation<sup>1</sup> (2017), because of previous trauma I had experienced during riots in South-East Asia. I worried about having anxiety attacks and flashbacks since I had not participated in a charged event in

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<sup>1</sup> #reoccupation is part of Idle No More - OFFICIAL- Unsettling Canada 150: A Call to Action, the Bawating Water Protectors from Sault Ste-Marie came to Ottawa to conduct a four-day fasting ceremony from June 28<sup>th</sup> to July 2<sup>nd</sup>. This was an Indigenous youth-led Reoccupation of Parliament Hill. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/events/1923800771235696/> to learn more.

many years. Even as I knew this to be a peaceful ceremony, I knew that that the settler state would not see it as such. On June 30, a friend texted me about taking coffee for the Elders and Protectors and I found myself saying yes without a thought, feeling the pressing need to be there in person and to offer support however I could. I went through the maze of security, had my body checked and all my belongings searched, simply to gain access to the Hill. The number of guns and rifles gained in numbers, as I got closer to the teepee that had been erected on the Hill. My heart beat fast as I took out my phone to move close to the police officers circling us at all times and started recording live stories to broadcast. I watched as organizers, Elders, and community members took the mike to speak words of love, compassion, and hope, urging people to inform themselves about the relationships between the Canadian nation-state and Indigenous communities. To become better informed about celebrating Canada 150. I watched those words make police officers uncomfortable as they rested their hands on their guns, rifles, and batons.

The power of words and storytelling create discomfort to established authorities. There is incredible power to stories and the ways they can create rifts in imagined absolute truths. Despite my heart chasing out of my chest, I felt the solidarity of participants help to calm me and encourage me to step more assuredly on to the tarp and willing to stand firmly against the wall of police officers. More importantly, I have learnt that relationality needs to inform the foundation of doing any research. I would not have been on that Hill had I not had the relationships that have been forged in the process of practicing decoloniality rather than just reading about it in textbooks. Hearing stories from my friends, my peers, and Elders in the community, about their lived experiences gave life to re-examining my own positionality.

### 3 Chapter: Exorcising Colonial Representations in Jackson 2bears' *Heritage Mythologies*

In June 2010, Jackson 2bears, a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) multimedia installation/performance artist and cultural theorist from Six Nations prepared and presented his Live Cinema/Scratch Video performance piece, *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day*<sup>2</sup>, at the Galerie SAW Gallery in Ottawa, Ontario. Throughout the chapter, I refer to the media text as *Heritage Mythologies* rather than by its full performance title, *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day*. The live installation was part of Crossings/Traversées: A Performance Art Exchange, an international artist residency and exchange project between Canada and Ireland, curated by Dr. Christine Conley. 2bears describes himself as "...an active researcher in the areas of video arts, digital media, and extended media, with a focus on embodied interaction and live audio/visual (Live Cinema) performance. [With] [h]is recent works focus[sing] on how the changing impacts of technology have a profound effect on contemporary politics, culture and society, in particular with regard to First Nations communities" (J2B, n.d.). It takes twelve minutes and ten seconds to watch the full recording of his performance at SAW available on three accessible sources online (2bears' professional website and two slightly different recordings of the same event uploaded by 2bears through Vimeo).

I must note that there is great disservice in trying to capture the auditory and sensory aspects of the performance piece since the written word cannot adequately reproduce the immersive elements. Instead I urge you to set this aside briefly and head over to view the online recording. While I provide an in-depth description and analysis of the video recording, it is hard to replicate the *mélange* of sounds, sights, and sensations that viewing the piece would offer you. In his refusal of settler nationalistic narratives and subsequent response to Heritage Minutes,

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<sup>2</sup> View *Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day* <https://vimeo.com/61661549>



2bears' performance piece demonstrates a visual narrative of the disconnect that exists within settler constructions of Indigeneity. Through this critical interrogation of settler narratives, he explores the disjointedness of existing in a space where on-going colonial acts of violence on language, culture, and land, continue to dispossess and alienate Indigenous peoples. 2bears' visual splices of images from government archives, mainstream media coverage, Heritage Minutes, clips from music videos and musical performances, counter the tidy narratives of Canada, the nation-state. In doing so, he rejects the rendering of history created through the settler lens. As Audra Simpson (2014) puts it, the act of refusal of settler nationalistic narratives and "asserting *actual* histories" (p. 23, original italics) not only facilitates the production of agency and autonomy of the individual but also acts as "contesting systems of legitimacy and acknowledgement" (p. 22). She iterates that refusal becomes a platform to demonstrate "Indigeneity and couple it with sovereignty" (p. 23).

*Heritage Mythologies* is a visceral demonstration of a form of visual sovereignty that I explore in this thesis as an expansion on Simpson's (2014) discussion of the act of refusal. I explicitly examine the media text to understand ways 2bears uses remixing and re-appropriating techniques to demonstrate an alter-narrative of nationalistic myths that emerge in Heritage Minutes. I look to *Heritage Mythologies* to offer analysis in two ways: (i) re-presenting and disrupting the linearity of settler narratives while employing subversion and humour and (ii) exploring the roles of flags and depictions of multiple nationhoods to centralize conversations about on-going land dispossession.

### **3.1 Getting Familiar with Heritage Mythologies**

In his 2010 performance, 2bears stands in the corner of the gallery space, surrounded by his laptop screens and his scratching equipment, his face gazing down at his table, running beats

and matching the hip hop rhythms to the changing images and videos on the large screen in the background. His face in shadows, he never looks at the audience, who is gazing up at him and the ever-changing series of visuals behind him while bombarded with sounds of hip-hop and electronica. Instead 2bears (2012/2014) is fully immersed in interacting with the spirits he is calling out as discussed further below. 2bears (2014) explains, that by utilizing “existing technology...[he] created a new multi- media performance interface where...[he] could remix and manipulate digital audio/video files in synchronization using traditional vinyl, two Technics 1200 turntables, and a DJ mixer with MIDI control” (p. 22). 2bears (2012/2014) does not consider technology to be inanimate and instead is reflexive about his relationship with it. He (2012/2014) explains that his dedication in playing with digital technologies comes from a sacred place. 2bears elucidates,

[w]hat I wanted was to perform a live audio/video narrative that would speak of resistance; to tell a live cinema story that would shore up against all the occidental simulations of our people in the mediascape and the colonial appropriations, constructions, and misrepresentations of First Nations identity. I wanted to create artworks in which I could publicly re-perform these injustices, and at the same time deconstruct and mash up these virulent simulations of our peoples that had been sustained within the lexicon of various media archives (p. 23).

*Heritage Mythologies* is one of many audio-visual remix projects carried out by 2bears that looks to technology as a site of hauntology. 2bears (2012) references Derrida in explaining, “...that hauntology is itself an aspect of ontology in that it represents the uncertainty of *being* (“*To be or not to be*”). In this context a specter is conceived of as the unacknowledged, undisclosed, invisible ‘thing’ that silently motivates or haunts the living present” (p. 37). 2bears

clarifies that his particular adaptation of remix in media practices are linked to a broader understanding of relationality. For instance, 2bears (2014) proposes

a speculative theorization, or better, a *spectral* theorization that is rooted in our traditions as Onkwehonwe... a *remix theory*, one that says if we consider technology as something alive and filled with spirit (as something that for us that has a “psychic significance,” and something with which we are interconnected in a “circle of relations”), then these technologies can equally possess spirits that manifest themselves in the form of ghosts and phantasms — *spectral apparitions whose will, it seems, is to haunt the lives of the living* (p. 19, original italics).

Through his use of technology, 2bears exorcises colonial renderings of Indigeneity, stating “I felt haunted by...images of the “Indian” (the noble savage, the bloodthirsty warrior, the squaw, and the Indian princess) and that for me what I was “calling” (convoking, incanting, conjuring) were no ordinary spirits, but those *spirit-simulations* that ghost our presence(s) as Onkwehonwe, those apparitions and spectres that have haunted our people for so many generations” (p. 24). These images shaped general understandings of Indigeneity on multiple levels, cultivating not only an understanding of Indigeneity for non-Indigenous audiences but it also became a referent for Indigenous individuals (Pearson & Knabe, 2015). Thus, in calling out colonial representations of Indigeneity, 2bears communicates “through electronic mediums and new media technologies” (p. 26) to initiate conversations with spirits and spectres to vanquish the ghosts of colonial underpinnings of Indigeneity while weaving together the past, present, and future, in an act of embodied demonstration of Indigeneity and sovereignty. In demonstrating his understanding of Derrida’s conceptualization of hauntology, 2bears (2012/2014) enacts out the state of uncertainty

and fluidity through which Indigeneity can be presented without being assigned to a fixed visual signifier.

### 3.2 Heritage Mythologies – O Kanata Day

In the section below, I take the time to do a detailed analysis of the audio-video installation, as the only descriptions of the project are available as short blurbs on 2bear<sup>3</sup> professional website and a news article written about the performance piece by Martineau<sup>3</sup> in 2015. In this moment is where I mourn that I could not have a conversation with the artist about his work since it would offer a much richer explanation for what I will be attempting. I refer to images, music, and clips used in the performance piece to further expand on the criticisms and implications of 2bears' work that help to provide a richer understanding of embodied storytelling that calls on the disembodied or spiritual. Throughout this section, while I refer to the reading I had and my impressions of how the performance piece is constructed to evoke particular feelings, sensations, and sensory experiences, this reading comes from my own perspective, and is far from universal. I use the pronoun "you" to explain how my particular understanding might be generalized more widely although I understand readings will inevitably vary based on subject position.

*Heritage Mythologies* starts off with a black and white rendering of the Canadian flag with the sound of fire crackling in the background, the flag waving languidly with a background showing geographic veins of land markers visible in maps peeking in through the flag. There is an auditory and visual warning: "The following program contains mature subject matter. Viewer discretion is advised." We start to see red and black swirls on the screen and the sound of a reeling of photo wheel, leading to an auditory countdown accompanied by series of overlapping

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<sup>3</sup> For access to the full article, access <http://rpm.fm/news/o-kanata-day-jackson-2bears-heritage-mythologies/>

images, one second, appearing hazy, the next, a face with the emphasis on a set of eyes looking out, and fading to a still image in greyscale and red text. The still image's background eerily resembling a Group of Seven<sup>4</sup> painting with the bold text title, *Heritage Mythologies*, directed by Jackson 2bears. There is electronic music accompanying the countdown. And then the video imagery sequence begins. For those who have previously seen the Heritage Minute on Jacques Cartier, there is immediate recognition of a familiar visual text. 2bears' *Heritage Mythologies* is an extended response to the presentation of settler and Indigenous relationships in Canada within Heritage Minutes made prior to 2010 by Historica Canada.

