An urban epicentre of decolonization in Canada: the Indigenous-settler alliance to make a place for peace at Asinabka.

by
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Political Economy
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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Smith, Eric L. (2011) *An urban epicentre of decolonization in Canada: the Indigenous-settler alliance to make a place for peace at Asinabka*. (Unpublished masters thesis.) Carleton University. Ottawa.

Abstract

This thesis explores urban decolonization in Canada through a critical case analysis of the colonial encounter in Ottawa. The Circle of All Nations, a community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies who find inspiration and leadership in Algonquin Elder William Commanda, illuminates the practice of land-based ceremony, which is vital to Indigenous communities' survival, urban or otherwise. The blindness of coloniality toward Indigenous ways of being and their cultural significance is formed by a rupture of the intersubjective relation between people, and between people and places. For this reason most importantly, the building of the Asinabka Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island, while a capital development project, is also a crucial manifestation of effective decolonial counterwork. It materializes relationality in a form and context that cannot be anything but visible to the colonial gaze.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the Circle of All Nations, specifically those who gave their time and energy to participating in this research: Verna McGregor, Phil Weir, Romola Thumbadoo, and of course Elder William Commanda, known as 'Grandfather' to many. Elder Commanda succumbed to illness on August 3, 2011, the day following submission of this thesis. Grandfather was in my thoughts and prayers with each page I wrote. During my last visit with him, I brought a platter of desserts from a fine vegetarian restaurant. Grandfather, however, had a craving for a double-double coffee and a butter croissant. So I asked to be excused, drove to Tim Hortons, and returned with his wish. I must say that I have never witnessed anyone enjoy a butter croissant like Grandfather did that afternoon. It grieves me deeply that I cannot return once again with another butter croissant for him. I dedicate this work to Grandfather William.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of wonderful people who have helped me throughout my studies at Carleton University. I am immensely grateful to my supervisor, Patricia Ballamingie, for her wisdom, experience, and dedication to my learning and growth throughout this research project. I am most fortunate that Eva Mackey and Simon Brascoupé agreed to act as, respectively, committee member and external examiner for this thesis, and I thank both for their time, insight and constructive criticism. Two of the finest teachers I have known, Graham Smart and John Milton, although not directly involved with my work in this thesis, nevertheless influenced by thinking and writing throughout this work. Many thanks to Cristina Rojas for introducing me to Latin American decolonial theory, and to Brian Noble (Dalhousie University) for encouraging my interest in relational models and for our ongoing discussion on how we can deploy such ideas practically and constructively for social change. I am especially grateful to the Institute of Political Economy at Carleton: Director Janet Siltanen for her encouragement (also for suggesting I read Flyvbjerg); Donna Coghill for her unwavering support and attention to detail; former Director Rianne Mahon for introducing me to political economy thought; and of course an outstanding group of IPE cohort peers for contributing to a lively and collegial learning environment.

I could not have accomplished this work without the loving encouragement of my father, Frank, my sisters, Elaine, Janet, and Eleanor, and their families. Rene V. and Kevin A. have helped me stay focused and grounded. I will always be grateful to Ronalda, for patiently taking good care of my heart during the writing of this work.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) program.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I could smell it years before I first laid eyes upon it. And it would be decades before I came to know it as Asinabka. During the late 1960s, I was a child growing up in Ottawa. On mornings when the air was heavy and the breeze was blowing gently from the north, the sulphurous emissions from the stacks of the paper mill on the Ottawa River would waft over the city and dissipate across the suburbs. Upon being greeted by a whiff of the odour, my sister and I would pinch our noses with our thumb and forefinger and lament: "Eew. It's E.B. Eddy again." The E. B. Eddy paper mill was located on the north shore of the Ottawa River, in what was then the city of Hull, Quebec. Today, the mills are abandoned, and the Chaudière Falls supply hydroelectric power to metropolitan Ottawa. The scent of sulphur is no longer in the air, but the foul presence of colonial oppression remains.

Asinabka, the Anishinabe term for 'place of glare rock', consists of the place that includes the Chaudière Falls, Victoria and Chaudière Islands, and the lesser islands and shorelines on both sides of the Falls. Anywhere that the spray from the Chaudière Falls contacts the ground constitutes the body of Asinabka (Thumbadoo 2005: 129). This site is of special historical, cultural, and spiritual significance to Anishinabe peoples living within the Ottawa River watershed. Since colonial settlement of the area in 1800, the islands, the river, and the shorelines have been transformed by industrial infrastructure, initially to support the logging and paper industry, and more recently to extract hydroelectric power from the Chaudière Falls. Asinabka is also a primary focus of concern for The Circle of All Nations, an informally organized alliance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who share in common an interest in the cultural teachings of ninety-seven year old Anishinabe Elder William Commanda. The central theme of this case study research is the relational connection participants within the Circle of All Nations have with Asinabka, and their ongoing struggle to honour and protect this relationship in the face of continuing colonial oppression. A specific event became the entry point for my investigation of the colonial encounter at Asinabka: the Circle of All Nations' two year campaign to prevent Domtar from upgrading the hydroelectric potential of its Chaudière Island power generation facility. A key part of this narrative is the determined effort of Elder Commanda and The Circle of All Nations to convince the Ontario government to elevate the project to an Individual Environmental Assessment. In the end, the government maintained its approval of the Domtar project, and the campaign failed. This event also serves as a fulcrum for a critical examination, with a particular focus on history and ontology, of the colonial and decolonial narratives that constitute Asinabka.

My rationale for choosing this case example for research is due to its distinctive geographic, social, and political characteristics that distinguish it as a unique opportunity to critically examine colonial administration as well as enrich awareness of decolonial political possibilities. Asinabka is situated not only in an urban landscape, but also in the centre of the national capital of a settler state. The site incorporates multiple political jurisdictions: one federal, two provincial, two municipal, and one metropolitan, each of which maintains a keen and vested interest in the development of the area. Much of the site is located on Crown land, all of which is unceded Anishinabe

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territory, and the Crown land on the Ontario side of the river is currently subject to consideration within the ongoing Algonquin comprehensive Land Claim negotiations. The continuing industrial presence of Domtar Inc. at Chaudière Falls is, as I will show, very much a significant factor in the complexion of this case. Another unique case aspect this research addresses is the emergence and growth of The Circle of All Nations, its intention to establish an Indigenous peace-building centre on Victoria Island, and the opportunities for decolonial politics that the presence of such an institution might present. I am unaware of any published scholarly studies of The Circle of All Nations to assert an Indigenous presence on Asinabka, although I have been informed by participants within the community that academics other than myself are becoming increasingly interested in investigating the movement through research endeavours. Lastly, I also identify as a participant within The Circle of All Nations and deeply respect the work of Elder Commanda, his friend and assistant Romola Thumbadoo, and each of the participants within The Circle of All Nations that I have had the pleasure of meeting.

Of the limitations of and exclusions within this thesis, I will discuss those that I believe are most helpful to declare at this juncture.[1] I explicitly declare that my research findings and knowledge claims are partial, situated, and contingent, and offered from merely one unique and biased standpoint. This admission is not only realistic but also consistent with my chosen methodology. Another limitation is the low number of interviews I conducted during the field research, an issue I discuss in Chapter 3 and again in Chapter 8. I elected to not interview members of Indigenous communities who hold dissenting opinions regarding Elder Commanda's work and the Circle of All Nations. I am aware that dissent does indeed exist, and it would add a fascinating dimension to a research project on Asinabka – just not in this project and not from this author.

To guide my investigation, I kept the following two sets of research questions at the forefront of my inquiry. The first set concerns the colonial encounter at Asinabka: How is Asinabka, as a place, understood from the colonial present? What social structures (i.e., economic, cultural, political) bear upon Asinabka as a locus of meaning, and by what processes are these structures constructed, sustained, legitimized, and resisted? What histories legitimate colonial understandings of Asinabka, and what histories emerge to contest the dominant colonial narrative? What practices are persistently invoked to sustain the colonial narrative in the construction of Asinabka? Conversely, what practices and narratives emerge from The Circle of All Nations to assert the decolonization of Asinabka? The second set of questions focuses on The Circle of All Nations' perception and understanding of Asinabka as a special place: What experiences and understandings does The Circle of All Nations articulate to describe Asinabka as a place? How do these experiences and understandings originate from and inform world-views, values, and connections to meaningful narratives and social processes? How is Asinabka understood within The Circle of All Nations as a sacred place and as a site of political struggle? What can be discovered about a relationship between the sacred and the political? I argue that the answers to the above

[1] In Chapter 8, the conclusion, I address limitations that I believe warrant deeper explication.

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questions reveal a two-fold problem produced by colonial rationality in this case: (1) the community of the Circle of All Nations does not fit into a 'slot' within the colonial constitution of Indigenous collective identities; and (2) the colonial framing of 'traditional land use' excludes practices of land-based ceremony, which is vital to Indigenous communities' survival, urban or otherwise. This problem is both a dismissal of the collective political identity of a community and a simultaneous devaluing of culturally significant practices. I argue that the blindness of coloniality toward Indigenous ways of being and their cultural significance is formed by a rupture of the intersubjective relation between people, and between people and places. For this reason most importantly, the building of the Asinabka Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island, while a capital development project, is also a crucial manifestation of effective decolonial counterwork. It materializes relationality in a form and context that cannot be anything but visible to the colonial gaze.

In *Chapter 2: Groundwork for a decolonial political ecology*, I present the conceptual approach that orients my inquiry in this thesis. I review the critical decolonial theory formulated by prominent Latin American scholars, arguing how it contributes to an understanding of the colonial encounter. I then discuss transformations in political ecology theory, in order to articulate a unique and provisional decolonial variant that is fitting for the aims of this case study research. The research methodology for this work is explained in *Chapter 3: Phronetic research methodology*. I open the chapter with a reflective consideration of my position as author, then move to a discussion of Flyvbjerg's (2001) phronetic social research methodology and its complementarity with genealogical analysis. I close the chapter by outlining the methods I used to gather evidence for this inquiry. The next two chapters present my research findings.

Chapter 4: The Circle of All Nations' campaign to prevent redevelopment of the Chaudière dam site examines The Circle of All Nations' two-year struggle to prevent government approval of Domtar's planned upgrade of their hydroelectric facility on Chaudière Island. I conduct a genealogical analysis of the struggle, focusing specifically on an environmental screening report. The findings indicate the gulf between the relational ontology of The Circle of All Nations and the schismatic ontology of the colonial government rationality. In the next chapter of findings, my focus turns to relational ontology and Asinabka.

In *Chapter 5: A resilient and persistent ethic of responsibility,* I elucidate the understanding of Asinabka within the ontology of the Anishinabe peoples, an understanding shared by non-Indigenous participants within The Circle of All Nations. I begin with a brief biography of Elder Commanda and the origins of The Circle of All Nations. I also offer a condensed narrative of my own experiences at the Circle of All Nations summer gatherings. I then turn to the Anishinabe wampum belts in Elder Commanda's possession. The last two sections of the chapter address Asinabka: first, the colonial erasure of Anishinabe practices, and second, the recent resurgence of those practices and why I argue for their necessity. In the next chapter, I bring critical analysis to bear on the realizations attained in this inquiry.

Chapter 6: From border thinking to broader being is comprised of a three part

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analysis. First, I revisit the environmental screening document and the importance of ceremony to offer explanation for The Circle of All Nations' opposition to the legitimacy of the screening process and the rationality that dismissed them as stakeholders. Second, I refer to a Supreme Court of Canada case ruling to assert the acknowledgement of ceremony as a form of traditional land use. Yet, in a strange turn on ontology, I argue that 'traditional land use' is, from the perspective of Indigenous relations with land, a completely untenable and self-contradicting concept. Third, I shift the dialogue from conflict to peace-building, and complete the chapter with a probative discussion on decolonial intersubjective ethics.

In *Chapter 7: Conclusion*, I synthesize, connect, and extend the results of my analysis. I argue that the one thing I would hope the reader takes away from this thesis is that the central problem this case study reveals is not a merely a clash of epistemologies, but a deeper problem formed in its inception by the rupture of the intersubjective relation between people, and between people and places. I conclude the chapter by revisiting some of the limitations of this work, and I suggest possible avenues for future research pertinent to the themes addressed in this thesis.

The appended *Coda: Metalogue on ontology* is a brief narrative that illustrates, through both its rhetorical form and its content, paradoxical problems that might inhere in the study of ontology.