As I mentioned above, the first half of the installation isolates the narrative provided through the Heritage Minute on French navigator and explorer, Jacques Cartier. The Minute attempts to reproduce the initial point of contact between Cartier and “Iroquois-speaking Aboriginal people from the region of Québec, who had come to the area for their annual seal hunt” (Allaire, 2015, para 3). Historica Canada states that the Minute offers “[o]ne explanation of how Canada may have got its name during Jacques Cartier's first meeting with Iroquoian peoples” in 1534 (Historica Canada, 2017). 2bears uses the footage from the Cartier Minute depicting Cartier along with his crew and a priest in conversation with an Elder or Chief of a nearby community. He draws attention to the miscommunication that occurs as result of linguistic differences. For example, 2bears' pauses on the moment in which the priest interjects the conversation taking place between Cartier and the Chief about the word “kanata”. As the Elder gestures to a cluster of built structures in the background, he uses the word “kanata”, to which the settler party attempts to decipher what is being said. The priest accompanying the

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<sup>4</sup> To learn more about the Group of Seven, go to <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/group-of-seven/>. The Canadian Encyclopedia is an educational online resource published for free by Historica Canada.

expedition team provides interpretation services, translating the word “kanata” as a name of a nation.

Elder or Chief [speaking Iroquoian]: Come to the village, we talk.

Cartier: What’s he saying, Father?

Priest: Commander Cartier, he is saying... this nation’s name is Ca-Nada.

Elder or Chief: Ka-Nata...

Cartier: Ah, Ca-Na-Da.

Man in Cartier’s entourage: Beg your pardon, Sir, but the word he used, I think it really means those houses down there.

Priest: No, no, believe me, I know the word, it means nation, and Canada is its name.

(Jacques Cartier Heritage Minute, 1991).

This scene references the obstinacy of settler officials who dismiss the opportunity to learn the proper names employed by the original inhabitants of the land. However, there is also a deliberate mocking of the settler explorers who are so sure of the knowledge that they hold, despite being the outsiders in the dynamics of gaining an introduction. While this impression of mocking the settler explorers could also be read as poking fun at Cartier and his entourage in the original Minute, it is further extended by 2bears to demonstrate the lack of active listening or understanding that exists in settler and Indigenous relationships.

2bears uses visual interrupters to create discomfort in seeing the image through the act of splicing. Images visually overlap, skip, repeat, and jump erratically causing discomfort to your eyes and pressure in trying to keep your eyes on the screen. In this decision to create physical discomfort, 2bears evokes the audience to be hyperaware of their environment, body, and ability to retain and absorb information. This over-exposure to information and sensory effects, offers

insight to the very real ways that Indigenous communities face on-going colonial violences, asking the audience to understand the jarring realities of growing up and living in a settler society where the on-going violence of settler colonialism creates a pall of over your every interaction (Simpson, 2008; Simpson, 2014). The systemic biases are a daily reality, and there is no opting-out from micro and macro violence in your everyday life. Violent systemic biases and practices threaten you and yours by making it difficult to practice and sustain your languages and cultures (Simpson, 2008; Simpson, 2014; 2bears 2012/2014).

From the splices, 2bears segues into historical still sketches that evoke war, showing military figures holding weaponry, and alternating still images with a video clip of an Indigenous male drawing lines on his face with paint, all the while in the background, you hear the sounds of cannons being shot, the beat of military drums urging on forces to go forward. Soon after, there are images of protests from the 2010 Olympics, the Unity Flag, and Indigenous community members engaging with the settler nation-state in acts of resistance. The dialogue that 2bears awakens through the juxtaposition of settler acts of violence in the name of colony-building in contrast to Indigenous communities, creates a temporal and spatial shift in how Indigeneity is reframed in the context of settler nation-making. He relentlessly asks the audience to question their past, present, and future interactions with the settler nation-state. 2Bears re-appropriates mainstream news clips, images, and pop cultural reference points to remix and reassert Indigenous presence as counter-narratives in the telling of the story of Canada. Through his visual interjections, the audience sees the layers of realities coming into play that do not exist in silos of isolation. In his act of mashing up existing images, he facilitates a more contrapuntal reading of the media landscape that without a critical lens offers a nationalistic and innocent telling of Canada.

2bears veers the viewer to softer music provided through the sound of a woodwind instrument, in a series of images; we see a snapshot of a cross on a chain, and a map drawn out on animal hide showing the borders and boundaries of settler nation-making, calling it Canada. In this section, 2bears starts to bring in visual markers i.e. crosses that reference the Church and religious practices that policed Indigenous bodies through the project of assimilation. The music changes and picks up a faster beat, one that starts to resemble the Canadian national anthem, and we start to see the peaks of Parliament Hill under the slightly transparent projection of the maple leaf but turned upside down. 2bears rejects the Canadian settler state through this act of flipping the flag upside down. Through his act, he not only rejects Canadian nationalism but also points out that the Canadian nation-state is in trouble with Indigenous communities. Eventually we see the markers of Upper and Lower Canada in the veins and outlines in the map floating through the colours of the red and white maple leaf. The music eases off a bit but then a crescendo builds up and we hear Classified (an East Coast rap artist) rapping the settler anthem “Oh Canada” with a flurry of images showing crowds of settler citizens gathered in taking part on Canada Day festivities. This boisterous partaking in Canada Day, obscures the fact that what is being celebrated are settler acts of genocide (Alfred, 2009; Truth & Reconciliation, 2015). People are shown waving mini Canadian flags and joining together to embrace the day of commemoration. 2bears splices through the Canada celebration images with a series of counter images depicting folks holding up signs protesting the 2010 Olympics and fists up while holding up the Unity Flag. All the while, you hear Classified singing the lyrics “1-2, 1-2, Mic check, 1-2, 1-2, Yeah, (O Canada)” juxtaposed by images of more protest by Indigenous communities holding up signs like “This Land is Our Land”, and “Native Resistance”.



Segueing to mainstream coverage of individuals walking up to lines of settler police agents, 2bears' starts to gently create an overlap of a secondary image over the Canadian maple, we start to see the prominence of the Mohawk Unity Flag along with news media coverage from Caledonia in 2006. He shifts over to showing segments from *Peacemaker*, a Heritage Minute about the birth of the Iroquois Confederacy discussed further in the next chapter, and the scene comes to a close briefly with a dark screen.

The viewer is then called into the next set of acts beginning with a song accompanied by a strong drumbeat along with images of people taking part in ceremony. We hear the words, "they gave us death". And the drumbeat gets faster, the images of folks in ceremony flashes faster, your eyes not sure which one to linger on the longest, and then you hear the settler anthem once again but this time, sung by Cape Breton singer-songwriter, Rita MacNeil. MacNeil is a Canadian music icon, considered to be Cape Breton's "first lady of song" (The Canadian Press, 2013). 2bears uses his scratching tools to isolate particular sections of the national anthem while MacNeil's face is superimposed over the Canadian flag, tripping with repetition on the sequence she sings with patriotic zeal, "Oh Canada, our home and native, native, native...native...native...". In this emphasis, 2bears provides a commentary on the irony of settler icons using references of narratives of native-ness.

As the beat increases, 2bears cuts over to scenes of mainstream news images of white men garbed in military attires, agents for the settler nation-state, holding rifles and battering rams at Kanehsatake<sup>5</sup> contrasted with images of Mohawk warriors with their lower face covered with a handkerchief and holding a rifle. In addition, he shows media images and recordings of

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<sup>5</sup> To learn more about Kanehsatake or the Oka Crisis which is often what is referred to as in mainstream media, watch Alanis Obomsawin's documentary, *Kanehsatake: 270 years of resistance* available for viewing through the National Film Board's website at [http://workforall.nfb.ca/film/kanehsatake\\_270\\_years\\_of\\_resistance/](http://workforall.nfb.ca/film/kanehsatake_270_years_of_resistance/)

residents of Quebec burning effigies of Mohawks hanging on a streetlight post amidst large groups of people. 2bears shows the dissonance that exists between the narratives of peaceful iterations of Indigenous and Canadian interactions with the actual realities of Indigenous communities. The screen shifts over to clips of community members engaging in drumming, an image of a wampum belt outlining treaty relations, media coverage with headlines like “Native Crisis”, clips from cars trying to cross the barricade at Kanehsatake, hearing the echoes of voice recordings “We’ll take your scalps” cut with scenes of people carrying the Six Nations flag, and the electronic beats pick up tempo until you see a blurred end of transmission, primary colours screen. End scene.

The installation picks up for a third time with an announcement of “This is a test of the emergency broadcast system. We interrupt our program with this important message”. Seguing to an advertisement for Lakota topical ointment, Molson Canadian’s “I am Canadian” beer campaigns, and a message letting the viewer know that the show will resume to regular programming. Beginning with an image of a residential school building, this segment explores the ethnocide of Indigenous communities and we hear “they came and they took every child” while pictures spill across the screen of children, families, seas of faces of young people inside classrooms and dormitories. As I did not have an opportunity to speak with Jackson 2bears, I turned to seeking out mainstream news coverage to match the photos used in 2bears’ work i.e. *The Toronto Star* (2015, June 2) photo showing “Swampy Cree children prayed several times a day in 1950s” which appears in the video installation. They are not pictures of Indigenous peoples taking pictures of themselves but rather images taken of young children during their times in residential schools by settler officials. Collocated over the archival images, you hear and see clips of then Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the late Jack Layton, New Democratic

Party leader in 2008, reading aloud from past documents and repeating apologies, during the offering of the Official Apology.

2bears provides a complex reading of the archival images being used by making it impossible to ignore the devastations imposed on Indigenous youth and young peoples. He provides a narrative of the settler employment of assimilation tactics by placing settler government officials speaking the very words that provided the rationale to legitimize genocide. You hear Harper and Layton's voices in the background.

“Kill the Indian in the child (Harper),

We are sorry (Layton),

We are sorry and we apologize for having done this (Harper), and

Not equally human (Layton)”.

Easing into the end of transmission messages with a flashing of Radio-Canada signage, you hear, “we have come to the end of another day of quality television. We hope you found our mix of local, regional, and national programming entertaining and informative. Join us again tomorrow for another day of good television. For now, good night.” The scene concludes with a series of images of protest signs from footage of actual confrontations between Indigenous individuals and communities and the settler state. Some of the signs include, “Oh Canada Your Home on Native Land”, “No justice on stolen land”, “This is Native land”, and “No Olympics on Stolen Native Land”. In addition, there are photographs of Indigenous community members engaging in protest through drumbeating, a graffiti tag with the message “You are on Indian Land”. You see a banner at a march stating, “Why celebrate a 100 years of theft?”. You then see a scene where the Mohawk Unity Flag takes central space, ending on a last note of a red and black depiction of the Canadian maple leaf encrusted flag. Playing alongside the visual collage is the Canadian

version of the Woody Guthrie's 1940 song *This Land is Your Land*<sup>6</sup> by folk band, The Travellers. Ending on the lyrics, "this land was made for you and me".

As mentioned earlier, the video of the installation of the actual performance in 2010 warrants a viewing in order to make better sense of the words I use to describe the piece. One of the things to keep in mind as you watch the piece is that while all the images and videos are being screened, one version of the recording of the performance also captures an audience that looks on, spellbound by 2bears' work, some in reverence, others caught in self-reflection, and for a few, this is a good time to dance to the beats.

As you read the description of the installation, you most likely felt an overwhelming sense of information; that was a deliberate act on my part to demonstrate the immense level of sensory overload that the performance evokes. From the cacophony of sounds, to the visual pressures in the distorted and fast-paced images, to the stories being imparted through the entirety of the piece, you feel but a small slice of systems being imposed onto you. 2bears articulates the alienating and overwhelming nature of living within systems where your very existence is continuously overshadowed by colonial structures. His immersive performance installation not only takes over your senses, it also makes you question your social location, your physical environment, relationality, and your own understandings of community.

In this lived performance, 2bears makes room for a convergence of temporal and spatial spaces. He marries past actions and histories along with present lived realities and contemporary struggles between Indigenous communities and the settler nation-state of Canada. In addition to this already elaborate meaning-making, he provides a future forecast of Indigenous occupation of spaces, literal and metaphorical, placing his own body within the installation as a stark reminder

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<sup>6</sup> For the full version of the song lyrics, visit [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/foundation\\_gr5/blms/5-2-3g.pdf](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/foundation_gr5/blms/5-2-3g.pdf)

that the settler nation-building did not succeed in its project of genocide. Through his productions of sounds, sights, and observations, 2bears interrupts temporal and spatial relations, demonstrating the ambivalence and complexities of Indigenous identities, affiliations, and associations. He provides a more complex depiction of Indigenous realities that challenges the settler practices of mythologizing the role of Indigenous peoples in the building of the Canadian nation-state.

### **3.3 Representations & Storytelling through Subversion & Indigenous Humour**

Taunton (2013) states that "...the performance of storytelling is a process that can be employed in order to complicate, interrupt, and intervene in colonial histories, to re-establish self-determined representations, and to provoke political resistance" (p. 130). 2bears (2012) explains that visual and digital media landscapes offer an opportunity to shape how we view others and ourselves. Indigenous media practitioners use music, film, podcasting, and art to reclaim their individual and communal identities: they use media to disrupt the colonial lies told about them as savage, primitive, and vanished. In essence, 2bears' production of *Heritage Mythologies* lays bare the lies told in order to assist the settler nation-building agenda. It also illustrates how footage from mainstream news follows a pattern of constructing Indigenous protestors as unreasonable (Anderson & Robertson, 2011) and a broader cultural catalogue can be subverted in the service of a visual counter-narrative. Similarly, Rader (2003) posits that Indigenous artistic production e.g. art, film, literature act as ways to control identity and agency amid the pressures of colonizing forces to assimilate. Rader (2003) argues,

inventive use of the lyric poem, the collage, and the movie [by Indigenous practitioners] transforms both public and private discourses and allows them not only to counter prevailing establishments of identity but also to tell who they are in their own languages.

They resist cultural erasure by attacking those armaments designed to annihilate their ability to speak themselves into being. Yet, through art they recoup the performative energies of enactment, ritual, and oration and engage both Anglo and Native discourse... For these artists, forging their own artistic language is not simply an aesthetic it is also ethics. Ultimately, their work is both a measure and a means of Indian sovereignty (p. 180).

It also signals to the real ways that problematic representational practices can be challenged, allowing alter-narratives to override the existing landscape. In 2bears' response to the Heritage Minutes, he layers his carefully grafted installation to provide a platform for Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers to see shifts occur right in front of their eyes. For example, as 2bears, stands in front of the audience, he is a representative of his Mohawk community and his heritage. His body becomes part of the conversation that challenges the settler narratives in the erasure of contemporary Indigenous bodies. The various levels of audience comprehension are significant phenomena. In viewing the recording of the performance which includes the audience watching 2bears spin and mix and perform, 2bears calls out non-Indigenous members through his work. The audience members who are shown watching the installation with grave attention become explicitly aware that their bodies are occupying Indigenous lands as they are in the gallery space. Conversely, Indigenous audience members become part of the public exorcism that 2bears is performing to cast out the colonial representations of Indigeneity.

2bears becomes a vessel of past, present, and future, converging together through his very existence, which he then magnifies through his interactions with the built environment. He uses the familiarity of the Heritage Minute on Jacques Cartier to signal to a larger discourse around settler conquest and dispossession of Indigenous lands. In the installation, 2bears offers the

audience a glimpse, which is quite timely in the post-2008 era of official apologies and the pushback from communities in the West Coast against the 2010 Olympics in British Columbia. This signals a state of contradiction between settler languages of reconciliation while continuing to engage with on-going dispossession of Indigenous lands and breaking of treaties.

2bears weaves together a story that refuses the sanitized linearity of settler narratives. Instead, he offers an alter-narrative that bridges the threads of past, present, and future, by creating this alternate temporal and spatial relationship between him, the audience members, and the visual and auditory storytelling. To this end, he questions the emphasis placed on certain acceptable forms of Indigeneity, where Indigenous bodies are made visible, for example, the Chief in the Lakota topical ointment advertisement. On the other hand, mainstream news coverage of Kanehsatake had headlines that emphasized “Native Crisis” and depicted images of Mohawk men but left out of the broadcast, the women and children who played large roles at Kanehsatake (Simpson, 2008). Furthermore, as Barnsley (2000) explains, the mainstream coverage only focused on the conflict that arose in Kanehsatake but refrained from providing historical context to the general watching audience. Jeffrey Thomas in Phillips (2012) observes that “[representations of Indigenous peoples exist] in paradoxical conditions of *invisibility* and *hypervisibility*...” (p. 357). Thomas’ (Phillips, 2012) indicates that while there is some form of visual recognition of Indigenous populations within the nation-state, it does not serve the interests or needs of the Indigenous individuals and communities. From consumer goods to films to photographs to sites of public memory, depictions of Indigenous bodies exist in extreme homogenous stereotypes, placed in the distant past, distorting relationships to time and space, where the complexities at the individual and community level are discounted and cast out of consideration in contemporary settings. Raheja (2010) draws attention to “...contemporary

Native American filmmakers and artists [who] are in the process of revising understandings of the figure of the Hollywood Indian in ways that provide a more nuanced and vibrant [reading of the homogenous tropes that have played out on celluloid]...” (p. 53). 2bears further demonstrates that the on-going dissent from Indigenous communities comes from particular histories, including colonial projects of genocide and ethnocide through the establishment of residential schools, spaces that created linguistic and cultural devastation in ways that continue to be felt to this day.

In speaking about the spiritual nature of technologies and the ways in which public forums of exorcism are demanded in order to make visible the lingering ghosts of colonial violence, 2bears (2012/2014) demonstrates an embodied reaction to settler narratives about Indigeneity. He exposes the simplified and reductive ways of understanding how Indigenous identities are performed within settler rhetoric. Mackey (2002) points out that in the Canadian context, the directing of public memory, upholding the values of a settler society, relies on the drawing in/pushing out of Indigenous bodies and communities in order to bolster Canadian nationalism. This means that the Canadian nation-state relies on the management of Indigenous identity/ies in order to cultivate a storyline that serves the best interests of the settler state relying on Indigeneity as being amorphous and homogenous within the Canadian national discourse.

2bears produces, through the splicing of imagery, a refusal of the colonial myth-making that explains away settler acts of violence through enveloping it in a series of nostalgia and reciprocal relationships (Lester, 2002; Hodgins, 2003; and Rukszto, 2005). For example, he shows vivid recordings of the burning of effigies of Mohawks during Kanehsatake, the militant reaction from the settler nation-state in Caledonia and Kanehsatake, and the dismissal of sacred spaces that are central to the Kanien’kehá:ka. Horn-Miller (2010) and Radar (2003) explore the



intersection of identity and visual representations and the ways they become a powerful means to dispel dominant narratives around bodies, communities, and spaces. The relationship between what we are seeing vs. the meanings that are imbued into the object, people etc. are an arbitrary dialectic relationship that is exposed only when meaning is subverted. 2bears does this particularly effectively when he juxtaposes the faces of Stephen Harper and Jack Layton over the images of residential schools, classroom spaces full of young people, and the series of faces who are kneeling down by their bedsides, policed by religious figures. To take complex social, political, and economic issues, and migrate them to a fixed image or series of images that tell a story, one that demonstrates the inequalities of dominant ways of understanding a specific issue or event, signals to the importance of using artistic interventions to signify inequalities, tear apart what dominant representations denote (the literal meanings that are derived from the images), and imbue new connotations (feelings/values associated with the images) to help re-establish a new baseline of meanings. These interjections act as breaches in the myths of harmonious relations between the settler project of colonization and the numerous Indigenous communities that the settler nation-state swallows up in its nation-building projects.

But 2bears does not simply rely on solemnness to offer commentary and assertion. Instead he utilizes humour as a mechanism to push back and gain space. Ute Lischke in Pearson & Knabe (2015) points out, “Indigenous humour is a reaction against a world that does not believe that Indigenous lives matter. It stems from a deep desire for survival” (p. 244). 2bears incorporates humour through the entirety of the piece, from the Heritage Minute scene where there is arrogance and miscommunication that leads to misinterpreting the word Kanata, to playing with the chords of the settler anthem and freezing it on MacNeil’s “Oh Canada, our home and native, native, native...native...native...”. 2bears makes apparent the absurdity of

claiming land as settler spaces while consistently relying on Indigenous bodies to ensure legitimacy. He also plays on settler fears of Indigenous bodies and pokes fun at it by explicitly orating “We’ll take your scalps” cut with scenes of people carrying the Six Nations flag. In these micro acts of dark humour emerge a place for pain, sorrow, and struggle to be articulated. Drew Hayden Taylor in Ute Lischke (2015) explains that,

Native humour comes from five hundred years of colonization, of oppression, of being kept prisoners in our own country. With legalized attacks on our culture, our identities and even our religion, often the only way left for Native people to respond to the cruel realities of Fourth World existence was in humour. Humour kept us sane. It gave us power. It gave us privacy (p. 69).

Similarly, Raheja (2010) discusses the importance of insider/outsider jokes helping to re-establish acts of sovereignty, allowing individuals to connect through a shared understanding of an in-joke while selecting to cast out others. This sense of humour extends even further when you take into account audience participation. For example, during the presentation of *Heritage Mythologies* at Galerie SAW Gallery, while many were focused on reflecting on the content of the performance piece, there were a few participants in the crowd who connected more with the auditory aspects of the installation, the hip-hop and electronica infused through the piece, paying scant attention to the screen. When you watch the video recording from June 2010, it is hard to not laugh out loud at the participants who seem to miss the point as they dance badly while also being captivated by the gravity of what they are witnessing in the installation. As with his use of humour, 2Bears’ use of symbolism provides visual cues to addressing nuances to understanding the complexities of community; in the next section, I further elaborate on his act of contesting

monolithic Canadian national identity by facilitating mutually existing communities as a result of his performance as intervention.

### 3.4 Community, Nationhoods, & Flags

2bears' critical treatment of community emerges in a series of ways. He articulates the layers of community that exist within a settler and Indigenous dynamic, the emergence of a pan-Indigenous identity, and a Mohawk national identity. This means that there are three levels of interactions that he is signaling to through the piece. He speaks to a settler audience by signaling to events like Canada Day that may resonate for some i.e. showing imagery of merriment and collective settler national identity emerging through shared partaking of Canada Day and singing the settler anthem. To this end, he overlaps the Canada Day clips with rapper Classified's rendition of Oh Canada. As Anderson (2006) explains the unisonance in uttering national anthems "no matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity..." (p. 145). He explains that it tugs on invisible chords of solidarity with nothing more than the figments of shared action coming together for a common cause. In this case, celebrating the settler nation-state with markers of Canadian national symbolic sovereignty, the Canadian flag.