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Chapter 2: Groundwork for a decolonial political ecology

Political ecology, as a mode of theorizing, has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, shifting from debates over epistemology to issues of ontology. This sea change is due arguably in large part to the emergence of practices that decentre modern knowledge paradigms, including but not limited to the efforts of transnational Indigenous activist networks, global movements such as the World Social Forum, critical subaltern pedagogy, and of course the countless published contributions of Indigenous elders, knowledge and wisdom keepers, and scholars. There exists no formulation of a 'decolonial political ecology' within scholarly works; however, a great number of anti-colonial political ecology studies do exist. I draw a distinction between anti-colonial and decolonial practice: the former is primarily analytically deconstructive while the latter is reconstructive. The ultimate objective of decolonial work, in my view, is to create more just relations among people and between people and places in colonized regions. For this reason, decolonial political ecology is productive of decolonized spaces, is dialogical, and places focus upon the preservation of a pluriverse of ontologies.

In Section 2.1, I open this chapter with a discussion of the important work being done in decolonial theory by Latin American scholars of the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) research group.[2] The critical work of Escobar, Thurner, Mignolo, Quijano and others centres upon political possibilities at the site of colonial difference, a concept that aptly describes the context of this case. Section 2.2 summarizes the recent transformations of political ecology conceptualizations, tracing them from their roots in the political economy of land-use, through poststructuralist approaches, and to the most recent postconstructivist formulations. Section 2.3 introduces a framework for a decolonial political ecology, a reconstructivist approach which features: narratology, thick description, a focus on practices, and intersubjective sensitivity. This conceptual approach orients the case study inquiry presented in this thesis.

2.1: The colonial encounter: colonization at the edges of modernity

Colonialism is a complex and multifaceted process of oppression through manifold economic, ideological, and cultural processes of subjugation. Equally manifold, and in some cases just as complex, is the extent of scholarly definitions of colonialism. Even a cursory survey of those conceptions deployed most frequently in recent decades is beyond the scope of this thesis. There does, however, appear to exist divisions among such conceptions based on orientation and degree of scale—from the global to the local and vice versa. Political economic geography tends to focus on the role of states, global trade, and transnational oppression and how these forces impact place (e.g., Harvey 2005; Watts 2000a; Sachs 2005), while anthropological (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Escobar 1995; Blaser et al. 2004), feminist (e.g., Mohanty 2003; Thobani 2007), and Indigenous (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987; Churchill 2002) perspectives are inclined to centre on the

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[2] A collective of primarily Latin-American decolonial scholars founded by Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Arturo Escobar, and others. MCD is an unaffiliated, informal research project committed to 'epistemic disobedience', as stated in Walter Mignolo's blog. See http://waltermignolo.com/2011/04/03/the-collective-project-modernitycolonialitydecoloniality/. Accessed May 15, 2011.

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standpoint of territory and subjugated knowledges and identities, while looking across larger scales for opportunities for transnational alliances and solidarity. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I begin with the following encapsulation of colonialism from Loomba (1998/2005: 23):

> [Colonialism is] the forcible takeover of land and economy, and, in the case of European colonialism, a restructuring of non-capitalist economies in order to fuel European capitalism... European colonialism [is] not some trans-historical impulse to conquer but... an integral part of capitalist development.

Loomba's foregrounding of economic takeover and the concomitant restructuring of non-capitalist economies displaces from prominence the idea that colonialism is based strictly upon the conquest and occupation of land by exogenous populations, a misconception that arguably contributes in part to the commonplace notion that Canada currently exists in a postcolonial era. If instead we understand colonialism as being the expansion of hegemonic economic forces and relations—primarily capitalist—into non-capitalist spaces, then the difference between colonialism and neocolonialism, as well as external and internal colonization, is not as crucial a distinction. This conclusion is supported by the work of a group of Latin American scholars, collectively comprising the Modernity/Coloniality/ Decoloniality research group (MCD).[3] The critical thought of scholars such as Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Anibal Quijano, among others, inform the understanding of decolonial theory that follows.

For Escobar (2008), globalization and development, thus the colonizing front of capitalism, is deeply negotiated at the edges of modernity—sites of "colonial difference" which are communities' position within the modern colonial system (176). They are places of difference and diversity, which hold in tension the incommensurable projects of globalization and decolonization; moreover, these sites of 'colonial difference' are occluded from the vision of modernity. For Escobar, difference emerges into the Eurocentric field of blindness when local and translocal social movements co-constitute, along with the usual discourses of colonial development, the field of difference that interpolates the Other as oppressed. Coloniality refracts the heterogeneity of human relations into discrete objects, empties the world of ecological relationships, and then reconstitutes a closed world according to a colonial order of power (Escobar 2008).

In his introduction to *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas*, Thurner (2003) asserts that "no 'postcolonial theory' adequately accounts for colonial and postcolonial American histories" (14). In Thurner's thesis, the emergence of colonized societies in Latin America through "an array of historical trajectories and lived critical predicaments" indicates that "colonialism and its [aftereffects] are not everywhere and at all times the same" (13-14). Likewise, to speak of some unitary characterization of 'Latin American decolonial theory' is problematized by the plurality of colonial experiences and historical difference. It is also difficult to amalgamate

[3] A thorough explanation of the work of MCD appears in the special issue of the international academic journal *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2-3), 2007.

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subjectivities in spaces of the colonial encounter. As argued by Morillo-Alicea in the same volume, colonialism "created interstitial categories of people whose very existence challenged the dichotomy of the colonizer and the colonized" (2003: 132-133). For Thurner, the meaning of colonialism (and I would add here 'decolonization' as well) must be "left unsecured, genealogically specific, and contextually malleable" (23). Certainly, this is no less true in Canada, especially in urban contexts where forces of colonization and decolonization operate simultaneously through many of the same social networks of power—it would be unwise to remain attached to simplistic categories of agents and structures.

Quijano's (1999) main argument is that colonial power is the primary organizing principle of social relations. Colonialism created, and imperialism sustains, the naturalization and codification of race, ethnicity, and nationhood within which class operates. Where direct rule by force was withdrawn, the extraction and appropriation of material resources and Indigenous knowledges, combined with the imposition of religion and other Eurocentric cultural expressions sustained rule by consent. This process results in assimilation by cultural genocide and integration through co-optation of Indigenous knowledge economies. Consent operates on the seductiveness of power—in this case, colonial power—which aims to conquer nature under the universal Eurocentric cultural rubric of capitalist, industrial development. Quijano argues that the order of race is the basis of the world capitalist system, the determinant of the order of labour, which in turn produced orders of nations, states, and political identities and continues to this day (44). Quijano shifts from race and coloniality to the historical roots of modernity/rationality in the production of knowledge.

At the centre of modernity, for Quijano (1999), is the Cartesian subject of the Enlightenment, which in its very existence produces the separation of the object, and its attendant separation from other objects, each due to unique properties (45-46). Crucially, the Cartesian subject is an historical figure and not a pre-given fact. It arose from the bondage of medieval imprisonment (46). Quijano's critique of this paradigm is threefold (46): (i) it denies intersubjectivity in knowledge production; (ii) objects exist in a field of relations in a state of ontological flux, and so they are not at all separate; and (iii) the subject/object division runs counter to the reality of ecological correlation. Intersubjectivity can be extended to property as well: for the colonizer, property, an object of knowledge, is a thing it itself; for the colonized, property is a relation between people in place imbued with intersubjective purpose. But the Eurocolonial individual negates and dispels this inter-subject into the slot of the object. This separation denies the social totality of humanity as an intersubjective whole, and all subjects that are marked as outside the Euro-paradigm are cast into inferior culture as 'Other'. For Quijano (1999), the Eurocolonial subject is fully-formed, fully in-formed and the Other, by contrast, is unformed and un-informed.

Quijano (1999) turns his sights to theories of society as an organic totality. In this metaphysics, the body of society is reduced to a closed structure, the head is an historical macro-subject, in which historical means 'development in time', which rules over the body, the subordinate proletariat. This image literally animates world-systems approaches. Quijano suggests that modernity/rationality refracts the world–into discrete

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objects—empties the world of ecological relationships, and then reconstitutes a closed world according to a colonial order of power. To offer a corrective, Quijano discusses a decolonization process that involves an epistemological and intercultural extraction of knowledge and purpose from coloniality. Decolonial social 'totality' is actually heterogeneous and irreducible. The form of this liberation is left open, but hinges upon social and cultural freedoms. Any intersubjective project that produces knowledge for anti-colonial purposes will offer alternatives to modernity. The insurrection of knowledges produced through ecological, intersubjective relations disturbs the foreclosures of modernity/rationality by introducing organic, open, and liberatory political possibilities.

Mignolo (2000) extends the work of Quijano to argue that colonialism, specifically the rationality of coloniality, is "constitutive of modernity" (50). Mignolo argues that the Eurocentric history of colonialism has separated its genealogical course from that of modernity, and that this false dichotomy obscures their fundamental relationship: coloniality and modernity from the perspective of colonialism's borders "are two sides of the same modern world system" (52). The illusory separation of colonialism and modernity is found in the story of postcolonialism, that the transformation from the colonial 'period' to the modern industrial 'period' signified an actual end to colonialism. Mignolo asserts that the contemporary economic global order continues to "articulate the modern/colonial world system and manage the colonial difference" (53). This phenomenon also applies to a Canadian context: the political boundaries of Canada and its apartheid system of reserves have been fixed for a century, and yet the management of colonial forces continues internally through the economic domination of Indigenous spaces. Alternatively, one could describe the colonial period of Canada as occurring from the 16th century to the early 19th century, and thereafter the "coloniality of power changed hands... and became subordinated to the new and emerging epistemological hegemony: ... the Enlightenment" (87-88). For Mignolo, the complexity of the colonial difference offers avenues for a consciousness of resistance in which, rather than "ordering the world in dichotomies", one can invoke a "border thinking" that utilizes the paradox of duality within a "cross-epistemological conversation" (85). Evident throughout Mignolo's (2000) work is the contention that local histories are the sole source for a real genealogy of colonialism as lived experience of the oppression of coloniality/modernity; likewise, an understanding of border thinking elicits the decolonial consciousness from which liberatory politics emerge.

Escobar (2008) examines the development of the Colombian Pacific coast from the early 1980s to the turn of the millennium, and endeavours to explain transformations in the orientation of policy development, focusing particularly on Black and Indigenous communities' decolonial projects. Escobar considers three development projects: *Coagro pacifico*, an agricultural project; *Gente Entintada y Parlante*, a literacy project; and *Proyecto Bipacifico,* a conservation and biodiversity project. Escobar notes the unfolding of neoliberal globalization during this period, and yet within the development discourse observes the inclusion of local and ethnic cultural resurgence as well as concern for biodiversity. Escobar argues that neoliberal

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development is not the totalizing discourse some claim it to be. He is particularly critical of the structuration theorist Anthony Giddens, referring to the ‘Giddens effect’ as “modernization all the way down, everywhere, until the end of time”(167). For Escobar, globalization, development, and thus modernization, is deeply negotiated at the edges of modernity—sites of colonial difference that constitute “communities’ position[s] within the modern colonial system” (176). Here, Escobar invokes Mignolo’s (2000: 49-88) epistemological challenge of the “colonial difference” in “border thinking”. Thurner’s (2003) reading of Mignolo identifies a dual aspect to the notion of colonial difference: diverse “historical experiences and locations of coloniality/modernity in the distinct phases... around the globe”, and the different worldviews such diversity produces (27).

For Escobar (2008), the ‘colonial difference’ is found in critical sites of alterity and diversity that hold in tension the incommensurable projects of globalization and decolonization. Sites of colonial difference are occluded from the vision of modernity. They emerge into the Eurocentric field of blindness when local and translocal social movements co-constitute, along with the usual discourses of colonial development the field of difference that interpolates the other as oppressed. As a result, every act of development is potentially an act of counter-development—each has the potential to constitute an alternative modernity and even an alternative to modernity (Escobar 2008: 176).

Escobar shows how agents in the space of colonial difference can re-appropriate mechanisms of power (in these cases, transformation of the application of development policy) through “counterwork”, or articulated, endogenous practices of economic, cultural, and ecological alterity (2008: 174). In doing so, community-based social movements challenge and weaken (with varying degrees of success) the structures of universality, unity, totality, scientific and instrumental rationality, and the domination of nature. Escobar differentiates the following three phases of decolonial counterwork, based on outcomes: ‘alternative development’, alternative modernities, and alternatives to modernity. Each can feed into the next to change the political and cultural common-sense that underpins development policy through vigorous counter-hegemonic struggle. In this case, the aim is to invoke traditional and local systems of knowledge and practices to decentre a particular kind of development as the organizing principle of social, economic, and cultural life. Since counterwork is dialogical, it involves experts and managers as well as community activists and exogenous organizations. Practices of alterity involve persistence, re-enactment, and transformation, specific to the perspective of the colonial difference, and these practices create outcomes that reverse trajectories of agency, and in so doing, resist the totalizing discourse of development. But there is no distinct division on the battlefield between coloniality and the colonized, and this is a key point that Escobar (2008: 196) asserts. Factions of modernity and counterwork co-exist within the social movements–there is the ever-present coercion and consent!–so the field of colonial difference is also internally differentiated. This produces transitions and multiple trajectories, and this is how alternative development, alternative modernities, and alternatives to modernity can co-exist, dovetail, and each create the conditions for the each other (Escobar 2008: 311).