Horn-Miller (2010) explains that while flags were emblematic agents for sovereignty emerging from European traditions, they have become a site of political and cultural meaning-making that speaks to the continuous abilities of adaptation and evolution that is central to Indigenous survivance. Vizenor (1999) emphasizes the need for "...a new tribal presence in the very ruins of [the] representations of in-vented Indians" (p. 3). 2bears (2014) shares, "I wanted to make a work that stood against what he [Vizenor] called the 'colonized *Indian* Other' and show the ways in which our people had been displaced, disappeared, and eclipsed by infectious codes

of colonial mythmaking” (p. 23). In the co-opting of the symbolic values associated with flags and associating it with representations of Indigenous nationhoods, 2bears offers an opportunity to create dialogue about governance structures that exist outside the settler rhetoric of Indigeneity. Horn-Miller (2010) draws on the work of Homi Bhabha to further explore how “contact, mimicry, and hybridization” (p. 104) function as a fluctuating series of mechanisms to hail members into community. In mimicking settler allegiance to flags, Indigenous re-interpretations of the flag i.e. Mohawk Unity Flag, dialogue is activated that demands a nation-to-nation dynamic. As 2bears utilizes imagery from settler celebrations i.e. Canada Day, he merges into the screen a moment where the Canadian flag is facing the Mohawk Unity Flag. This ostensibly could be read as a declaration of Mohawk nationalism and a refusal of Canadian national identity. Consequently, it is also a visual comment on tenets of the Two Row Wampum Belt, the promise that was made for two nations to co-exist without interference.

2bears offers a two-part reading in understanding Indigeneity. By relying on images that show protests from Caledonia, the 2010 Olympics, and graffiti tags with references to “Oh Canada Your Home on Native Land”, “No justice on stolen land”, “This is Native land”, and “This is Indian Land”, 2bears imparts to the audience two levels of Indigeneity. For one in which there is a pan-Indigenous identity that faces the settler nation-state. It also refers to specific events such as Kanehsatake and images of the Six Nations flag, which directs the audience to think specifically of Mohawk relations with settler governance structures. He references the Heritage Minute of the *Peacemaker* and the birth of the Iroquois Confederacy as a drawing together of the Haudenosaunee, to work together in community relations and to live in treaty. This reference not only indicates the existence of Iroquois governance structures that pre-existed prior to contact with European governance structures but also signals to the coming together of

Indigenous communities to stand against the settler power structures. In a short window of time, 2bears articulates that Indigenous communities are not a homogenous group of peoples but instead hails a more complex reading of the various relationships between multiple communities: Indigenous nation to fellow Indigenous nation, settler nation to Aboriginal communities, Indigenous individuals to Indigenous individuals, and Indigenous individual to their own community. As I use the word nation in describing the relationships between Indigenous communities, I have to problematize my use of the nation since this is a pretty modern concept. As Simpson (2014) elucidates, there is a need to be critical of the idea of the nation as a practice. However, Horn-Miller (2010) elaborates through Homi Bhabha's work, there is strategy at play in co-opting the practices or ideologies of the settler structures, to re-organize the dispersing of power. Thus, in adopting and adapting the concept of nation, Indigenous nations bring about ways of talking with a settler nation-state, in a language that is clearly understood by the other party.

In 2bears' work in *Heritage Mythologies*, alter-narratives of nationhoods emerge through the iconography of the Canadian national flag juxtaposed against the Mohawk Unity Flag and Six Nations. He makes clear that nationhood is a claim to space: the unapologetic assertion that Indigenous sovereignty and governance exists in parallel to settler structures and existed prior to contact with settler societies. The representations of the flags act as a visual wampum belt, which upon collision, will not fade into the background or sink but rather rise up to face the challenges brought on through the interaction. It is not shy. It is not hesitant. 2bears uses art, visuals, and music with images of protests that contradict the myth of peaceful settler-Indigenous relations and point out the enormous gaps that Heritage Minutes endeavor to smooth over and over again. 2bears illustrates that although the Minutes are naturalized as a Canadian staple, they are not an

innocuous and innocent medium, but haunted by the violence that is settler-colonial nation building.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I look to Jackson 2bears' multimedia audio and visual performance installation, *Heritage Mythologies*. His work demonstrates how alter-narratives of storytelling can emerge that do not have to rely on being distributed through a state-sponsored settler distribution channel while concurrently making commentary about the tropes that exist in settler media texts. 2bears explicitly uses the aesthetic of Heritage Minutes along with clips from Heritage Minutes made about Indigenous peoples to demonstrate the disconnect that exists between settler representations of Indigeneity and the real life counterparts. In this performance installation space, he performs a vanquishing of colonial demons that haunt the visual landscape and give shape to how Indigeneity is portrayed. He re-appropriates archival images, mainstream media coverage of settler and Indigenous interactions, and filmography of Indigeneity in Heritage Minutes to show viewers contradictory narratives that co-exist in temporal and spatial realms. He articulates through music, video clips, and photographic images inconsistencies between settler myths of the nation-state versus Indigenous understandings; this includes calling out and challenging the on-going land dispossession that Indigenous communities continue to face that is rarely on the mainstream media landscape unless it blatantly interrupts or inconveniences the settler nation-building projects.

#### 4 Chapter: Flipping the Script: Heritage Minutes

So I felt like an outsider, and then you become aware of the outsidersness authoring Indigenous stories you know? And worldviews and perspectives that you thought were just, “oh that's just me”, you realize ooh that’s me on a certain side of the line. You know, and you become aware of that as you get older when you start critically thinking about it. So yeah and then that was how I thought about the Minutes. It’s a great tool for people to celebrate this thing. Oh I’m going to celebrate being Canadian, and that was fine, but what would it mean to celebrate other facets of Canada? (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017)

In the more than two decades that Historica Canada has been making notable historical moments in Canada, very few have focused primarily on highlighting the stories, achievements, and struggles of Indigenous peoples. Even more illuminating is that of the eighty-six episodes of Heritage Minutes that have been produced since the early 1990s, only eleven directly speak about Indigenous peoples, of which an even smaller handful are written, directed, and produced by Indigenous media makers. The quotation above is a glimpse of Métis filmmaker Shane Belcourt’s motivations in directing two Heritage Minutes that were released in June of 2016. As I argue, Belcourt’s opportunity to make these Minutes concurrently with the conclusion of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission opened up a new but limited platform for Indigenous filmmakers to assert their understanding of history into the national narrative. However, he is not the first Indigenous filmmaker to participate in this process of intervention especially in heightened moments of settler national celebrations as I discussed in my interview with filmmaker Michael Doxtater. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this project looks to the Heritage Minutes as a tool for subversion, both overtly as demonstrated by Jackson 2bears but also

covertly, by Indigenous filmmakers within the institution producing the media texts, to operationalize the Minutes in ways that the nationalistic institution may not have intended. This chapter centralizes the creative productions of Heritage Minutes by Indigenous filmmakers. I do this deliberately by keeping the focus on Indigenous discourse-making rather than centering settler national narratives. I compare one of Belcourt's 2016 Heritage Minutes with its predecessor made in the 1992, both short films focussing on an Indigenous topic by an Indigenous filmmaker, in order to explore the limitations and advantages experienced by the filmmakers in working with Historica on topics with which they are intimately familiar. I compare two media texts to learn what objectives the filmmakers had in working with Historica and what kind of meaning-making processes were intended as a result of the relationship with the institution. The two media texts I turn to in this section are: (i) *Peacemaker*, retelling the story of the Iroquois legend of the Tree of Great Peace, explaining the origins of the Iroquois Confederacy, written, co-directed, and co-produced by filmmaker and scholar from Six Nations, T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater (Kanien'kehá:ka or Mohawk) and (ii) *Chanie Wenjack*, produced and directed by Shane Belcourt (Métis) and a largely Indigenous film crew, is a telling of residential school history through the story of Chanie, a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy from Ontario who died attempting to flee the school. Pearl Achneepineskum, Chanie's sister, narrates *Chanie Wenjack*. As I speak to Michael and Shane, what starts to become evident is their reverence in telling of stories, grounded in the personal and the political. According to Archibald (2008), "a synergistic action happens between the storyteller and story, but it is the storyteller who ultimately gives breath, or life to the story" (p. 112). It is not in the finished product of a Heritage Minute that I end up focussing on as a result of the conversations I have with the filmmakers, but rather the immense effort placed in the pre-production and planning and the



eventual execution of shaping the media text while working with a settler nationalistic institution. As Belcourt (2016, June 28), in speaking about Heritage Minutes, explains, "...[what] these two Minutes and all Heritage Minutes are all about, or should be all about, to spark conversations and reflections on what it means to be Canadian, to be 'Canada.' These 'Indigenous Issues' are Canada's issues and they need to be a National dialogue, for many generations to come" (para 9).

In the previous chapter on *Heritage Mythologies* by Jackson 2bears, I offered an analysis of alter-narratives that come to fruition through the refusal of settler national narratives about Indigeneity, making room for a visual wampum belt to emerge that decries being consumed into the rhetoric of Canadian nationalistic projects. In this chapter, I explore what happens when Indigenous media creators work with a settler institution responsible for creating content that acts as a mechanism to foster a national identity. I break this chapter in two parts: Michael and Shane. I outline some of the ways stories are shifted or subverted by Indigenous contributors through the act of refusing a monolithic settler narrative. I explicitly draw on conversations that I had with Michael, Shane, and Historica Canada's CEO, Anthony Wilson-Smith to provide more complex readings of media texts. I do this because on the surface, critics might treat Heritage Minutes as texts that simply further the agenda of the nation-state through the model of reconciliation or what Coulthard (2014) critiques as a politics of recognition. As discussed in the theoretical framework, this politics folds Indigenous identities and issues into the national narrative through highly visible gestures while making it possible for the state to continue dispossessing Indigenous people of their land and self-determining authority. However, I argue that Heritage Minutes directed by Indigenous filmmakers are a fair bit more complicated than simply a politics of recognition. I highlight narratives of refusal, resistance, and humour as the

filmmakers negotiate to carve out space in a landscape that is predominantly grounded in settler rationale, restructuring from inside, while always drawing in the land within the visuals of the media text. Michael and Shane demonstrate the value in mobilizing Heritage Minutes to gain access to a larger audience base by speaking through the vehicle of Historica Canada. They do this by depicting Indigenous experiences from within the settler device to actively complicate settler national narratives that homogenize Indigeneity. This does not come without cost as they encounter bureaucracy and are hindered by settler political structures in the making of their creative contributions. However, their determination in telling their stories, from and about Indigenous communities and experiences is evident in every moment of the short films.

#### **4.1 Michael and the Re-telling of *Peacemaker***

1992 was a big year for Canada and North America. Not only was it the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Confederation of Canada but also the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery by Columbus of North America. Amidst all of the settler celebrations lay fresh the lingering ghosts of the events of Kanehsatake that took place in 1990. In the wake of Kanehsatake, CRB Creative Director, Patrick Watson, approached T’ohohoken Michael Doxtater to submit a script and potentially take over the co-producing and co-directing of a project the late Robert Markle had been working on before he passed away unexpectedly. The requirement for the film was to submit a 60-second concept storyline on the Iroquois Confederacy. Michael in his conversation with me said,

So I wrote a two-page script...A little girl saying “Dada what's this?” “This is the Great Tree of Peace of the Iroquois.” And then the whole middle section there where Hiawatha raises the thing and there’s the line he’s the hero, the object of his desire is to get rid of war and the foil to that is the computer graphic that swoops around...So it’s clear. And

then finally the end “Does the Great Peace still have power?” “Well you’re still here aren’t ya?” Punch line, right? (M. Doxtater, Personal Communication, May 9 2017).

For Michael, getting involved in the making of a Heritage Minute was built on a career that had been steadily involved in Canadian media industries. Working as an industrial film producer and a documentary filmmaker since the 1980s, Michael has worked behind the scenes unwaveringly engaged in projects that brought a lens to Indigenous lives. For example, he was the writer, screen and production consultant on *Where the Spirit Lives*, “a film on Indian residential schools that was at the frontier of the whole apology era” (M. Doxtater, Personal Communication, May 9 2017). Sharing the story of *Peacemaker* came from a place of deeply personal and lived understandings of the story, resulting in conversations between himself and (co-producer) Bruce McKay, that demanded that use of language or choice of words in imparting the story, had to bridge two worlds: Mohawk and English. For Michael the story of *Peacemaker* is one of but many stories given to him in trust by Elders to help him navigate having two feet in two worlds. He says, “I was raised by chiefs and so on so I know this story like telegraphy”, and it meant trying to impart it in a way that would pay honour to the story. The compromise came in the form of linguistic choices; for instance, the Mohawk story has no mention of the word, demon, yet in creating a script that would convey the concept to a non-Mohawk speaking audience, modifications were made. Michael explains,

The hero is Gordon Tootoosis’ character; the object of his desire is to give a little girl her history. And that it shows the impediments to that in our history were war, and the demon of war. Actually, Bruce and I had a long talk about that, this demon of war. He says, “Did they say demon?” I said no, but this is communicating to your audience who’s well aware of Shakespearean language and what demons are. This is what it says in Mohawk and

there is no mention of demons in there but there is in the Great Law. This evil force that will try to tear it down. So you can call that a demon if you want, and that's what I chose to do in the English translation but the Mohawk doesn't say that. That image floating around is the demon. [In Mohawk tellings of the story] there are evil forces around you that will try to tear down what you're trying to build up.

When I asked him about who his intended audience was in developing the storyline, Michael replied that he imagined this to be a film about a Northern Hemisphere story, one in which

The tree is the cosmic spire. It's our cosmic spire but it is not exclusive to North America...[and] cosmic spires are those channels for truths. So that's the truth there, but these trees exist all over the place. I was comfortable with the idea that this is, this might be...culturally focused on North America, a segment of North American population but it's actually a truth, there is a truth there. The reason why we throw our weapons of war under the tree to be carried away forever is to protect our children...everybody should get that...(M. Doxtater, Personal Communication, May 9 2017).

Michael worked with the board at what was then the CRB Foundation to bring to the screen this story about Iroquois government structures, the practice of wampum relations, and the demonstration of passing on stories that remind people to act as caretakers of land and community. For Michael, storytelling is a grand undertaking, he explains,

For 30 seconds, for a minute, for half an hour, for one hour or for two hours you are asking somebody [to take time to pay attention to what you are saying and] to commit a part of their entire life that they do not get back...That is a big honour and responsibility on the part of the storyteller. (M. Doxtater, Personal Communication, May 9 2017).

He explains that in sharing of the story, there is room for a dialectic relation to emerge. On one hand, the storyteller is giving knowledge to the audience but in response, the audience is recruited to learn and hold these gifts of stories to guide them. While he speaks with passion about the messages of *Peacemaker*, Michael does not fail to tell me about how his sardonic sense of humour guides his work. He shares insider perspective of how he uses humour and mockery to throw off the austerity and seriousness of the Heritage Minute and subvert the nationalistic device. Michael's inside jokes filter through his co-producing and co-directing of *Peacemaker*. For instance, he tells me about the hiring and location selection processes that he was involved in the making of the Minute. He explains that he took this opportunity to hire individuals who would provide an added layer of meaning-making in the telling of *Peacemaker*, the hiring of members of the Warrior Society. He recounts that the filming of the planting of the white pine tree took place in Kanehsatake. A deliberate choice on his part to include a recognizable land marker that was the site of the standoff that took place between the Mohawks of Kanehsatake and the township of Oka. Simpson & Ladner (2010) give credit to Kanehsatake as acting as a massive impetus to reinvigorate Indigenous acts of re-assertion of sovereignty. Kanehsatake acted as a catalyst, exposing to the nation-state and the world, the very real conflicts that existed between the settler nation-state and Indigenous communities in Canada. Michael with a hearty laugh says,

I do practical jokes, the story about the Great Peace with all kinds of warriors populating the screen, the idea that they're planting the Tree of Peace at Kanehsatake where two years before they had the big thing. Yes plugging warriors was purposeful, it was all purposeful that you have on National TV at Christmas time, the story of the great Christmas Tree of Peace being raised filled with all these people that the governments

were ready to blow to smithereens right. It's so funny, a lot of the people in the Heritage Minute are members of the Warrior Society, you know? The famous Warrior Society. There [are] lots of them in there. Jon Philips, Mark Maracle. Mark Maracle is the guy playing Hiawatha. They were the gun toting AK47 guys down in New York State and so on. These Warrior Society guys are in the film. (M. Doxtater, Personal Communication, May 9 2017).

This thread of humour and sarcasm is intricately woven through the *Peacemaker*. Michael utilizes this platform as a sounding board to share stories that are revered within the Mohawk community while poking fun at the settler nation-state. In Hodgins' (2003) discussion of *Peacemaker*, he strips the value of the story being shared by the filmmaker about the message in the film that promotes working together to foster community and the importance of passing down knowledges. Hodgins (2003) interprets the media text as a maneuver by the nation-state to toe the line or face further violence. This reading provides commentary on the stoic representations of participants in the film, which becomes comical when you take in Michael's hiring of members of the Warrior Society playing key roles in the Minute. What is left out of the account of Hodgins' (2003) analysis is the Indigenous filmmaker's vision of bringing an important story of the Iroquois peoples to gift as a teaching tool in addition to subverting a settler media text. In creating these multiple layers of meaning-making, Michael demonstrates the various ways that a singular text is productive.

Additionally, as Hall (1980) explains, while media producers can intend on a media text to have a fixed meaning, the audience's agency in interpreting a text enables a more nuanced and complex relationship to interpreting the media text. For example, different audiences will read the text very differently based on their own experiences and subject positions, i.e. if they are

familiar with Haudenosaunee teachings or part of that community. As a result, Indigenous filmmakers like Michael are able to use a recognizable media text as a reference point of Canadian nationalism to interrupt, disrupt, and re-organize a monolithic story of nationhood. Slippage occurs when alter-narratives are provided within the same media text, devising other pathways of interpreting the same text. Michael's film destabilizes the notion of the settler narrative as an absolute and instead points out the vibrant and thriving Indigenous youth who are here in the present, wanting to learn from their Elders about their pasts. These simulated representations of Indigeneity that Hodgins (2003) critiques as acts of re-colonizing Indigeneity instead act as a device for exorcism similar to 2bears' (2012/2014) public performances that draw in stereotypes and tropes of Indigeneity to then destabilize through his own occupation of space. The Warriors attired in regalia provided by the film production company play an important role in occupying space in the visual landscape. As Raheja (2010) points out these acts of "playing Indian" for media production purposes, are a necessary visual signifier of Indigeneity which while inaccurate in terms of homogenized regalia, are a vivid challenge to the settler state, through the occupation of the visual landscape by Indigenous bodies. There is subtle laughing at the settler state occurring in wearing what the settlers perceive as authentically "Indian" while the members of the Warrior Society playing the characters for the film are contemporary participants and seen as active threats to the settler state. Their presence evokes a variation of responses from those viewing the media text, dynamically calling out to a specific audience while participating in a film aimed at a majority audience. The subtle and subliminal message might be lost on some audiences and resonate with others. In having Mohawk Warriors act in the film, folks framed in mainstream media as dangerous threats to settler nationalism, Michael "flips the script" (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017) on the original intention

of the Heritage Minute. In the moment of broadcast, Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous viewers who are aware of the Warrior Society see the covert ways that the Mohawk identity is re-appropriating the settler platform. For non-Indigenous viewers, they are left out of this complex interpretation, but instead they learn about governance structures existing prior to contact with settler structures.

Furthermore, I argue, that *Peacemaker* in speaking about the birth of the Iroquois Confederacy delivers a message to the settler nation-state of the importance of working in solidarity with other communities and rejects attempts by the Canadian nation-state to sideline or stifle Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous people. In sharing the story of the Confederacy, Michael refuses the tactics of the settler state to enfold Indigeneity within its borders, in fact, by beginning and ending with the grandfather and his granddaughter occupying screen space, framed as happening in a more recent present, Michael is showing the audience that colonization is not the main theme to this story. Instead, this is a story about Indigenous nation-relations that is not informed about colonial violence but rather about the collaborative elements that draw in many Indigenous communities to work together to overcome common obstacles that impede the well-being and health of their communities.

#### **4.2 Shane and the Story of Chanie and Pearl**

In June 2016, Historica Canada released two Minutes aimed at exploring Indigenous-centric topics. Métis filmmaker, Shane Belcourt, explains,

the Ontario government knew about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report.