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The theorizations of the above scholars contribute to the present research by drawing attention to the diversity of subjectivities, practices, economies, and cultures that exist at the loci of counterwork in decolonial projects. While modernity, coloniality, and rationality attempt to gloss heterogeneity, sites of colonial difference are rich with politics and possibility of hope.

2.2: Genealogies of political ecology

Political ecology emerged in the 1970s as an interdisciplinary approach to investigating the relations between social power and ecology, with roots formed within the nascent environmental social movements of the 1960s. Prior to this period, ecology was arguably understood as the exclusive domain of biology, while its relation to society was considered through the politically modest discipline of cultural anthropology (Escobar 2010: 91). The germinal works most cited as the forebears of contemporary political ecology theory are Piers Blaikie's (1985) *The political economy of soil erosion* and Harold Brookfield and Blaikie's (1987) edited volume, *Land degradation and society*. Early formulations of political ecology were "analytical, normative, and applied", deploying the "basic toolkit of political economy" to enquire into "the social relations of production and about [inequitable] access and control over resources" (Paulson, et al. 2003: 206). During the 1990s and well into the 21st century, the body of political ecology was stretched to accommodate the proliferation of divergent trends in theoretical and analytical frameworks dealing with the comingling of nature(s), societies, and cultures. This expansion leads Watts (2000b) to remark that political ecology, as a coherent domain of study, has "in a sense almost dissolved itself" (592). A vast amount of scholarly work across disciplines surveys and maps the intellectual genealogies of political ecology.[4] One work in particular serves as the point of departure for the approach delineated in the following argument.

In *Postconstructivist Political Ecologies,* Escobar (2010) focuses on meta-epistemological distinctions to organize conceptualizations of political ecology into three generations: (1) preconstructivist, (2) constructivist, and (3) postconstructivist. Escobar's taxonomy is based on the ontological status of 'nature' in contemporary socio-political theory, primarily an epistemological and philosophical debate concerning what can be known as 'real' about nature. The genealogy proposed in this work by Escobar traces the impact of social theory, specifically poststructuralism and constructivism, upon how political ecology manages the interface of 'society' and 'nature'. First-generation political ecology accepts nature as a given construct and can be called realist or modern. This initial foray into political ecology corresponds to the work that emerged during the 1970s, mentioned above. Second-generation political ecology follows the anti-essentialist turn arising from poststructural criticism and constructivist epistemologies. The principal deviation between second- and third-generation political ecology is "the attention that the latter gives to issues of ontology besides epistemology" (91).

Ontology concerns "the theory of what exists", whereas epistemology deals with "theory of knowledge" and the systematization of what can be known of reality (Sayer,

[4] See, for example: Paulson, Gezon, and Watts (2003) and (2005); and Watts (2000)

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1992: 155).(put in earlier) Ontology answers the question, 'What exists as real?', and can be understood as the meta-theory of being, existence, and reality – an underlying philosophy that accounts for “what the world must be like for knowledge to be possible” (Bhaskar, 1978). Of course, any knowledge of reality rests on grounds for what can possibly be known about reality, and therefore what is believed to be real has a direct influence on how we think about reality. Thus, how we *can* know what we *do* know is the subject of epistemology. Ontology rests necessarily on specific epistemological assumptions, although ontology and epistemology can also be thought of as mutually informing. (sources?)

The third generation, postconstructivist political ecologies, which constitutes the bulk of Escobar's (2010) analytical efforts, has emerged over the past five years in response to “the ontological turn” in social theory (92). Postconstructivist political ecologies aim at “working through the impasses and predicaments created by constructivism, radicalizing them, while at the same time returning to questions about 'the real'" (91). A third-generation political ecology “finds its direct conditions of possibility in the most recent debates on post-representational epistemologies in geography and science and technology studies [STS], on the one hand, and flat and relational ontologies in anthropology, geography, cultural studies and STS, on the other" (91).[5] All three generations of political ecology deal with similar questions and problems concerning relationships between the 'social' and 'natural', but the more recent postconstructivist trends address:

> the multiplicity of socionatural worlds or cultures-natures, relational versus dualist ontologies, networked versus structural forms of analysis, and even a renewal of the question of what constitutes life. While these questions are more intractable theoretically, they seem to stem from the social more clearly than ever before, due in great part to the practice of some social movements (92).

The problem of the theoretical intractability of multiple ontologies in a pluriverse, as I intend to show, does not pose a problem for practice-oriented analysis that is relational instead of deconstructive, and leverages and promotes dialogue instead of ontological closure. Decolonial political ecology, proposed in the following discussion, is one possible route to this kind of analysis.

2.3: Decolonial political ecology

The basic premise of a decolonial political ecology approach is that within political ecology the current trend to shift focus from epistemology onto ontology demands new ways of theorizing multiple, relational, and experiential ways of being in the world. A decolonial political ecology ought to be reconstructivist and not merely

[5] In fact, Escboar (2010) surveys no less than six postconstructivist political ecologies that straddle the essentialist-constructivist line to varying degrees: dialectical constructivism, constructive interactionism, phenomenological perspectives, poststructuralist anti-essentialism, Deluzean neo-realism and holistic realism.

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postconstructivist. Before proposing how a decolonial political ecology might move beyond models of conflict and into conceptual spaces of relationality, hope, and possibility, the matter of ontology needs to be addressed.

Multiple ontologies refers to contexts in which different ontological presuppositions exist for different groups, a clear example of this being the colonial encounter. Escobar (2008) asserts that conflict between cultures is “often the reflection of underlying ontological differences, that is, different ways of understanding the world and, in the last instance, different worlds” (14). I would concur with this observation with the sole exception that 'different worlds' constitute the *first instance* of divergent understanding. Blaser (2010) uses the words 'ontologies' and 'worlds' interchangeably, as ontologies “must be understood as the total (i.e., including discursive and nondiscursive) enactments of worlds” which are “neither true nor false” and in which each “have there own criteria for defining truth”(3). In the colonial encounter, to speak of worldviews is therefore misleading, as the phrase implies multiple views of one world; present in ontological multiplicity are different views of separate 'worlds'. Relational ontologies, common to Indigenous knowledges, are understandings of reality that “subvert[s] modernist subject–object distinctions” (Noble, 2007: 343).

The idea of 'third space' opens a theoretical window for multiple ontologies to coexist. Homi Bhaba (1994) advocates “negotiation” over negation, where “theory becomes the *negotiation* of contradictory and antagonistic instances that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects, and between theory and practical-political reason” (37-38). The spatial product of hybridity is what Bhaba coins “third space” (39), an idea that Soja (1996) develops in his discussion of spaces that are “simultaneously real and imagined and more” (11). From a critical decolonial perspective, the idea of hybridity can be problematized. First, the notion of hybridity contains a semantic (from genetics) link to the source polarities it seeks to overcome, and thus might not truly escape them. For example, practices of radical Algonquin culture that emerge within and transform colonial spaces might constitute a hybrid third space, but how does the theory of hybridity account for the fact that there is, according to Battiste and Henderson (2000: 35), no word in Algonquin thought that corresponds to the conception of culture? Second, the absence of a practical and clear demarcation between negotiation and negation runs the risk of slippage into negation and, as stated above, cognitive assimilation. As Escobar (2008) observes, ontological differences are “more patently clear” when Indigenous life-worlds are at stake; however, while Indigenous knowledges are “increasingly recognized [...] they are rarely incorporated into program and project design” (14-15). This suggests that post/constructivist theorizations of political ecology may stray too far from realist, historical critiques that constitute earlier formulations of critical political ecology.

Groundwork for a decolonial political ecology begins with the premise that the presence of multiple ontologies within any placed-based political struggle poses serious challenges for the deployment of theory. If ontology concerns what exists as real, and theory, writ most simply, provides a model for the interpretation of what exists as real, then how does a given theory manage multiple realities that by definition might well be

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incompatible, or even incommensurable? A theory that proposes to resolve ontological incommensurability through closure, i.e., by conflating one reality into another, cannot be anything but colonizing and destructive in its impact. Historically, this teleological process constitutes the backbone of the project of modernity: the dialectical and evolutionary transformation of Eurocentric knowledge through conflict with the Other, negation of the reality of the Other, and resolution through syncretic absorption of Otherness into the dominant order of things. This quest for the domination of non-Eurocentric knowledges has been coined as “ontological imperialism” by Levinas (1969: 44) and “cognitive assimilation” by Battiste (1986). As a result, any epistemology that imposes a truth claim upon the ontological status of 'nature' and 'culture' and the relationship between the two cannot form the core of a political ecology analytic.

As a theoretical jumping-off point from Escobar, I contend that a postconstructivist approach has the potential, and in some cases an ethical responsibility, to become a *reconstructivist* political ecology—of which the present case study could arguably be a fitting example. In the presence of multiple ontologies, a decolonial political ecology could seek less to 'explain' phenomena and instead endeavour to locate opportunities for dialogical politics within “the primacy of context” (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1987: 8). It should be able to recognize multiple ontologies and open up avenues for a “politics of becoming” involving “new ways of being” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 51). A reconstructivist approach could identify possible opportunities in the social practice of productive resistance, in tactical and strategic options for success in the movement, and in ways of gaining greater recognition and political opportunities for more effective public participation in social change. This practice would be a dialogical process of knowledge sharing, imagining decolonized futures, and co-creating new metaphors to describe such futures and political avenues to attain them.

Decolonial political ecology is *reconstructivist* because it seeks to privilege alliance and community over difference and factionalism. The formulation presented here does not prescribe an epistemological 'safety net'—a deliberate omission that is consistent with the previous discussion of multiple ontologies. In fact, the particulars of the present case study are the driving force behind my effort to locate, understand, and convey an approach to a practical political ecology that is decolonial but not too rigid. There are, however, signposts or guidelines that could be proposed that would allow this approach to adapt to other case studies.

First, a decolonial political ecology is narratological. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) stresses how necessary it is for Indigenous researchers to “demystify knowledge and information” and speak “in plain language to the community” (161). This appeal, of course, applies to non-Indigenous researchers too. Storytelling is, moreover, the vehicle for the transmission of knowledge of life, land, and ecological relations within Indigenous ontologies (Battiste and Henderson, 2000: 10). The findings of the research process may even inform 'counterwork' by offering alternative narratives to support community-based projects.

Second, the focus of analysis should be on description, ideally “thick description” (Geertz, 1973: 6) of the ontologies that constitute the site of study, rather

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than on hermeneutics, filtered through critical theorizations. This is a key specification borrowed from Flyvbjerg's (2001) methodology of phronetic research. The goal of decolonial political ecology is not to avoid analysis of power and rationality within a situated context, but to accept the presence of multiple ontologies and seek to maintain a focus of pluralistic realism in the explication of rationality and power.

Third, a decolonial political ecology places its analytic focus on practices and how practices in place constitute the ontologies that shape social relations between and among people and place. In order to be able to conceive of decolonial projects (i.e., 'counterworks') and open-up spaces for such projects to come into being, practices must be changed. Anna Peterson (2001: 239) writes: “We need alternatives both to the idealistic hope for a straight line from ideas to practice and to the cynical notion that no such line exists.” What I hope to achieve with this conceptual framework is to highlight how the relationship between ideology and practices is complex and bidirectional. By examining practices, I find it easier to 'keep it real' and be mindful of Petersen's caution to avoid the traps of dualism.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, a decolonial political ecology contains a strong ethical bias of intersubjective sensitivity. Relationality involves locating and nurturing common connections (to each other, to land, to non-human life and entities) even, and perhaps especially, in the presence of political difference. I find inspiring not only the ethics of Elder Commanda (see Chapter 5) but also the “dialogics” of Freire (1970), a balance of reflection and practice rooted in love, trust, humility, hope, faith, and critical thinking (87-124). In working with narrative and description, it is important to “recognize particularity and contingency, honour difference and otherness, and cultivate local capacity” (Gibson-Graham, 2003: 51). Appropriate levels of respect and responsibility are ingredients of what Wilson (2008) terms 'relational accountability'. The foregrounding of the ethical responsibility to honour and protect the alterity of the Other will contribute to the praxis of the decolonization of the mind (Bell, 2008). Such an intersubjective sensitivity emerges from this research, and as an ethical standpoint, it may contribute to political possibilities while also offering resistance to closure.