They want[ed] to get ahead of its findings, which [was] saying we need[ed] to have more materials in the schools about treaty and about residential schools. And so they specifically said Historica Canada, we want an Ontario Aboriginal team hopefully to



make an Ontario Aboriginal focused production story in the production taking place in Ontario, and here's the budget (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

The lead-up to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation is also a point of discussion that we mull over as Shane and I start to speak about his motivations in taking part in the making of the two Heritage Minutes. For Shane, his work is grounded in art and politics growing up in a household that existed on the nexus of his father's political practices and mother's artistic productions. Shane's father, Tony Belcourt, is a key Métis rights leader and activist and his mother is Nova Scotian musician/actress Judith Pierce Martin. He explains that these two co-existing forces heavily influence the work he produces. When discussing Heritage Minutes, Shane mentions that as he was growing up, the Minutes were screened in movie theatres and on TV. He elaborates that,

the one I remember the most that kind of pissed me off was the Louis Riel one...the Riel one was when I was more critical and I was sort of delving into you know more consciously into my dad's politics and I was working for him and I was really immersed into the Métis nation and all that sort of stuff. And so watching at that time, seeing the Louis Riel minute if you watch it, you're like a Metis person didn't make it!...There's so much agency that he could have been given and it's not. I remember seeing that and just being fucking pissed off. I thought it was disgusting and it ticked me off. It's sort of like, of all the things you chose, you chose that?...You know? He's half crazy and then he gets hung, nice, that's not our reality. (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

Fast forward a couple decades, Shane is provided with an opportunity to be part of a majority Indigenous-led team to write, produce, and direct Minutes aimed at exploring the contentious histories between the settler nation-state and Indigenous communities. "I remember getting the

email, the text message from Jeremy [Edwards] like we got the Minute. I was really excited... Michelle [St. John; producer of the two Minutes in 2016 and one of Shane's partners in their co-partnered production company, The Breath, that he co-founded with Jordan O'Connor] was very excited because, "wow an Indigenous crew is going to make a Historica minute about Indigenous issues." This is really great...I was excited about getting some politics into them. I like the storyline of Indigenous people authoring the Minutes" (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

However, as Belcourt explains, from the beginning there were some hard lines that had to be established in order to continue work on the project. For Historica, that line included a bottom-line that the Minute on residential schools would tell "Charlie" Wenjack's story. I use the name "Charlie" because that was the name on record until a later conversation with Pearl Achneepineskum (Chanie's sister, a residential school survivor) shed light on his real name. For the longest time, Chanie was referred to as Charlie in Historica's project documents and by the production team, based off information collected from a cover story published in 1967 by *Maclean's* (Adams, 1967) magazine about the death of the boy<sup>7</sup>. The correction to the name on record occurred, when a face-to-face conversation took place where, according to Belcourt, Pearl Achneepineskum said, "His name is not Charlie, it's Chanie...Our parents named him Chanie but when he got to the residential school, they changed it to Charlie, some people called him Jonny, but it's Chanie" (Belcourt, 2016, June 28).

Shane recalls, "...they [Historica] had a penchant for the Chanie Wenjack story. That was something that Historica wanted to do. How they came to that, I don't know, why they came to that I don't know. Other than the *Maclean's* [Adams, 1967] article that they spoke about and that

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<sup>7</sup> For the full article, go to <http://www.macleans.ca/society/the-lonely-death-of-chanie-wenjack/>

they thought it was an iconic story to tell” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017). When speaking with CEO Anthony Wilson-Smith, in query to how Chanie’s story was selected, Anthony explains that,

...[Chanie’s] was a story that knit together so many elements that are troubling about residential schools again in ways that were verifiable. So we, — for example we know there were allegations of, frequent allegations and instances of sexual abuse, that’s tough to document for a minute that will be widely seen and it’s also often tough to flat out have the proof. I have no doubt these things happened, but it’s someone’s word against another (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 1 2017).

The comment from Anthony above illustrates that it was a harsh battle for the Indigenous team to work with the settler institution when there are fundamental differences in recognizing the trauma and harm done to Indigenous communities by settler structures. For instance, I find myself looking to Historica Canada’s emphasis on Chanie Wenjack, the experiences of residential schools thrust on to the body of one individual while obscuring the shockingly violent and intrusive ways that survivors of residential schools continue to have dealings with the Canadian government through the Common Experience Payments (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2013) program. As explained by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2010),

...most participants saw no connection between money and healing. No amount of compensation could repay the language and cultural losses incurred from a residential school system that lasted for 150 years and involved generations of Aboriginal children... applicants were faced with the choice of retelling their story and of trying to prove their years of attendance in the hope that the government would validate their experiences (93-95).

It was troubling to hear that the head of an organization working with a predominantly Indigenous crew would be so quick to dismiss the accounts of thousands of residential school survivors by reducing it to semantics of “everyone has a side to tell”. As a result, it was an uphill battle for Shane and his team to make sure that the stories that would be told by Historica would be given the attention and respect they needed.

Coming into the project knowing that Historica’s vision of Chanie’s story was expected to be about how a boy had experienced being in residential school and died during an attempt to escape the school, meant Shane and his team had to negotiate for an alternate telling, one that brought the focus to survivors. Shane describes the difficulty during the initial meetings, stating, “biggest problem for me is that you see a small First Nation’s boy walk and then die and so people may look at that and assume that’s where the story ended...[and] Oh yeah, we killed all the Indians. Well now that’s not true, (i) people are still around, and (ii) there are survivors of residential schools. So if we are going to do that Minute we have to find a way to let people know there are survivors and they are here with us today” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

Producer Michelle St. John became the central figure in building a relationship with Pearl Achneepineskum to see if she would speak about her brother and whether she wanted the Minute to be made sharing Chanie’s story. Shane explains “for Michelle and I, if we’re going to put her brother’s story on screen, she and her family need to agree that we can do this... having Pearl in her brother’s Minute was a fight that I was going to die on the field for. That was going to happen...you were going to see a residential school survivor from today on screen or we’re not doing it” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017). Working on these Minutes became a site for constant push and pull to ensure that compromising with Historica did not

mean sacrificing the responsibility that the Indigenous film crew carried with them. Shane tells me, "...you know when you're doing residential school 101... that it's for non-Indigenous people and Treaty 101 is for non-Indigenous people. But we wanted the feeling that when our audience saw it, they would support the way we presented the ideas. We've become now the national spokesperson at that moment for that particular time on that issue so we were like we want to get that right and not fuck it up" (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

Shane elaborates that every step forward required tremendous tenacity in ensuring that the Minute would do justice to the on-going legacies of the residential schools. For example, he tells me of one of the major disagreements that occurred between the film crew and Historica over a story development issue. In *Chanie Wenjack*, there was initially a line that stated, "it is cultural genocide." The board and their committee pressured Shane and his team to re-word the statement to its final version, "It's been called cultural genocide". Shane explains that while it may have appeared to be a small distinction in wording that it in fact carries with it, heavy history, and would have garnered an unhappy reaction from many people in the Indigenous communities. "Michelle was very upset by that...putting it [referencing to decision to use "it's been called cultural genocide" in a nice clean box or something over there. What else was it??? It was cultural genocide full stop, end of story" (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017). This contentious moment highlighted to Shane, cultural bias and worldview perspectives, which had not been as evident until the conflict. This is consistent when thinking back to Anthony Wilson-Smith's risk averse comment above from the Historica Canada CEO stating that the many, many accounts of sexual abuse in residential schools is not a legitimate form of "evidence". To be told, "Shane, you're being political. You're attached to this because you're being political," was unnerving as Belcourt states:

No, let me tell you something. You are a political organization, when you make a Sir John A Macdonald minute in which you celebrate the father of Confederation? That's a political minute, that's your word view, those are your politics." Because my Sir John A Macdonald Minute would be way the fuck different than that. It's going to be a total flip on it. No I think the guy [John A. MacDonald] was a dick, not somebody I should cherish. At all. But wait I realize — I know that that's my political view. But you saying that yours is somehow the truth, its the factual truth, is like, well that's your political perspective that your cultural bias, your entitlement, that's given you this authority, that's true history, that's the way to frame history, that's truth, everything else is political. So how do we make this apolitical? [Historica adds] "It's been called [cultural genocide]" (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

As Shane's comment illustrates above, working with a state sanctioned settler institution meant having to collide with different epistemologies and ontologies at every turn. These were tough spaces for filmmaker Shane Belcourt and his team at *The Breath*. Shane emphasizes that for Michelle and himself the stakes were high:

"if we get this wrong. If we give in to your view, then those are your politics that we're somehow aligned with. So you definitely sort of start thinking about quitting a lot, walking away a lot... The script development phase and the pre-production was really really difficult...like you're not being heard...just all the shenanigans that go into the approval stage. Just so you can go out and do it" (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

Not only were Shane and his team having to ensure that the truths of their own communities' stories be told accurately, they were also expending intense emotional labour to make sure the

stories that were going to be shared were done so with honour and integrity. Their tenacity to be responsible storytellers (Archibald, 2008) paid off, with a massive shift in the telling of *Chanie Wenjack's* story. Historica, as a result of the partnership with an Indigenous-led production company, created a short film with a radically different angle from its previous iterations of the Minutes. The practice of emphasizing historically distant events or peoples migrated over to a present-oriented narrative through the inclusion of Pearl's narration and mention that she survived residential schools but her brother did not.

In speaking with Anthony Wilson-Smith, I ask, how Historica went from producing historical narratives to a survivor narrative and what prompted the shift. Wilson-Smith responds with,

You're right that's not something to my knowledge that we'd done before. And we weren't clear even— so early on in we felt, we wanted to have the awareness of the family and if his family found it too painful to go ahead with this, we weren't sure what we would do.... And then I just started thinking, you know, we always say we look at history, as an eye to understanding how we got to where we are today and in some ways history, yesterday is only a tool to understand present. So when you put that in mind as our background perspective, and the idea comes to be, 'well is there anything more schooling than showing this is not something that's 100 years ago or 40 years ago' as a reminder that people still live today who remember him, whose heart breaks for him, lost a member of the family and in effect reminding people Chanie would have been 62, 63. He could have been functioning— he could have been a dad, could have been a granddad, very much moving among us. This was a way to make clear that this was a tragedy that extends into this day beyond just the schools themselves. All of those people

still living out there who underwent this experience (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 1 2017).

The process in the making of Chanie Wenjack exists as a micro-example of the difficulty in collaborating with settler structures on Indigenous topics. While Shane Belcourt and Michelle St. John, expended great emotional and creative costs to do justice to the project, their efforts resulted in producing a Minute that had a survivor focus, a radical shift for Historica Canada. For Shane, all the complications and frustrations that came with the project, paid off with knowing this Minute on Chanie Wenjack will leave a lasting imprint on Historica. He elaborates,

They're saying this is one of the most important minutes that they've [Historica Canada has] ever done, this is Canadian history that everybody has to know. And that's part of [Historica's] decision to do it, and us to voice it, it's a good feeling to have that — to feel like maybe there's a dialogue thing...It's one of those things where like it gets out. You know? Which kind of makes all the fighting and stress worth it in a way. Because it is something that is seen and shared widely just like they were when we were kids (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

In addition to arguing for a survivor focus, Shane and the production team chose to shoot the short film at Six Nations, at the site of the former Mohawk Institute Residential School, outside of Brantford, Ontario. The Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ontario, the residential school that Chanie ran away from, no longer exists. The production team wanted to find a building that would hold similar weight with its history of operating as a residential school. Furthermore, Shane explains that choosing to film at Six Nations was not only because the site where they filmed (adjacent to the more recently constructed Woodland Cultural centre) was previously a residential school but it also meant "...get[ting] local hires... spend money



locally...and make a donation because they are trying to raise money as a living museum for it” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

He clarifies that it was not an average filming experience, that being on site felt “cold and heavy and almost haunted” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017). Anthony describes the building as mostly “untouched from the way it looked in the ‘40s, ‘50s, ‘60s. You really, when you turn in the gates you really just kind of shudder. It’s like the engineering of a gothic horror film and some ways that’s precisely what it was” (A. Wilson-Smith, Personal Communication, May 1 2017). Shane strongly asserts,

it’s not like a movie...for all of us it was important to kind of ground us in that space as we are trying to do something that is going to shed light, that maybe will help people heal. That will expand dialogue, and all these good positive things towards healing. And that is why we were doing it, but it was doing it in a place that was definitely still very much alive for the people that were there from Six Nations or beyond who worked on the Minute (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