To summarize, in the preceding discussion I have attempted to lay down groundwork for a reconstructive decolonial political ecology. The emergence of multiple and relational ontologies within discourses in which politics and ecology intermingle decentres modern colonial knowledge paradigms. The main thrust of anti-colonial work has been to make possible this decentring through deconstructive criticism. There is, however, an opportunity to occupy the fissures opened-up by deconstruction and forge new spaces in which multiple and relational ontologies may coexist. Decolonial practices seek to achieve more just relations not only among human populations but also between humans and the places they inhabit. A decolonial political ecology needs to be productive of such spaces, and the work of MCD research group is particularly helpful in this regard. The ideas of counterwork and border thinking complicate the dualism inherent within modernity/coloniality and create opportunities for decolonial projects that comprise both alternative and alternatives to modernity. A genealogical survey shows how scholarly formulations of political ecology have taken a turn from epistemic foundations and are moving toward considerations of multiple,

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relational ontologies. The proposed decolonial political ecology framework presented in the above responds to the conceptual demands of this turn.

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Chapter 3: Phronetic research methodology

In *Making Social Science Matter,* Bent Flyvbjerg (2001: 85) cites a metaphor that Ludwig Wittgenstein conceived to describe narratology, an approach to philosophical inquiry. To introduce this chapter, I reproduce it here, since it is a fitting description of how the research design of this case study will unfold:

> In teaching you philosophy I'm like a guide showing you how to find your way round London. I have to take you through the city from north to south, from east to west, from Euston to the embankment and from Piccadilly to the Marble Arch. After I have taken you many journeys through the city, in all sorts of directions, we shall have passed through any given street a number of times – each time traversing the street as part of a different journey. At the end of this you will know London; you will be able to find your way about like a born Londoner. Of course, a good guide will take you through the more important streets more often than he takes you down the side streets; a bad guide will do the opposite. In philosophy I'm a rather bad guide.[6]

Wittgenstein's tour guide analogy aptly describes the methodological approach to case study research that I employ in this thesis. I too make a rather poor guide – if reader expectation is to be shown the main streets of what is potentially a paradigmatic case study. In this chapter, however, what I do offer is an approach to case study research that complements a decolonial political ecology. I do not promise a one-to-one correspondence between theory and evidence but rather present a 'map' and a 'territory' that are mutually informing. This encourages the reader to ponder an answer to the question, 'What is this case actually a case of?'. Each reader will obtain a unique resolution to this question, which I contend is part of an ongoing dialogical process of envisioning a decolonial politics.

The present chapter begins, in Section 3.1, with a reflective statement concerning my position and location as author, with the aims of offering the reader a sense of the origin of the claims in this thesis, as well as reaffirming the partial and contingent nature of these claims. I situate myself within The Circle of All Nations community and as an ally within the urban Indigenous community in the Ottawa area. Section 3.2 describes phronetic social research, the approach to case study investigation championed by Danish social scientist Bent Flyvbjerg and the methodological framework I have drawn upon for the present case study. I discuss the contextual, situational ethics involved in the practice of phronetic research, and delineate how a genealogical approach compliments this practice. Section 3.3 closes the chapter with an outline of the methods by which I gathered evidence to construct this case study inquiry.

3.1: Reflexivity, bias, and positionality of the author

The practice of relational accountability demands that, as author and researcher, I situate myself ethically, politically, and ontologically within the present work. But even

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[6] Gasking and Jackson, 1967, p. 51)

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though I emphasize the presence of ontologies within this research, my thesis is an argument, and every argument has a definite epistemological orientation. To avert 'cognitive imperialism', I assert that all knowledge claims of this thesis as well as the standpoint of its author are contingent, partial, and situated. Since I adopt a view of pluralistic realism that accepts the validity of multiple ontologies, I concur with Gibson-Graham's (1994) assertion that "there is no prior [sole] reality or unified identity to gain access to or to be created by research" (214).[7]

Through this research, I endeavour to construct a narrative—one that I offer to be included in the ongoing story of Asinabka, if accepted by my interlocutors within The Circle of All Nations community. Freire (1970) writes: "It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours" (96). The practices of research and writing are components of a much greater dialogue that is decolonization. As Turner (2006: 109) argues, a postcolonial future for Canada cannot be created without the participation of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are actively engaged in dialogical political processes. Thus, this thesis is an engagement with a dialogical process that extends beyond academic discourse and into the public sphere of decolonial political deliberation. Given the present mode of communication, my arguments and propositions are offered with humility, with the understanding that my view of the world as limited and unique—but not inherently more valuable than any other.

I agree with Fiona Smith (1996) who argues that the "translation" of local knowledges into academic knowledges disrupt author and meaning transparency, open-up "new spaces of insight, of meaning which dis-place, de-centre the researcher's assumption that their own language is clear in its meaning" (163).[8] Fiona Smith adds that "as a writing strategy [translation] demands that differences, tensions and conflicts are explored, not as problems, but as spaces of conceptual and indeed political opportunities and negotiations' (1996: 165). As a participant within the political community I study, I take a stand on what decolonization ought to entail. Accordingly, I intend that this work be read as a partial and provisional narratology' – an incomplete, not entirely lucid, and hopefully transparent collision of researcher and research that lends itself to transformation and revision by its interlocutors. I do not claim to hold an illusory scientific objectivity; i.e., a "view from nowhere" (Fine 1994; Nagel 1989), although my training as a scholar and positionality as a white male of privilege may interrupt this claim though my use of language and rationality. I expect and welcome challenges to any truth claims I make in this research. I consider such challenges and the ensuing dialogue to be part of the democratic political process of continually creating and recreating community. This space reflects my own tenuous subject-position as a political being, and my knowledge claims as inherently biased. My view is entirely 'from somewhere', and thus a brief autobiographical account of my arrival into

7 Due to its origin within non-relational ontologies, I am reluctant to offer a statement of fact on my position as an 'insider' or 'outsider' relative to my subject of study. I will allow my interlocutors to assess my location if they deem it significant.

8 'Translation' between ontological frameworks set in a common language is arguably more problematic than translation between different languages because the subject of referents are too hastily assumed.

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this work as researcher is warranted.

I am marked as a middle-aged, middle-class, white male of privilege—and a great deal of privilege considering my publicly-funded vocation as a scholar attending an institution of higher learning built upon unceded Algonquin land. I am not a landowner, although I do benefit from resources drawn from Algonquin land. I do not identify as Indigenous, and I choose not to label myself a 'settler', although I have done so in the past.[9] My engagement with Asinabka began with my first contact with the Circle of All Nations in 2002, when I attended my first summer gathering at Elder William Commanda's home at Lake Bitobi in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (near Maniwaki, Quebec). I have attended yearly since. I have contributed research to The Circle of All Nations and facilitated a well-received workshop at the 2008 gathering. During the summer of 2002, I was also introduced to local Algonquin Elder Jim Albert and Cree Elder Irene Lindsay. Together, the two elders conduct monthly sweat-lodge ceremonies in Lanark County, Ontario, which I began to attend regularly. In 2003, I was invited by Elder Jim Albert to sit as executive secretary of the board of directors of Kina Kachige Nimik, an Indigenous cultural centre proposed for Carleton Place, Ontario.[10] Over the years, I have participated in and volunteered time and resources to a number of local Indigenous events and activities. My story as a participant within The Circle of All Nations will be addressed within the narratology in the forthcoming chapters.

Fausto-Sterling (2000) cites Nigerian anthropologist Oyeronke Oyewumi, who argues: “by writing about any society through a gendered perspective, scholars necessarily write gender into that society.... Thus scholarship is implicated in the process of gender-formation” (20). Oyewumi refers to a specific case of how a focus on the axis of gender reconfigures the results and contaminates the integrity of an ethnography by misrepresenting Yoruba culture, a culture that privileges seniority instead of gender. This is a translation problem that I dearly hope to avoid replicating in the present work. Even though I am a participant within the community of study, and despite my stated intent to declare bias, partiality, and partial knowledge, I am writing *on* a decolonial perspective *through* the scholarly practice of a masters thesis *from the standpoint* of a practice of privilege. To what extent I am writing colonialism into the subject of my research will be a matter for my readers to adjudicate. I do admit, however, that it may not be possible for me to completely escape doing so.

The next subsection addresses the methodological foundations of this case study and the methods I employed to gather and analyze evidence to support my overall research objectives.

3.2: Phronetic research and situational ethics

I turn to Flyvbjerg’s (2001) program of phronetic social science to act as a methodological guide for this research. As I endeavour to explain below, phronetic

[9] The term 'settler' resonates cognitively and politically with the hegemonic and violent function of Canada as a settler state. I acknowledge my privilege as a resident upon unceded Algonquin land and as a descendant of actual persons who settled in Upper Canada.

[10] Problems with securing start-up and operational funding warranted the dissolution of the project in 2004.

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research, by means of its focus on historical detail, practices, and narratives, contains the potential for advancing emancipatory projects by "find[ing] avenues to praxis" (Flyvbjerg 2001: 140). Phronetic research also shares important methodological principles with Indigenous approaches to knowledge and understanding. I choose to not integrate phronetic research with (and thus possibly co-opt) Indigenous methodologies, but instead modify it to incorporate decolonial principles. The narratology of phronetic research, as I try to show, when augmented to privilege dialogical understandings and reconciliation, contains powerful methodological tools for a practical decolonial political ecology (explored in Chapter 2).

Phronetic social science is an approach to case study inquiry developed by Danish social scientist Bent Flyvbjerg (1998; 2001). While this approach has received much scholarly debate (c.f. Flyvbjerg 2004b; 2006; and Schram and Caterino 2006), it is not the purpose of this chapter to enter into those arguments; rather, my intent is to summarize the approach. Later in this chapter, I will argue for its appropriateness as an approach to contextual decolonial research and how phronetic research complements the proposed framework for decolonial political ecology. In his summary of phronetic social science, Flyvbjerg asserts (2001: 140):

> In so far as political situations become clear, they get clarified by detailed stories about who's doing what to whom... Such clarification is a principal concern for phronetic social science and provides the main link to praxis. Phronetic social science explores historic circumstances and current practices to find avenues to praxis. The task... is to clarify and deliberate [on] the problems and risks we face and to outline how things may be done differently, in full knowledge that we cannot find ultimate answers to these questions or even a single version of what the questions are.

The seedbed for Flyvbjerg's phronetic research can be found in his study of the Aalborg Project (Flyvbjerg 1998; 2001: 144-161), the result of urban planning in the Danish city of Aalborg. In short, the context of his study was a conflict between two factions of municipal transportation planning authority: (1) the public sector interest and the need for reduced automotive traffic and increased environmental sustainability; and, (2) the private sector interest and the dependence of business on automotive traffic. Flyvbjerg's genealogical study of the project revealed there were two forms of rationality and power struggling to achieve diametrically opposed desired outcomes. While a full explication of Flyvbjerg's discoveries is beyond the scope of this work, what is most important is how a deep and detailed investigation into a single project delivered a thorough understanding of how power and rationality impacted democratic processes and structured the planning and implementation of a particular vision for the site.

In Flyvbjerg (2001), the front section of his work considers the history of the philosophy of science; specifically, how social research has historically attempted to attain the predictive bias of the natural sciences. For this reason, the validity of single case studies to be informative of general principles has been doubted. Drawing upon

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Aristotle's *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, Flyvbjerg argues for and proposes guidelines for a pragmatic research methodology of the ethics of the possible. Phronesis is practical wisdom, in which the focus is placed on analysis, with the understanding that all knowledge is partial and situated. Phronetic research takes a case in context, examines practical matters of where the situation is going, whether is it a desirable direction, whether a better alternative is possible, and may even claim a normative stance on what ought to be done. Ideally, the practice of phronesis aims to transcend the duality of the general/concrete by exploring the minutiae of historical detail that constitute context. As Rorty (1999) contends, the "appropriate intellectual background to political deliberation is historical narrative rather than philosophical or quasi-philosophical theory... It is the kind of historical narrative which segues into a utopian scenario about how we can get from the present to a better future" (231). The question of 'How can we get there?' is of course charged with political value. Not only does the 'how' bear upon questions of power and democratic process, but also the struggle over who counts in the 'we' and the assumptions inhering in the imagined future that is located in the 'there'. In the case of Asinabka, Flyvbjerg's key questions of "Where are we going? Is it desirable? And what should be done?" (2001: 130), will yield different answers depending upon which narratives are taken into account, whose stories are being heard, and where their interests lie. Rather than prescribing a rigid methodology of social inquiry, Flyvbjerg offers a series of methodological guidelines to direct the research process, a summary of which follows.

For phronetic research, inquiry focuses on questions of values and power, that is, the situational ethics of the "socially and historically conditioned context" (Flyvbjerg 2001: 130). Attention is paid to both structure and process: not only who has power and why, but how they use it. Archival research offers a deep and detailed study of historical narrative—practices are understood as events that provide concrete examples of how power works and with what consequences. Agents and structures are understood to inhabit each other, so the stories elicited by practices will answer questions about what structural factors influence individual choices and actions, how these actions are understood and constructed, as well as their structural consequences (Flyvbjerg 2001: 137). Therefore, a deep historical study of the stories that create a site, events, and actor relationships all form the narratology of context. Evidence consists of examples and detailed stories of how power and rationality operates and to what effective outcomes; accordingly, it is then possible to suggest how rationality and power may be influenced to change and enable alternative outcomes (Flyvbjerg 2001: 140). This process of opening-up and extending the narratology of a case study resonates with the practice of counterwork, politically articulated practices of alterity [see Escobar (2008), above]. Another essential element of this research approach is dialoguing with "a polyphony of voices, with no one voice, including that of the researcher, claiming final authority" (Flyvbjerg 2001: 139). Dialogical narratology embodies "the practical rationality of phronesis... based on a socially conditioned, intersubjective between-reason [*dia-logos*]" (140). The outcome of phronetic research is a pragmatic interpretation of the studied practices.[11]

[11] Flyvbjerg's work has been the subject of intensive scholarly debate, but I choose not to include this

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As demonstrated by Flyvbjerg's (1999) earlier account of the Aalborg Project, a single case study, if investigated deeply and comprehensively enough, can offer a paradigmatic intervention into understanding commonplace configurations of rationality and power. It is a result the proposed study of Asinabka hopes to achieve. Phronetic research, as an analytic project, is well suited for this task, since I make the assumption that the predominant rationality shaping the context of power at Asinabka is coloniality. Flyvbjerg's (2004a: 430) pedagogical question, "What is this case a case of?", immediately calls forth the tension that exists between two contextual understandings of placemaking: (1) the colonial history, past and present, of Victoria and Chaudière Islands, and (2) the continuity since before European contact of Asinabka as an Indigenous place. To invoke pluriversal realism, this case is plausibly a case of the historical subjugation of Indigenous ontology by an exogenous colonial ontology. I first asked 'How so? How has this subjugation worked in the past, and how does it work today? Most importantly, what should we do about it?'. This line of questioning led me to commit to conducting a genealogical analysis to inform the story of the case.

Genealogy is concerned with the emancipation of subjugated knowledges, and seeks to achieve this result through study of "the power-knowledge nexus, a collection of practices, discursive and non-discursive, in which truth is produced" (Oksala 2010: 456). Subjugated knowledges, for Foucault (1980), consists of two dimensions. First, it has always been the task of critical scholarship to examine totalizing thought systems and to facilitate the emergence of buried historical contents. These knowledges are "blocs of historical knowledge" that have been "buried" and "disguised" in "functionalist and systematizing thought" (81-82). Erudite knowledge is "meticulous" and "exact historical knowledge" (82). The second dimension of subjugated knowledges are "local memories" (82). Disqualified and erased by dominant discourses, these "particular, local, regional", "differential", and "specific" knowledges that are "incapable of unanimity" and share "no common meaning" (82). Subjugated knowledges, however, do share one commonality: each emerges though struggle, and each represents a site of resistance. Foucault defines genealogical research as "the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (83). With the strict emphasis on historical content and local understanding, the work of genealogy stands opposed to the generalizations of dominant discourses; conversely, "genealogy... requires patience and a knowledge of details... [It] rejects that metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for origins" (Foucault 1984: 76-77). Thus, I argue that genealogy is well suited to decolonial analytics, because colonial historical discourse is a master-narrative—a regime of truth making constituting the myth of progress. The colonial narrative writes over subjectivities, land, and nationhood. Genealogy disrupts this meaning-making history and brings into visibility liberates knowledges, subjectivities, and ways of being that have been and continue to be subjugated by the statements and practices of colonialism. Genealogy also reveals place as a site of struggle, rather than as a pre-given geographic component of modernity.

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argumentation in this thesis. I refer the reader to Schram and Caterino (2006).

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Gibson-Graham asserts: “One of the avowed strengths of a spatial genealogical method is its ability to reveal the constitutive contingencies of history and geography, dispelling any sense of necessary unfolding” (2006: 49). It is through this strength that an 'ethics of the possible' is indeed possible. A genealogical analysis provides a means to excavate and perceive the relations of power that constitute the tension that exists between the spatial ontologies of Asinabka and Victoria and Chaudière Islands, and at the same time leverage this tension to contribute to a dialogical, contextual politics of hope and possibility.

Having detailed the methodological framework I employed for this research, I will now recount the specific methods I used to gather information about this case study, the relevance and adequacy criteria for information selection, and limitations I have identified as having an impact on the formulation of this case study.

3.3: Content acquisition, selection, and analysis

The colonial history of the Victoria and Chaudière Islands has been well documented within archival material, including: autobiographical accounts of early explorers and settlers, historical accounts of the establishment of the lumber industry in Bytown (early Ottawa), as well as within scholarly historical research (most of which lacks explicit criticism of coloniality). The wealth of these source materials were located within national and local public archives and libraries, including the Library and Archives Canada and the Ottawa Room of the Ottawa Public Library Central Branch. For materials pertaining to the transformation of the site during the latter half of the twentieth century to the present, the National Capital Commission (NCC) Library proved most useful as a source of information. The resurgence of Indigenous political autonomy at Asinabka led to a proliferation of public statements from government and corporate institutions and also media texts such as journalistic reports, editorials, op-ed stories and letters, all of which constitute an important aspect of the narratology of the site.

The decolonial counter-narrative emerged with the coalescence of The Circle of All Nations and the political organizing initiated in 1969 by Elder William Commanda and his allies. The Circle of All Nations is a loosely-organized collective, but William Commanda and his colleague and assistant, Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo, have patiently accumulated a vast archival database of documentary community contributions on The Circle of All Nations' websites: www.asinabka.com and www.circleofallnations.ca. Researchers and videographers have published biographical material on the life and teachings of Elder Commanda. I have relied heavily on these sources to convey the story of Asinabka. To enliven the narratology of the case study, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with participants in The Circle of All Nations. I anticipate criticism that the dialogical theme of my chosen methodology warranted interviews with a greater number of participants. Such an expectation is grounded in the premise that the quality of narratology varies in proportion to sample size. I disagree with this assumption. The narratology of this research is partial and fragmentary (as delineated in my preceding sub-section on reflexivity) and is not presented as representative of the participant community. The interview data I inject

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into the narratology is information-rich, descriptively thick, and focuses primarily on practices. Also, I must contend with space limitation, and, since I am including substantive auto-ethnographic material, a smaller, more intimate 'talking circle' within this thesis reflects the practice of intersubjective sensitivity, as due respect and consideration is given to the participants. A greater sampling would necessitate a reduction in the depth of participant presence within the narratology, unsuitably amplifying my own voice as a result. Finally, I include in the data an auto-ethnographic narrative and reflection on my eight years of participation within The Circle of All Nations, with a particular focus on the annual spiritual gatherings on Lake Bitobi in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. Having summarized the data sources that inform my analysis, the following subsection explains how sources were put together to explicate relevant information.

The ontology of 'narrative and storytelling' does not appear to complement the ontology of 'data and analysis', since I view the former as having literary origins and the latter as scientific. But the presence of such a problem is fitting considering the pluralistic realism of this thesis. Nevertheless, in my review of texts and transcripts, I needed to maintain a reference-point in mind for what might constitute meaningful narratological content. Guided by the focus of phronetic research on values and power, while centring primarily on practices, I investigated the accumulated texts for both recurring and unexpected themes. I also endeavoured to locate and identify evidence of ontologies that contribute to dialogical political processes, in keeping with the conceptual framework of this research. To identify an ontology, I examined narratives for descriptions and assumptions, both explicit and implicit, of what exists as real in the world. By means of the dialogical practice of narratology, this research contains a reconstructive character by locating and privileging themes of relationality, hope, and the politics of possibility within and across the ontologies that comprise the context of the case.

To revisit Wittgenstein's metaphor given at outset of this chapter, I must stipulate that, rather than a tour of London, this thesis is a brief and specialized excursion of two small islands on the Ottawa River. In fact, it may be more of an 'incursion' than excursion – we are going down only a few 'streets', but in the process, you will discover a secluded, welcoming, and diverse neighbourhood with excellent vantage points from which one can see the watchful eye of the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the regnant gaze of the Supreme Court of Canada, and the looming spectre of Parliament Hill. I fully expect my interlocutors to retrace and review the steps along this journey, suggest routes down different paths, and expand on this work – all as constituent practices of decolonial, dialogical narratology.

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Chapter 4: The Circle of All Nations' campaign to prevent redevelopment of the Chaudière dam site.

In this chapter, I present a narratological account of The Circle of All Nations' two-year (2006-2008) struggle to prevent Domtar from upgrading the hydroelectric potential of its Chaudière Island facility. A significant part of the story of this struggle is the persistent effort of Elder Commanda to attain a simple and reasonable goal: to convince the Ontario government to elevate the project to an Individual Environmental Assessment (IEA). That goal was never achieved, but had it been, the participatory processes built into an IEA would have enabled The Circle of All Nations to further advance Elder Commanda's vision for Asinabka. However, the government had given stamp of approval for the project long before anyone in The Circle of All Nations was aware of the proposed development. Early in 2006, GENIVAR, an engineering firm, was hired by Domtar to prepare an Environmental Screening Report (ESR). This ESR became the evidence upon which the Ontario government founded its decision to allow the project to proceed. The treatment of Indigenous concerns and interests within the ESR is the point of departure to begin this narratology. Section 4.1 analyzes the Environmental Screening Report, its omissions, and the governmental rationality that produced it and also erased the concerns of what is arguably a significant stakeholder group, The Circle of All Nations. Section 4.2 describes The Circle of All Nations' two year campaign to be heard as stakeholders in the proposed upgrade of the industrial hydroelectric facility on Asinabka. In this section, the evidence I present highlights the schism between the relational ontology of The Circle of All Nations and the divisive ontology of government rationality.

4.1: A surprising development in the works

The political, legal, and economic status of Chaudière Island and the upstream ring dam is a jurisdictional quagmire. In terms of land ownership and use, Chaudière Island is mix of federal (Crown) land, managed by the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), and private land and industrial infrastructure, owned and managed by Domtar Corporation. Domtar has been the owner of the hydroelectric facility on Chaudière Island since acquiring the E. B. Eddy properties from George Weston Co. in 1998 for over $800 million CDN ("Domtar adds Eddy" 1998: 1). Through the administration of PWGSC, the Crown owns the hydraulic lots along the perimeter of Chaudière Island and leases them to Domtar. The entire island is restricted to industrial use, and public access is prohibited. Three principal parties share responsibilities for managing the dam, maintaining and setting water levels (portion of interest in parentheses): Hydro Ottawa Holding Inc. (17/60 = 28.33%); Hydro-Quebec (20/60 = 33.33%); and Domtar Inc. (23/60 = 38.33%). These principals operate and maintain the dam under the corporate entity known as Chaudière Water Power Inc.. The City of Ottawa owns Hydro Ottawa Holding Inc., while a subsidiary of Hydro Ottawa Holding Inc., Energy Ottawa, owns and operates two of the hydroelectric generating plants below the falls on the Ontario side.

Politically, the interprovincial Ontario-Quebec border runs along the river channel north of Chaudière Island, situating the island within the city of Ottawa, but at

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the western edge of the island, the interprovincial border dips to the south, with the result that the Chaudière ring dam lies entirely within the city of Gatineau in the province of Quebec. The interprovincial border bisects the Chaudière Falls and cuts across the service platform on the concrete penstocks that join the ring dam to Chaudière Island. For the National Capital Commission (NCC), the entire island and the waters of the Ottawa River fall within the category of partnership land, in which there is an ongoing federal role and involvement. The NCC considers the Domtar properties to form part of a 'National Interest Land Mass' – "a category of lands that are key to building the Capital over the long term." (G. Dionne, personal communication, June 7, 2011); however, the NCC and Domtar have no lease arrangements. The ring dam, however, is excluded from NCC jurisdiction (ibid.). The island, waters, and the dam also exist within the Census Metropolitan Area of Ottawa-Gatineau, the only of its kind in Canada to fall within two provinces. Since its acquisition of the facility in 1998, Domtar made no major investments in the Chaudière hydroelectric infrastructure. But in August 2006, the pulp and paper company had announced a merger with global giant Weyerhaeuser, a deal amounting to $3.3 billion US.

Earlier that year, Domtar hired a private engineering consulting firm, GENIVAR, to prepare an Environmental Screening Report (ESR) to redevelop the hydroelectric potential of Chaudière Island for a planned refurbishment of the facility (GENIVAR 2006). The proposed refurbishment involved substantial renovation of the existing plant to achieve an increase in power generation capacity. The plant, which had not undergone any major renovations in ninety years, held a power generation capacity of 9 MW, and the planned upgrade would increase the generating capacity of the plant to 28 MW (GENIVAR 2006). In September 2006, the ESR was published, and at some point afterwards, a copy of the report was deposited for public viewing at four Ottawa Public Library locations.