For Shane, the project that started from personal experiences in watching the Louis Riel Heritage Minute to making a Minute where he had creative albeit moderated control. It was a media text that he feels tells the history and on-going legacies of residential school in a respectful way that comes from an Indigenous perspective. It was bittersweet though because it came at the cost of arguing and conceding to Historica’s adamant objection to citing residential schools as acts of cultural genocide without qualification. For Shane, this collaboration is not an experience he wants to repeat. In fact, he goes on to say,

I would rather have those ideas in a narrative work that whether I’m the writer, director, or producer on, that we, the team, decide full stop. And we’re making decisions that the

creative team is deciding together why. As opposed to fighting for worldview. (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

Shane elaborates that he is not completely opposed to working with a big organization but only if creative control and autonomy was on the table. For him, the stories that he wants to tell, needs to eclipse 101 or introductory stories that are aimed at predominantly non-Indigenous audiences. He wants to share stories about celebrating Indigenous identity that do not stem from colonization. He says that stories do not need to begin with

colonization hit Indigenous people and now here's this difficult story. [Instead how about] here's the people, check it out. None of the talk about that stuff [colonization], it's about us. That kind of celebration would be amazing. I like those works, it's not that I only want to tell good news but I guess in a way it's sort of, if it's going to be bad news, I want to have it tied into a strong narrative that's a more fulsome emotional piece as opposed to like, here's the 101 about this thing. (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

For Shane, in working with *Historica*, he offers a realization that Indigenous stories being told through settler structures are a difficult space to negotiate, with compromise coming at great cost to the Indigenous creative production team. The pay-off? Their work is accessible by a large audience base and the opportunity to dilute the potency of settler nationalistic narratives that tell stories about Indigeneity without Indigenous voices telling the stories.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I center Indigenous-led and Indigenous produced Heritage Minutes to learn ways in which Indigenous media makers are engaging with a nationalistic settler institution. In doing so, I learn how the media makers are taking the opportunity to work with a

nationally recognized media text to tell Indigenous stories. In addition to reaching a non-Indigenous or uninformed audience base who may be unaware of Indigenous histories and contexts that drive Indigenous acts of protest and discord with settler acts of on-going dispossession of Indigenous lands, the filmmakers share stories or inside jokes that resonate with their own community members. I am aware that as I use the word “Indigenous”, I myself am reproducing a homogenous construction of diverse identities. I want to explain that my words are not intended to in any way homogenize individual communities rather that I want to highlight how perhaps an essentialized understanding of Indigeneity becomes part of the narrative in order to reach a larger audience. Spivak & Morris (2010) uses ‘strategic essentialism’ to describe the act of intentional solidarity to create a space that acknowledges marginal identities as one fixed entity rather than a host of fragmented identities. This essentialized identity provides language to speak in a cogent manner and engage in acts of alternate knowledge productions to destabilize dominant discourses. Michael and Shane in their intentional engagement with a settler institution offered me stories about different ways that they negotiated with Historica. On one hand, Michael used the platform of the Minutes to tell a story about the Iroquois Confederacy that had nothing to do with interactions with settler bodies in terms of the narrative. However, he complicates the story of the birth of Iroquois governance structure, with an interjection of humour and poking fun at the settler nation-state by placing members of the Mohawk Warrior Society in the film. On the other hand, Shane and his team members fought to have their version of the story to be brought to the screen. With great temerity, they were able to persuade and negotiate the telling of Chanie Wenjack that highlighted a survivor narrative rather than allowing for the original version to be produced. The original telling of the story was based on *Maclean's* (Adams, 1967) cover story, which not only referred to Chanie as Charlie but also commented

and criticized residential schools as they were at the time still in operation. Through Shane and Michelle's engagement with *Historica*, this narrative drastically re-oriented the story to highlight not only the dark legacy of residential schools in Canada but also, the survivors who are still here today, and the continuing struggles of living with the ghosts of residential schools.

I leave you with a last reminder of how this chapter is situated within the broader argument of my thesis. I argue that we need a need a more nuanced reading of *Heritage Minutes* to understand how they are productive, how the process and Indigenous directors' intention matters as much as the final product. An interpretative account will help us to understand how they might be read variously, the humour that is imbedded in them as well as the nods and winks to Indigenous audiences. We need to note the limitations and clashes that Indigenous directors come up against with non-Indigenous audiences and *Historica Canada* as a nationalistic institution with its own agenda that wishes to avoid rocking the proverbial national boat in any significant way. Therefore, *Heritage Minutes* are not just mechanisms of the state to reproduce itself but are layered and fraught sites of contestation.

## **5 Chapter: The Power of Storytelling: Re-orienting the Heritage Minutes through Indigenous Eyes**

As this thesis has demonstrated, Heritage Minutes have become key forms of cultural currency promoting Canadiana. Heritage Minutes serve as nationalistic texts, and their producer, Historica Canada, enjoys a cozy private/public relationship with the nation-state. The absorption of Indigenous identities and issues into Heritage Minutes is part of a politics of recognition (Coulthard 2006/2014) whereby the state provides visual and symbolic concessions to Indigenous people while continuing to dispossess them of their lands and self-determining authority. However, the Minutes are also more than just that, and we need to be careful to understand and situate their nuances and potential. This thesis set out to both challenge the Minutes as well as to reveal some of their layers when we consider their relationship with Indigenous identity and media makers. I did this through a review of relevant existing literature; close textual analysis, including an analysis of how artist Jackson 2Bears (Kanien'kehá:ka) remixes Heritage Minutes in his performances; conversational interviews with Indigenous filmmakers Shane Belcourt (Métis) and T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater (Kanien'kehá:ka); as well as an interview with Historica Canada executive, CEO, Anthony Wilson-Smith. As discussed throughout the thesis, reflecting on my own subject position (Archibald, 2008; Denzin, Smith, & Lincoln, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Simpson & Ladner, 2010) was essential throughout the process. While the Heritage Minutes can be seen as playing into a larger conversation about the politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2006), they become more complex media texts when looking to intentions and processes prompted by Indigenous filmmakers whose work subvert and interrogate the culturally recognizable text.

I grew up with the Heritage Minutes. My family and I immigrated to Canada as political refugees in the early 1990s. In those early years, referring to the Minutes often acted as a gateway to building connections through discussing which short film was a personal favourite or demonstrating knowledge about Canada. As discussed in Chapter 4, For Métis filmmaker, Shane Belcourt, the Minutes were banal media texts that he encountered growing up in Ottawa, Ontario, in the 90's, in theatres or on television. It was not until he saw the Minute on Louis Riel, that a nostalgia driven cultural text (Hodgins, 2003) became politicized, making him realize that the story being told was not one that resonated with his experiences, his history, and his community.

I started this project with a particular sense of memory associated with Heritage Minutes. While I read literature about the Minutes (Lester, 2002; Hodgins, 2003; and Rukszto, 2005), I found myself frustrated at not reading anything in-depth about Indigenous perspectives and experiences in related analysis. This led me to wonder what other processes of meaning-making were left un-interrogated? My thesis is informed by the lack of inquiry in turning to the contributions made by Indigenous media makers in the landscape of Heritage Minutes. I turn to looking at what kind of interventions and interrogations have been made when looking to the Minutes as sites of resistance and subversion. How do Indigenous media creators mobilize Heritage Minutes as a recognizable cultural text to create new meanings? How are settler nationalistic narratives and interpretations of Indigeneity interrupted and subverted? What are some limitations and advantages of working outside of the framework of settler institutions versus working with them?

With these questions raised, I found myself examining how existing literature fails to address the experiences and processes of Indigenous media makers. For instance, while Rukszto

(2005) looks to parodies of Heritage Minutes as a source of playing with scripts of nation-building, she focusses on Minutes that did not interrogate or interrupt representations of Indigeneity. Similarly, although Hodgins (2003) analyzes *Peacemaker*, written, co-produced, and co-directed by an Indigenous filmmaker (T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater), he neglects to account for the filmmaker's decision to write a script and develop a project that offered the audience a teaching about the Iroquois Confederacy. Hodgins' (2003) method of textual analysis rather than an interview with the filmmaker left out the possibility of understanding why the filmmaker made the film and a great deal of the meaning that is embedded in it. As Archibald (2008) explains, there is a powerful responsibility in telling Indigenous stories, but in turn, the one receiving the story must attentively understand the meaning-making that happens through the gifting of the story. In speaking with Michael Doxtater, I learn about his decisions to share a story that is important to his community with a larger audience and reasons for particular approaches that he took. I learn about the threads of humour and subversion that result in a complex cultural media text.

Similarly, in speaking with Shane Belcourt about his experiences in working with a settler institution, my understanding of how I read the Minute now, compared to before our conversation took place, is very different. This is a demonstration of the immense importance in letting the stories sit with me, far past the moment in which the stories are given to me by Shane. It is impossible for me to view *Chanie Wenjack* without recalling a story Shane has told me about a particular moment of disagreement or success. The shift from residential schools as an event relegated to the past to the centering of survivors is a monumental achievement for the predominantly Indigenous media makers involved in the writing, producing, and directing of *Chanie Wenjack*. In fact, it is the conversations with Shane and Historica Canada's CEO

Anthony Wilson-Smith that offer a particularly rich demonstration of the challenges faced by Indigenous media makers when working with settler organizations and institutions. The ontological and epistemological differences hovered over the planning, implementation, and eventual production of the Minutes.

In Chapter 1, I chronicled the beginning of what we now know as Historica Canada. I map out how the public and private interests have merged to bolster the production and maintenance of popular national myths. I provided a historical morphing of the institution from its inception as a vehicle for nation-making and to educate newcomers and citizens alike on notable moments, peoples, and places in Canada. I reflected on the cultural capital the Minutes have in becoming a reference point for being knowledgeable about Canada. I explained through a historical breakdown of the organization and personal conversations with Shane Belcourt and Anthony Wilson-Smith about the lack of Indigenous themed Heritage Minutes and how the Truth and Reconciliation findings report played a role to hire a predominantly Indigenous film crew to tell stories about Indigenous experiences. I turn to previous scholarship on Heritage Minutes to seek out how scholars have looked to Indigenous negotiations with the nationalistic media text. And in doing so, I found that the scholarly writings thus far have neglected to provide a nuanced and complex reading of the Minutes from the perspective of Indigenous media-makers who have been involved in the making of the Minutes. It also prompted me to look to outside resources of folks who may have told their own stories but through the recognizable platform of the Minutes.