At the end of October 2006, a member of The Circle of All Nations stumbled upon a public notice published in the *Ottawa Citizen* that referred to the approval of the ESR and forwarded the notice to Romola Thumbadoo. On November 3-5, 2006, a grassroots network, the Indigenous Cooperative on the Environment, held a *Water Life* workshop in Ottawa to cultivate capacity to support the revitalization of the watershed of the Ottawa River. This workshop was facilitated by Elder Commanda. During the workshop, Thumbadoo announced the existence of the ESR and the planned redevelopment of the Chaudière site to workshop participants. As one participant in the workshop noted, "There were many well-educated speakers, both native and non-native, on the issue of the health of the Ottawa River and I can tell you none of them were aware of Domtar's proposal, or the Screening Report until Thumbadoo shared the announcement" (K. Bisson, personal communication, November 13, 2006). The attendees of the workshop are without question stakeholders in the proposed upgrade of Domtar's facility as well as any other modification, industrial or otherwise, to the site of Asinabka. Yet none were approached or consulted by Domtar, nor by any governmental authority prior to this revelation at the workshop. How it is possible that such key stakeholders could be overlooked from the planning process? The answer to this question lies in the choice of technologies deployed within the practice of

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environmental screening to assess the social and environmental impact of the proposed facility upgrade. Following the *Water Life* workshop, a member of The Circle of All Nations located a copy of the ESR that was deposited for public viewing at the Ottawa Public Library Main Branch, copied a selection of pages from the report, and distributed them to members of The Circle of All Nations via its e-mail listserv.[12]

The ESR document (GENIVAR 2006) consists of over one-hundred pages detailing description of the proposed project and the existing environment, followed by an assessment of the impact of the project, discussion of mitigation and impact management, the results of public and agency consultation, and concludes with an evaluation of the environmental advantages and disadvantages of the proposed redevelopment. The stated purpose of the ESR is to:

> … [summarize] details on the anticipated environmental effects of the facility, how Domtar Inc. intends to mitigate these effects, and the results of public and agency consultation. As part of the Environmental Screening Review requirements, a consultation process is underway to provide the opportunity for all stakeholders to voice their concerns (GENIVAR 2006: 5).

The contents of the ESR cite compliance with an array of political technologies governing land use that restrict the impact of industrial environmental modification. The following table (see Fig. 1) presents the regulatory processes that bear (either directly or indirectly) upon this particular proposal, listing the corresponding socio-environmental concern, its attendant political authority, and the technology of governance that defines the scope and value of each concern.

Figure 1: Rationality of the ESR – Regulation of the environment

Social-environmental concern	**Attendant political body**	**Technology of governance**
Use of public land	National Capital Commission (Crown Corporation)	National Capital Act
Alteration of federal land (bridge)	Public Works and Government Services Canada (Canada)	Federal Real Property Policy
Alteration of federal land (lots)	Public Works and Government Services Canada (Canada)	Federal Real Property Policy
Health and safety	Public Works and Government Services Canada (Canada)	Canada Labour Code
Water use and waste water discharge	Ministry of Environment (Ontario)	Ontario Water Resources Act
Atmospheric and noise emissions	Ministry of Environment (Ontario)	Environmental Protection Act
Management of waste material	Ministry of Environment	Environmental Protection Act

[12] I received the e-mail on November 9, 2006. Selected pages scanned from the ESR were attached to the e-mail in .jpg format. I subsequently assembled a .pdf file containing the selected pages in their proper order and forwarded the .pdf file to Thumbadoo.

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	(Ontario)	
Explosive permit	Ministry of Natural Resources (Canada)	Explosives Act
Alteration of riparian zone	Ministry of Natural Resources (Canada)	Public Lands Act; Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act; Conservation Authorities Act
Alteration of fish habitat	Department of Fisheries and Oceans (Canada)	Fisheries Act
Alteration to river access	Transport Canada	Navigable Waters Protection Act
Building and site modification	City of Ottawa	Ontario Building Code Act
Fig. 1: Data compiled from review of Sect 1.6, 'Domtar Construction/Operation Permits and Approvals', in GENIVAR (2006).		

As the contents of the above table illustrate, the political jurisdiction of Chaudière Island materializes in its full complexity when invoking the possibility of material alteration to the infrastructure of the site. No less than eleven pieces of legislation from federal, provincial, and municipal political regimes bear upon the site. Most significantly, not one of the acts listed above contains explicit reference to the concerns of Indigenous peoples.

Later in the report, the ESR addresses the determination, assessment, evaluation of environmental impacts, and outlines “mitigation and net effects” (GENIVAR 2006: 13). Section 4.13 of the chapter, entitled “First Nations”, contains the following (GENIVAR 2006: 87-88):

> The [Federal] Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC)[13] as part of their federal environmental assessment review *notified the Algonquin of Pikwàkanagàn* of the project in January 2006 [italic emphasis added]. In June 2006, PWGSC notified Domtar Inc. in writing that PWGSC would be assessing the likely adverse impacts, if any, that Domtar's project may have on the potential existence of Aboriginal right or title as the administrator of the leased lands to Domtar. The basis of this risk analysis will determine further action with respect to the Crown duty to consult. Domtar Inc. acknowledges that the First Nations [Algonquins of Ontario, Pikwàkanagàn (Golden Lake) community] are a stakeholder in this process. As part of the process, First Nations have been contacted via the public notification process by INAC, and invited to participate. However, they have not participated to date.

[13] In May 2011, after a cabinet shuffle, the federal government changed the title of the department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). At the time of this writing, the federal government is phasing-in the new title. For the sake of clarity, I maintain the use of INAC throughout this thesis, with the sole exception of cases in which I cite material that employs the updated title in its content and/or bibliographic data.

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> Potential effects on land and resources used for traditional purposes by aboriginal persons have been examined by taking into account the Domtar Inc's. knowledge of the study area, reviewing existing information from other sources including the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn website, and identifying potential effects on specific resources. Domtar Inc. is not aware of any current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes by aboriginal persons within the study boundaries. The urban and suburban nature of the study area limits many traditional land uses, including hunting, fishing and the gathering or harvesting of pants for traditional use.
>
> *Net Effects and Mitigation:*
>
> No current use of land and resources for *traditional purposes (hunting, fishing and the gathering or harvesting of plants)* by aboriginal persons, therefore no mitigation measures are required [italic emphasis added].

The sole Indigenous stakeholder identified in the ESR assessment is the Algonquin community of Pikwàkanagàn at Golden Lake, Ont., located over 150 km from the site. No other Anishinabe community, reserve, urban, or otherwise, was identified and reported as a stakeholder, and neither was the community of the Circle of All Nations. In the section 4.3 of this chapter, I will discuss my reasons for evaluating this omission as a serious oversight, but I wish to first address the efforts of the Circle of All Nations to be heard as a stakeholder and to have the project elevated to an Individual Environmental Assessment.

4.2: If nothing changes, nothing changes

When news of the ESR for the Domtar project reached The Circle of All Nations at the *Water Life* workshop during the first weekend of November 2006, it was already over a month since the MOE had approved the screening report, thus giving formal government consent to the project. Not only was the news of the project, with its stamp of approval from the MOE, a shock to participants within The Circle of All Nations community, but the ESR also stated that Domtar, by placing a small notice in the *Ottawa Citizen*, had initiated 'public consultation' on the project in August 2004 (GENIVAR 2006: 101). The first action taken by Elder Commanda and Thumbadoo was to initiate a campaign to have the assessment decision rescinded and the project elevated to an Individual Environmental Assessment (IEA).

During the two weeks following the *Water Life* workshop, Elder Commanda wrote Craig Wood, Project Manager, GENIVAR, and James O'Mara, Director, Environmental Assessment and Approvals Branch (EAAB), MOE. Copies of the letters were posted on the Asinabka website, and a call to action missive was distributed to

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members on The Circle of All Nations mailing list, urging recipients to write O'Mara, as well as the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, and the provincial Lieutenant Governor, James Bartleman ("Campaign to Support Grandfather William", November 27, 2006). Elder Commanda's appeal reasserted his vision for Asinabka (to be elaborated upon shortly), the need for more consultation through the elevation of the project to an IEA. Elder Commanda detailed premises in support of his argument, many of which I will refer to in the following chapter in discussion of the ontological foundation of the vision for Asinabka. In support of Elder Commanda's position, numerous individuals within The Circle of All Nations sent letters to public officials, the content of each either reflects, directly or indirectly, reflects Elder Commanda's understanding of Asinabka as a sacred site, with meaningful connections to water and the surrounding land.[14]

On November 28, 2006, shortly after the letter writing campaign commenced, Elder Commanda secured a meeting with representatives from Domtar and GENIVAR. Elder Commanda's "primary aim was to 'transform them' and convince them of the urgency of the need for a new relationship with Mother Earth and the Waters" ("Re: Domtar Inc.'s project", December 11, 2006). Elder Commanda began his presentation with an Anishinabe smudge ceremony, offered a drum song to honour the water; and presented the CBC animated short, *The Mighty River* (Back 1993), "a mainstream reflection" on the "costs of… unrelenting exploitation of resources of the watersheds" and the "need for reconciliation with nature" ("Re: Domtar Inc.'s project", December 11, 2006). Following the film presentation, Elder Commanda brought forth the wampum belts, speaking of the "values of his ancestors, about interconnection, and about the urgent need for change in our relationships with Mother Earth and each other" (ibid.). He then discussed his vision for Asinabka as a sacred site for peace-building, the campaign to designate the Ottawa River as a heritage river, the need for a broad consultation process with Indigenous peoples on both sides of the interprovincial border, and finally, the need for an elevated IEA and how Domtar, invoking corporate responsibility, could act in a leadership capacity in a "revitalized relationship with Mother Earth" (ibid.). Before the meeting closed, Elder Commanda presented the Domtar and GENIVAR representatives with copies of his book, *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout* (Thumbadoo 2005), and his biographical documentary, *Good Enough For Two* (Pouyanne 2005). Whether Elder Commanda achieved his goal of transforming his counterparts across the table remains to be seen, as, since the meeting, neither Domtar nor GENIVAR voluntarily elevated the project to an Individual Environmental Assessment. Had either party voluntarily elected to elevate the project, there would have been scope for greater public involvement during the assessment process.

During 2007, as the letter writing campaign continued, responses began to trickle in. The first to arrive, on January 4, was a reply from the Office of the Prime Minister. The letter was simply an acknowledgement of the Elder Commanda's concerns and notification that the appeal had been copied to the Ministers responsible

14 The archive of letters, with author names deleted, are reproduced online at ("A Sampling of Letters" 2007).

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for INAC, PWGSC, Transport Canada, and Environment Canada. On January 11, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario replied, “Given His Honour’s non-partisan and non-political role as The Queen’s representative in Ontario, neither he nor his office can comment on the issues you raised in your message” (“Early 2007 Official Responses” n.d.: 3). This statement carries thick irony, considering that, since the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the 'Honour of the Crown' carries partisan and political fiduciary obligations for Canada in nation-to-nation relations, as well as the duty to consult today. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (a portfolio that includes the NCC), Lawrence Cannon, entirely ignored the matter of the ESR. The Minister instead asserted Domtar's ownership of both Chaudière Island and the Falls, iterated the government's “arm's length” relationship with the NCC, then deferred Elder Commanda to the Crown corporation – perhaps to keep the issue at arm’s length as well? A reply from the NCC interim director soon followed, bearing a kind but non-committal message, referring to a future meeting with a future director (AANDC 2011: 9). On February 26th, chief of staff for INAC Minister, Jim Prentice, replied by dismissing Elder Commanda's request for a meeting, and passed him off to another department, since “initiatives *of this kind* fall within the mandate of [PWGSC]” (AANDC 2011: 6; emphasis added). This *kind* of initiative, in my view, is the assertion of Indigenous assertion of title and rights and not a facile objection to federal land use as implied by the INAC minister.

The campaign to generate a positive response from government officials was not getting off to a good start, but Elder Commanda, Thumbadoo, and other participants within The Circle of All Nations continued to actively pursue the elevation of the Domtar file to an IEA. The vision for Asinabka has, since its inception, been a focus for community discussion during the annual The Circle of All Nations spiritual gathering on the first weekend of August. In 2007, the matter of the ESR and its implications for a broader industrial transformation of the site became a topic of great interest. Earlier in the spring, Thumbadoo had asked me to investigate steps that could eventually lead to the removal of the Chaudière dam. In June and July 2007, I researched the subject, prepared a discussion paper, and submitted it to Thumbadoo for review.[15] I facilitated a talking circle at the gathering, the topic focus being the future undamming the Chaudière Falls. About 20 people participated in the circle, and from this workshop coalesced a working group, organized around the theme of Chaudière Falls renewal.[16] It was not until the following spring that the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) replied to the many requests for elevation to an IEA.

On June 6, 2008, Agatha Garcia-Wright, then director of the Environmental Assessment and Approvals Branch (EAAB), conveyed in a detailed 8-page letter that an IEA was not required for the Domtar project. Garcia-Wright provided counterarguments to concerns many appellants raised, including, impact of the project on: water levels; the migration of the American Eel; landscape aesthetics; and archaeology and heritage assets (A. Garcia-Wright, personal communication, June 6, 2008). Addressing the

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[15] See, Smith (2007).

[16] Momentum gained from the workshop, however, slowly declined and vanished, as is too often the case with grassroots organizing. The working group activity ceased by the fall of 2008.

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Anishinabe ceremonial relationship with the Chaudière Falls, Garcia-Wright referred to Domtar plans to incorporate a foot path along the project lands next to the Falls, but that further discussion of the matter of public access and land use planning outside the limits of the project specifics lies within the mandate of the NCC (ibid.). Garcia-Wright also rationalized the adequacy of the ESR procedures with respect to the public consultation process (ibid.). Glaring in its absence from the EAAB letter was any mention of Asinabka, of Elder Commanda and his work, of The Circle of All Nations, or of any other qualitative response to The Circle of All Nations identification of the project site and the surrounding lands as sacred and inherently valued by a large community of stakeholders. The decision was confined to matters that linked directly back to the content of the ESR. Garcia-Wright closed the letter stating that appellants had a fifteen-day window of opportunity to request that the Minister of the Environment review the decision (ibid.). Elder Commanda prepared a final appeal to be delivered to the existing provincial Minister of the Environment, John Gerretsen.

Elder Commanda's appeal to the Minister reiterated the significant issues that drove The Circle of All Nations campaign over what had become a laborious nineteen months of its existence; furthermore, Elder Commanda challenged the lack of respect and recognition for Indigenous concerns within the EAAB decision (Commanda, W., personal communication, June 25, 2008; emphasis added):

> The decision and rationale indicates that the EAAB does not understand the position of the Algonquin Nation in relation to this Sacred Site, for which, as I advised previously, we have developed a vision to share with all people, and to portions of which, we learned on July 12, 2007, Domtar Inc. holds the lease in perpetuity, renewable periodically, for $100 a year.
>
> The Individual Environmental Assessment requested would have offered opportunity for broad discussion on the future of this *most significant area* within the nation’s capital and history with First Peoples and others; and on behalf of *all living creatures* that share this *sacred space,* some being species at risk.
>
> In this regard, please note that the two plants Domtar presently owns are reaching the end of their life spans. New funds will now be required for investment in this new project, while the location comes cheap. As I see it, Domtar has nothing to lose but its dream for new development on space it has occupied for a pittance over the past decade; its losses of late are related to its lumber operations, and we all carry the burden of that legacy. *Indigenous Peoples occupied this site for at least six thousand years*, and I believe our dream is of *potential benefit for all* and demands serious attention.
>
> [...]

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> Finally, I must say that I have made similar points to the ones I raise now in earlier correspondence with your Ministry, and Domtar Inc. *only to see them dismissed, and the status quo affirmed, and it is disheartening to have to repeat this effort.*
>
> [...]
>
> On June 11, 2008, the country apologized to First Peoples for the injustices and abuses of the past, and committed to turn the page on the shameful history.
>
> I hope in this new climate, your Ministry, Domtar Inc. and the NCC will be able to move beyond the limitations of the past and *embrace a new relationship with First Peoples*, and with our vision for the National Capital Region.

Elder Commanda's assertion of an Indigenous ontological perspective, one that values relationality and sanctifies places in which relationships are historically meaningful, anchors the contextual ethics that informed efforts to elevate the project to an Individual Environmental Assessment (IEA) from the start of the campaign in November 2006. Nearly four months later, on October 21, 2008, Minister Gerretsen stood behind the EAAB and affirmed the decision to deny the IEA and allow Domtar to proceed with that project (Gerretsen, J., personal communication, October 21, 2008):

> The interest in undamming the Chaudière Falls is broader than an individual EA that could be imposed on the Domtar facilities for this Project. [...]
>
> The Project area does not include the entire Chaudière Island site, rather it includes a portion related to the replacement of the two existing powerhouses. The remainder of the Chaudière Island is beyond the scope of what would be covered under an individual EA. [...]
>
> Domtar has demonstrated that it has planned and developed the Project in accordance with the provisions of the EA Guide. [...]
>
> Concerns were also expressed that the Director's decision did not consider Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) about eel population levels. The AFN [The Assembly of First Nations] was consulted for this Project by MOE staff. [...] MOE staff are satisfied the AFN has had a direct opportunity to provide ATK but did not do so, the fact that the Director did not consider ATK in making her decision does not make the decision unreasonable. [...]

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> The Director concluded the scope of Domtar's consultation for a project of this type is in keeping with standard ESP practice. [...]
>
> Concerns were raised that your vision for Chaudière Falls was not considered. [...] Following the July 12, 2007 meeting, MOE staff received no further request from you for a meeting to discuss the Project. I am satisfied that as part of her decision, the Director considered your vision and the concerns expressed in your elevation request. [...]
>
> I am therefore satisfied that the purpose of the EAA [Environmental Assessment and Approval], "the betterment of the people of the whole or any part of Ontario by providing for the protection, conservation and wise management in Ontario of the environment", has been met for the Project.

While Gerretsen's letter acknowledges concerns for the recognition of Indigenous knowledge, in his reply to Elder Commanda he does not respond directly to the Elder's concerns. Rather, the context of the issues is shifted away from Indigenous relationality and re-inserted into a governmental rationality that I suggest is non-relational. For example, Gerretsen replies that the “Project area”, is bounded to “a portion” of the island, and that anything beyond that limitation is “beyond the scope” of an Individual Environmental Assessment. His logic, in my opinion, takes Elder Commanda's relational understanding of Asinabka and extracts one aspect – land – and narrows this aspect down to the property limit of the physical project location. I find this circumspect, since other aspects of the Environmental Screening process do suggest broader relationships, such as the impact of the project on water quality, riparian habitat, pollution, and so on. Another problem with the apportioning of land in this regard is that with the development of a sufficient number of “portions”, the entire face of Asinabka could be modified, piece by piece, without a single Individual Environmental Assessment. What I suggest is that there is a deeper rationality at work beneath Gerretsen's logic. I argue that it is a political rationality that might indicate a desire to avert an acknowledgement that Elder Commanda, or any of the Circle of All Nations participants, may be asserting a claim to the land in question. I will now explore this rationality.

I would argue that Anishinabe participants in The Circle of All Nations are legitimate Indigenous stakeholders, regardless of their national affiliation. So too would be Anishinabe residents of the reserve of Kitigan Zìbì, the home community of Elder Commanda and many of his Anishinabe supporters. Every Anishinabeg community within the 146,300 km^2 of the Ottawa River watershed, on both sides of the interprovincial border, arguably holds a stake in Asinabka. Lastly, while the registered membership of Pikwàkanagàn amounts to 1,800, with 400 living in the reserve, Indigenous people in the city of Ottawa number 35,000,[17] any of whom, whether

[17] Sources for population data: “Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn” n.d.; City of Ottawa 2011.

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actively involved in The Circle of All Nations or otherwise, could also claim a stake in the social impact of the transformation of Asinabka. Given that, in my view, there is a broad and diverse constituency of Indigenous stakeholders, how is it possible that the ESR overlooks all but one community, the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn? To answer this question, I return in to the rationalities that govern the ESR process by extending the previous table (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Rationality of the ESR – Indigenous stakeholders

Social-environmental concern	**Attendant political body**	**Technology of governance**
Identification of Indigenous stakeholders	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (Canada)	Indian Act
Evaluation of impacts on *identified* Indigenous stakeholders	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (Canada); jointly with other federal bodies: Health Canada, Treasury Board, Department of Justice, Public Works and Government Services Canada, and the Canada Lands Company (Crown Corporation).	Ontario Environmental Assessment Act; (Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, if and only if there the presence of a 'trigger')

The political technology that governs the environmental screening process of the Domtar facility upgrade is the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act (OEAA) (MOE 2011). The Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) publishes guidelines, in accordance with the OEAA, in order to facilitate the environmental screening of industrial development projects. One such guide pertains specifically to the Domtar project, the *Guide to Environmental Assessment Requirements for Electricity Projects* (MOE 2010). A significant purpose of environmental screening is to identify projects that need to be elevated to an Individual Environmental Assessment (IEA). Factors and conditions that prompt the elevation of a project are referred to as 'triggers' (MOE 2011: 75). One such trigger is the potential that a project will adversely impact Indigenous populations. The guidelines take into consideration the Crown duty to consult Indigenous peoples, as established through Supreme Court of Canada case rulings. To avert overlapping services, this duty is also discharged from the Crown to provincial governments (AANDC 2011: 64). As can be read from above selection from the ESR, Domtar followed procedural guidelines by consulting INAC, with the subsequent result being that INAC plausibly met its obligation to consult, even though Pikwàkanagàn allegedly took no interest in participating in consultation on the project. In September 2006, the MOE, “after taking into consideration the screening report and taking into account the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures” deemed “that the project is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects” and granted full approval for the Domtar project (CEAA 2008). Had the MOE deemed there were sufficient grounds to trigger elevation to an IEA, there would have occurred a subtle but crucial shift in the legislative mechanisms bearing upon the interests and concerns of Indigenous stakeholders in this case. Greater federal government involvement in the

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case could also elevate emphasis on Indigenous concerns and interests.

In The Circle of All Nations efforts to elevate the Domtar project to an Individual Environmental Assessment, the characteristics of these relationships formed the basis of arguments to convince the Ministry of the Environment to reevaluate the assessment. Sadly, the end result of the struggle proved to be a disappointment for Elder Commanda and The Circle of All Nations. In the next chapter, I move the narratology from what was arguably, in the case of the Domtar ESR, a story of struggle and dismay toward a story of hope and reconciliation, in a discussion of the relational ontology, ethics, and practices of Elder Commanda and The Circle of All Nations.

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Chapter 5: A resilient and persistent ethic of responsibility

The Circle of All Nations, as a phrase, carries two distinct meanings. The first meaning refers to Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies who have coalesced into an informally organized collective in support of the teachings and work of the movement's founder, Elder Commanda, supported by the tireless efforts of his friend and The Circle of All Nations coordinator, Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo. The second meaning of The Circle of All Nations, antecedent to the first, is as the key ideological component of Elder Commanda's envisioning of intercultural harmony, as summarized in his declaration for unity and peace (Thumbadoo 2005: 190):

> It was prophesied that the time would come when the voice of Indigenous peoples would rise again after five hundred years of silence and oppression, to light a path to an eternal fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood amongst all nations. We must come together with one heart, one mind, and one determination.

This call for the resurgence of Indigenous peacemaking arises from the hereditary Anishinabe teachings that accompany the three wampum shell belts that Elder Commanda has carried since 1970, as well as from the wisdom he has gained through his personal experience with overcoming illness and a lifetime struggle with the violent impact of colonization. It is a two-fold vision that focuses on: (1) the “healing, strengthening and unification of [Indigenous] peoples” and (2) “the “sharing [of] Indigenous ideology, values and culture with all others, in order to develop a circle of all nations and a culture of peace” (Thumbadoo 2005: 131). In this chapter, I will convey context and narrative to elucidate the current understanding of Asinabka as a place of meaning within the ontology of the Anishinabe peoples, an understanding shared by non-Indigenous supporters of Elder Commanda's work. To begin, I will provide a brief biographical account of Elder Commanda, and the experiences that gave rise to the ideology of the Circle of All Nations. Next, the Circle of All Nations annual gathering is a key affirmation of both the Circle of All Nations ideology as well as the community, and I will present a condensed narrative of my own experience at the Circle of All Nations gatherings as a participant and observer. I will focus in the next section on the significance and relevance of the Anishinabe wampum belts in Elder Commanda's possession. The last two sections address Asinabka, as a ceremonial site, and as a site of colonial encounter: the penultimate section deals with the erasure of Anishinabe practices, while the final section emphasizes their recent resurgence and affirms their necessity.

5.1: A journey from individual to community healing

William Commanda was born at eight o’clock in the morning of November 11, 1913, down the road from his current home on the shore of Bitobi Lake. His mother named him *Ojigkwanong*, which is Anishinabe for ‘Morning Star’, under which he was born.[18] Elder Commanda never went to school. Childhood on an Indian reserve in the early

[18] Biographical findings in this section based on data compiled from: INAC (2004), Ouimet (2000), Pouyanne (2005) and Thumbadoo (2005).

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twentieth century was an education in subsistence level living. The Commanda family spent winters living in the hardwood forests surrounding the reserve. “My father taught me everything: making canoes, sleds, snow-shoes, all in hardwood.”, recalls Elder Commanda, “Nature was my school” (Ouimet 2000). Other teachers came in the form of community elders, many of whom had knowledge of natural medicine. Communal gatherings at campfires were frequent. It is here that Commanda would listen to the elders and learn about his ancestors and the history of his people. Commanda’s father was a hunter-trapper as well as a craftsman, and would bring home moose meat to feed his family. Under the Indian Act, the Anishinabe had few rights and even fewer privileges in the 1920s and 30s. Provincial game wardens would descend upon the food cache and seize the food supply, leaving young William and his family with nothing to eat (Ouimet 2000):

> They chased us around the woods because [the] province rented our trap-lands where we used to hunt to tourists. It wasn’t easy, sometimes not eating for three or four days. Really, when you think of it, it was cruel. And when we went to get fish, we cooked it on the spot, so no one saw. That’s how we got through it. Life was spent hiding things. Serious, yet not serious. At least they let us live. That’s the main thing.