In Chapter 2, I turned to critical and Indigenous scholars to shape the ways in which I approached the project. I struggled to figure out a way to recognize my own social location and the limitations of my interactions with research methodology, which was mostly informed by



western research practices. In having read Leanne Simpson (2014), Jo-ann Archibald (2008), Margaret Kovach (2009), and Norman Denzin, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, & Yvonne Lincoln (2008), I found the language to centre stories as active ways of knowing and embodying knowledges. Archibald's (2008) elaboration on the importance of storywork helped shape my decision to emphasize Indigenous contributions in the textual legacy of Heritage Minutes. Sadly, the numbers are scarce in terms of Historica employing Indigenous filmmakers to tell Indigenous stories. In seeking out existing literature on the Minutes, I noticed that the focus on analyzing the Minutes (whether critical or not) centered the Canadian nation-state, which subsequently meant that the discussion of Canadian national identity was the focal point of the literature. In response to this and influenced by critical and Indigenous thinkers, I was encouraged to take a different approach in proceeding with my project. I deliberately rejected the notion of centering the Heritage Minutes as a settler nation-building tool and instead I turned to practices of how the Minutes are used to reflect alter-narratives. I employed language of informality to signal to how knowledge production can still occur without clinging to pseudo objectivity touted as necessary within western pedagogy and to signal relationality with research participants. I turned to stories to show how the act of storytelling is a powerful means by which to disrupt dominant paradigms and discourses.

In Chapter 3, I turned to Mohawk multi-media artist, Jackson 2bears' performance piece, *Heritage Mythologies*, which appropriates the template and aesthetic of Heritage Minutes to create an alter-narrative that directly questioned the mythmaking logics of the media text. 2bears turns to audio-visual remix practices to create immersive productions that disrupt temporal and spatial relations. In his work, he demonstrates that contemporary Indigenous identities do not exist in a silo, preserved in a state of historical existence. Using mash-up and remix practices,

2bears incorporates hip-hop, electronica, and drumbeats accompanied by archival images, clips from Heritage Minutes, and mainstream media images about Indigenous peoples to summon and subsequently perform public exorcisms of settler conceptualizations of Indigeneity. In addition to challenging settler representations of Indigeneity, 2bears' mimicry of Heritage Minutes provides a bold criticism and commentary of the disconnect that exists between settler rhetoric of relationships with Indigenous communities versus the realities and tensions that continue to amplify in the on-going legacies of colonization. *Heritage Mythologies* is a creative endeavor that is not associated with Historica Canada. In fact, while Historica currently offers an option to view the parodies that have been made in reaction to original content, they do not list 2bears' work as a resource that can be accessed through their website (Historica Canada, 2017). In short, while 2bears' performance piece carries valuable critique of the settler nationalistic media text, very few people are aware of the project's existence, since the piece is not nationally broadcast nor promoted. While working outside of a standard distribution channel allows him more creative freedom to produce a media text that can deride and critique the settler nation-state in overt ways, the throttling in distribution, limits the potential impacts of his work unless you are explicitly searching it out. Which brings up the question, what kind of advantages exists with working with an institution that has a broader network of access?

In Chapter 4, I turn to Indigenous filmmakers who work with Historica Canada to produce Indigenous themed Heritage Minutes. I speak to T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater and Shane Belcourt to hear their experiences in working and producing stories about Indigenous lives and communities from within a settler cultural institution. Shane and Michael's work with Historica has produced media texts that are now being employed as education tools. As Anthony Wilson-Smith explains, more than 12,000 schools in Canada turn to Historica Canada's

educational toolkits and Canadian Encyclopedia linked heavily to the content aggregated from making of the Heritage Minutes (Historica Canada, 2017). In these distribution channels exist the potential for creating discursive shifts in understanding settler and Indigenous relations in the Canadian landscape. I would go so far as saying that the Minutes with an Indigenous theme that are produced and directed by Indigenous content producers operate on creating avenues for discourse making in a myriad of ways. For instance, while the Minutes initially exists as a text that is as a gateway to inform a mostly uninformed settler audience; they are also an opportunity to create a database of knowledges for people to access to educate themselves about the land on which they are guests. In addition, as a result of settler interference and violence on Indigenous communities across geographic spaces lays a vast number of Indigenous individuals who are still trying to pull threads together to heal. This is a pretty huge leap but I imagine that these texts are a gateway for Indigenous folks to connect internally with family members about speaking about the extremely painful roots of the breakdown of connections. Having Indigenous voices create Indigenous stories about their community means that the narrative that emerges through the stories told by folks like Michael and Shane provide a platform to speak about and through ideas and experiences that are grounded in the personal. Their work re-possesses spaces that had told stories about Indigeneity from a non-Indigenous perspective for too long. But it does come at great cost to the media makers who choose to foster these relationships. For Michael, it meant having to concede to linguistic differences in sharing the story of the Iroquois Confederacy by utilizing words that would be recognized by a non-Indigenous viewer i.e. the use of demons to signal to a great evil in *Peacemaker*. Shane's experience in working with Historica Canada meant having to actively push back every step of the pre-production and post-production phases to ensure that the stories that would get told would reflect an Indigenous perspective. Thus, the

lack of creative control meant having to concede to the regulations of Historica Canada on the depths to which the stories could have been further expanded on i.e. contemporary topics like Common Experience Payments (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2013) as Shane mentioned during his conversation with me. In this sense, the relationship with a settler nationalistic institution requires compromise and concessions on the part of the Indigenous media maker who is involved.

### **5.1 Discussion and Limitations**

One of my biggest regrets is that due to the constraints of time and scope of an MA thesis, I was not able to share all the stories given to me by Michael and Shane. I cannot emphasize the importance of having conversations being the backbone of my thesis. Time limitations meant that I did not have enough of an opportunity to solidify a time to speak with Jackson 2bears on his work, *Heritage Mythologies*. While 2bears extensively speaks about his personal experiences shaping his work through publicly accessible documents i.e. his PhD dissertation, brief descriptions on his official website (J2B, n.d.) and his chapter in S. Loft & K. Swanson's (2014) edited volume, I was quite devastated that I was not able to sit with him to hear about the processes that led to the final completed project. It would have been a great learning moment to know about what made him select an image or song to accompany a particular image. I would have appreciated hearing about the decisions that lead to the production of this media text that drew on mainstream media content to offer commentary while mimicking the familiarity of a Heritage Minute.

But I also have to make a confession: I had to learn patience and practice boundaries when attempting to reach out to 2bears. I had to figure out at what point to heed the line and accept that scheduling conflicts meant that a conversation with 2bears was not going to happen.

This was a valuable takeaway: learning when to persevere but also acknowledging that the timing just may not be right for it. For example, in the case of speaking with Anthony Wilson-Smith, I had given up hope for chatting with him until weeks later; a conversation with another person at Historica Canada resulted in the scheduling of a meeting. In fact, it is a huge ask for someone to pause their lives to speak about a project that they may not have thought about for years. This particularly resonated when speaking to Shane about a project he had wrapped up a year or so ago, Shane commented, “you should have done this interview like the day after we finished. So I’m like a shark that way, as soon as something’s done, it’s into an archive and I’m on to the next thing” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017). For all the desire to want to know what went into the making of a story or the decision behind a particular choice of site location, it is also necessary to remember that just because you call it an interview, does not mean that you get to stay unaffected as you converse with a person. That is the funny thing about conducting conversational interviews, you can prep all you want and have your list of questions but when you are having a shared conversation that starts with where you grew up and the common threads that bind you together, the formal questions tend to go out the window. Knowing how to let go was a familiar theme that emerged in the process of writing this thesis.

This entire project has morphed from analyzing the finished media texts of the Heritage Minutes to seeing the texts through the personal stories of the artists and filmmakers. Where I once thought that I could look at the video recordings and do a textual analysis and leave it at that, I cannot imagine going back to produce a work that excludes the stories that gave life to richer interpretation of how the Minutes came to be. I developed relationships with the folks with whom I spoke. I am forever thankful for the time that they each took to sit with me and share their experiences in working with Historica in making of the Minutes.

Given a chance, I would have liked to do an analysis on all eleven Indigenous themed Heritage Minutes. I think it would have been a far more rich and illuminating conversation had I gotten the opportunity to sit with writers, producers, and directors who have all contributed in portraying and projecting stories about Indigeneity. On a broader note, I would have liked to develop a mapping of the story of Chanie Wenjack as a particular mechanization of the reconciliation tactics employed by the nation-state. For instance, a particular avenue of inquiry I would have liked to explore is the emphasis on Wenjack's story but married with the connection to Canadian musician Gord Downie and his band, The Tragically Hip, in speaking about Canadian nationalism. I could have also further explored the role of Joseph Boyden, the screenwriter for Minutes, looking at his level of contribution and involvement in the making of the Minutes. This is especially relevant considering the contentious on-going commentaries about the work he has done situating himself as an authority of Indigenous culture in the Canadian context and his claims to Indigeneity (Barrera, 2017; Blaney, 2017; Jago, 2017; Larue, 2017; Kay, 2016;). By signaling to other pathways this project could have gone, I leave open the possibility of expanding on this project for future inquiry. For instance, what are the implications of new projects like Kenojuak Ashevak, the first Heritage minute narrated in English, French, and Inuktitut, in the broader discourse of nationalistic cultural productions in the Canadian landscape? In speaking about the current climate of positioning reconciliation by the settler nation-state, Shane comments,

You know like there's no quick fix to reconciliation. How are you going to get that, I don't know? Part of it — there was a line by Lee Maracle in *Colonization Road* “if you get off my fucking foot for a second, I'll accept your apology of standing on my foot.”... We need to be alone for a bit. We need to have a little bit of developing our own

[cultures]. Re-establishing the languages, re-establishing traditions or expanding those further throughout the community. That work is so important and it's that kind — it means reconciliation is two people coming as wholes to do that. And Indigenous people and a lot of communities are spending time doing that...as opposed to looking for affirmation and acceptance from Canada. It's not about that right now. It's going to take a long time. It's going to take a long time to get there. (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017).

These Indigenous media makers use mechanisms by which to “flip the script” (S. Belcourt, Personal Communication, March 3 2017) on monolithic nationalistic narratives which obscure Indigeneity while fetishizing it for settler nation building agendas (Raheja, 2010; 2bears, 2012). In the course of the thesis, we see a shift occur through the platform of the Minutes, from the locating of stories within settler-centric narratives to an Indigenous-centric narrative. I would be the first to tell you that when I started on this journey, I had difficulty letting go of the idea of the settler state as all-powerful and oppressive. I initially struggled to see the myriad of ways that changes come to be through individual and collective action. Over the course of working on my thesis, I have changed. No longer am I so willing to envision the settler nation-state as a structure that cannot be challenged or disrupted. Instead I find myself left hungry to hear more about alter-narratives and contestations to settler mechanizations of nation-building. I am eager to hear the stories told about peoples' experiences that also exist outside the spheres of on-going colonial violence that celebrate or provide commentary on their own experiences.

I turn once more to Jo-Ann Archibald's (2008) examination of the importance of storytelling, because as a result of the stories given to me during my conversations with Michael and Shane, I find myself reflecting and changing in my own social location as a queer WOC, an

immigrant, and a guest on Indigenous lands. In response to Michael's first series of questions to me: Tell me about you? Who are you? Where are your peoples from? Why are you doing what you are doing? I can only tell you that I am learning to unlearn so much of what I have absorbed in coming to Canada as an immigrant. I now crave wanting to know more about my own histories and the stories that my mother and grandmother carry with them, that I so easily dismissed in the past. I want to learn about other peoples' stories that exist outside of the colonial discourse and instead center community knowledges and histories as central.



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