Commanda spent his early adulthood, as many Anishinabe men did then, working in forestry. The lumbermen showed him how to read and write. He became a trapper, a guide, a violinist, a craftsman, and a husband—to Mary Smith. The workmanship and skill demonstrated by William and Mary in building traditional Algonquin birch bark canoes gained them international renown. He also learned how to drink (Ouimet 2000):

> I drank a lot in my day. Everyone was a drunk. I was perhaps the biggest drunk here, on the reserve. But I was never picked-up by the police because I was like a fox. When I bought a bottle of whiskey, I took it in the woods. I’d get drunk in the woods and stay there. No one ever saw me.

In 1943, he met a Huron aboriginal rights activist, Jules Sioui, who became a teacher and a friend. Two years later, Commanda stepped into the political arena with his participation in the North American Indian Nation Government, a body unrecognized by the governments of Canada and the United States. In 1951, he became the Chief of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, a position he would hold for nineteen years; in 1953, he was designated Supreme Chief of the North American Indian Government. In 1956, he accompanied other Indigenous leaders to the United Nations. The pain of a life of poverty and oppression fuelled his pursuit of the restoration of rights and dignity for his people. However, progressive dependence on alcohol and a deep-seated hatred for his oppressors ate away at him from the inside. Elder Commanda laments, “At that time, I hated Whites for what hey did to my ancestors. I was always cursing them. I would’ve caused harm if I could” (cited in Ouimet 2000).

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In 1961, at the age of 47, Ottawa doctors informed Commanda that his body was over-run with malignant cancer and that he had two weeks to live. Commanda returned to his home in Kitigan Zibi. Not long after returning home with a terminal prognosis, Commanda awoke from sleep early one morning and experienced a poignant and transformative personal event (Ouimet 2000):

> I was sleeping on the chesterfield very early in the morning, it was still dark. Through the window, I heard a bird singing outside. It made me cry. I had never experienced crying before. But it did something to me that touched my heart. Very emotional. I asked the Creator to save me. If there was nothing I could do in life, I asked him to take me right away. I wanted to go. I didn't want to live another day, it hurt so much…the cancer spread all over…

Commanda turned his physical care over to his wife, Mary, an herbalist, and to the traditional medicine of healers within his community. Two months later, he returned to an Ottawa hospital to have a tumour on his appendix surgically removed. The doctors found that the cancer had vanished from his body. Elder Commanda attributes this unlikely disappearance of his illness to a change in consciousness that is commonly understood as a spiritual awakening (Ouimet 2000):

> I stopped cursing. I stopped drinking. I stopped doing all the bad things I did before. And above all, the people I hated, when I saw them, I felt for them. I said, poor people, they don't know what they're doing. People don't understand. I'd have helped them any way I could if they asked—done anything to help. But not before then. I had never helped anyone. Things change. The same way I changed lives.

During his recovery, Commanda envisioned reconciliation between his people, the Algonquin, and the Haudenosaunee. In 1969, at his home on Bitobi Lake in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, he hosted the first reconciliation meeting between the two Indigenous groups of nations. Attendance numbered 1,500, including representatives from Indigenous nations across North America. This was the first such gathering since European contact and the first of numerous peace-building gatherings at his home. Dedicating his life to forgiveness and reconciliation, Elder Commanda discovered a life's work (Ouimet 2000):

> For the first time, we were together here with all the Indian Nations from the United States. Then with other races, to bring them together. I saw the whole thing in my vision: speaking with love rather than talking about putting our fists up. That's not the way to do things. Things often get quite heated. But through talking, we all calm down, and we become friends. That's my goal. It's my life.

This inaugural reconciliation gathering marked the beginning of a series of annual

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gatherings at Bitobi Lake. Into the 1970s, however, the political climate in North America became unfavourable to Indigenous political gatherings.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s generated public awareness of injustices inflicted by colonial governments upon Indigenous peoples; at the same time, however, direct political actions staged by organized Indigenous collectives, most notably the American Indian Movement, produced baleful results, such as the infamous 1973 massacre at Wounded Knee. In Canada, not even two decades had elapsed since the 1951 repeal of the 'Potlatch Law', the Indian Act prohibition on Indigenous ceremonial gatherings. The 1969 Canadian government's 'White Paper' on Indian Policy, in its erasure of Indigenous collective rights, overemphasized liberal moral individualism while dismissing the reality of Indigenous nationhood and collectivity (Turner 2006: 23). In 1974, over twenty years before Ipperwash and the murder of Dudley George, the Ojibway Warrior Society, led by Louis Cameron, occupied Anicinabe Park in Kenora, Ontario (Burke 1992). After laying down arms and evacuating the park, Cameron organized the Native People's Caravan, which brought over 800 activists from as far as Vancouver into a violent confrontation with police on Parliament Hill (Burke 1992). Following the demonstration, the Caravan occupied the Carbide Mill building on Victoria Island, establishing a 'Native People's Embassy' at the abandoned NCC site. Occupation continued through the winter of 1975, until a fire made the structure uninhabitable (“Fire destroys old mill.”). It was during this period, that Elder Commanda, inspired by the vision of reconciliation of all peoples, began to host the Circle of All Nations gatherings at his home. Elder Commanda's niece, Verna McGregor, was then a child. McGregor is Anishinabe from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. Her parents were actively involved in the initial gatherings and McGregor recalls the political environment in which Elder Commanda had begun to facilitate the peace gatherings at his home (personal communication, February 24, 2011):

> So even when we were little kids, we would go to William’s gatherings by Bitobi Lake. I was about four or five. My brothers were older, and we'd have all the kids running around from all over.
>
> And what happened is one year the police arrived and they stamped out the fires. So they stopped the gatherings.... There was the fear of gathering, coming together, so I think William has been the most resilient terms of carrying on regardless....
>
> There was a stoppage of our gatherings and the pow-wow gatherings, and that was revived recently too as well a couple years in the 80s when we brought back our traditional pow-wow in the community but also William started having the Circle of All Nations.

As an adult, McGregor has worked to overcome the violence of colonization and has forged a successful career in community healing work and capacity building, bringing Anishinabe understandings to bear on concerns of violence, and especially on issues of violence against women and lateral violence. She is the former National

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Coordinator of the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, which worked to overcome issues of family violence and violence against women, particularly the issue of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women. McGregor has also worked in the field of economic development for First Nations in Canada, at local and national scales (personal communication, February 24, 2011). McGregor's narrative sheds light upon how the collective responsibility within Anishinabe culture to move from violence to healing informs the foundation of the ideology of the Circle of All Nations (personal communication, February 24, 2011):

> There was such a degrading and erasing of the language and culture, and we're still trying to overcome that today, even in the community. So, I could see there was a lot of criticism towards William when he started the Circle of All Nations. I think it's the lateral violence. He was criticized a lot even in our community: 'Why are you bringing in all these non-Native people?' There's still a lot of anger and misunderstanding.... It was my own personal journey as well – having worked at the [Assembly of First Nations] and understanding the issues....
>
> I would be so nervous and I would see William coming in he'd be so calm eh, and... know what I want to be is a good elder. Where you get to that point where you're calm inside when there's so much turmoil going on.
>
> And so... after that, I started reconnecting with the gatherings at William's. I'd go to a lot of the circles... He also relied on my mother for a lot of guidance. So... it's also reconnecting with the traditional understandings and even though there was such a push to erase that and there's still a push to erase the language and culture and the gatherings.

The Circle of All Nations intention of openly sharing with and educating settler peoples carries a dilemma that McGregor alludes to: on one hand, the cross-cultural opening-up and sharing of Anishinabe knowledge fosters the process of peace and reconciliation and constitutes a practice that fulfills a culturally significant Anishinabe social responsibility; on the other hand, the transmission of knowledge from within Anishinabe culture and into the hands of settler communities poses inherent risks – namely, dangers associated with the misuse and distortion of Anishinabe knowledge. The latter prospect is a particular vulnerability, considering how the coherence and integrity of meaning in Anishinabe knowledge is dependent upon Anishinabemowin, the Anishinabe language (Battiste and Henderson 2000: 102-104). Elder Commanda is fluently trilingual, speaking Anishinabemowin, French, and English, and speaks of his knowledge in all three languages when practising ceremonial public sharing.

Clearly, the desire for Indigenous knowledge by outsiders has, as asserted by Brascoupé and Mann (2001), "often been based on relationships that have not always been fair, equitable or beneficial for the community" (7). But the authors do note, however, that "[t]his is changing today. If Aboriginal peoples decide to share their knowledge, they should be able to share it in a way that is consistent with their

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traditions and social values" (Brascoupé and Mann 2001: 7). McGregor validates how Elder Commanda, through envisioning The Circle of All Nations, maintains consistency with traditional Anishinabe practices with respect to the transmission of knowledge (personal communication, February 24, 2011; emphasis in italics added):

> And then I understood too why he had the Circle of All Nations.... It was also this understanding with the Earth and what he was saying is... *if we do not educate people of a different perspective... we're not fulfilling our job or our duties as Anishinabe. The traditional understanding is that we are protectors of the Earth.* And if we do not share our knowledge and then we allow the destruction to continue, we're not doing our duties as Anishinabe.
>
> So that's why I was involved for all these years too as well with the Circle of All Nations. I understand this concept, and this concept is also tied with the Medicine Wheel. Because we get so caught up with our individual day-to-day things that we get our ego all involved.... We forget to see the big picture.... It's drawn people back to the big issue of, for example [in] the Medicine Wheel, where we are all connected with the Earth. So that's where I see this coming. So that's why I've been involved with the Circle of All Nations.

Before engaging in a discussion of the relationship between the Circle of All Nations and Asinabka, I will present a condensed narrative of my own experience at the Circle of All Nations gatherings as a participant and observer, having attended the summer event each year since 2002.

5.2: The Circle of All Nations gathering

Each year, the Circle of All Nations gathering focuses on a particular theme; for example, the celebration of water or of culture. Attendees begin to arrive on the Thursday before the August long weekend. There is a field between Elder Commanda's house and the main road, and as people arrive they set up their tents in the field. On the eastern tip of the property is a point that extends into Bitobi Lake, and nestled into the point is the sacred fire. On Thursday, firekeeper Peter Decontie, a long-time friend and helper of Elder Commanda and Anishinabe member of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, lights the sacred fire, and tends the fire until the gathering closes on Sunday. Circling the sacred fire are benches, and in the eastern direction is an opening that acts as an entrance to the circle. The sacred fire is often the first destination for those arriving: visitors are smudged with sage smoke, an Anishinabe ritual purification ceremony, and tobacco is offered to the fire with prayers. Along the lake shore, between the sacred fire and Elder Commanda's house, can be found a number of sweatlodges that have been built for the gathering. Visiting elders provide this ceremony for any who wish and make the customary offering of tobacco in order to participate. The sweatlodge ceremony can often place focus upon individual healing; however, the guidance of the

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elder typically centres on the relational elements of wisdom, vision, and mutual respect. The space from Elder Commanda's house down to sacred fire and all the lies in between is deemed sacred. All attendees are expected to respect and adhere to protocol for dress and conduct in the sacred space.

Opening each day of the gathering, at sunrise, is the pipe ceremony at the sacred fire. People arrive in darkness at the eastern door of the sacred fire, are smudged by Decontie or his helpers, and find seats upon the benches that circumscribe the circle. The elders enter, spreading their blanket mats out upon the earth, and they take up positions in the western centre of the circle, kneeling or sitting on their blankets, facing east. Elders prepare for the ceremony in keeping with their own cultural tradition. Elders carry medicine: traditional Indigenous knowledge based in natural healing, and the sacred tools to direct the knowledge. Each elder invited into the sunrise ceremony circle are pipe carriers. At first light, before the sun breaks the horizon, Decontie takes a handful of tobacco and, while standing, offers prayers to the spirits inhabiting the east, south, west, north, above, below and within—the seven directions. As Decontie offers prayer, the elders unfurl their medicine bundles and begin private prayer. When Decontie is done, and as the sun breaks the eastern horizon, the elders light their pipes and pray. The pipe has significance that is shared by many Indigenous traditions. The bowl of the pipe represents the female aspect of spirit, the stem the male. The medicine of tobacco is for prayer: when it burns, it carries prayers directly to the Creator. After the pipe ceremony, the senior elders will speak to the circle, and share their wisdom, usually pertaining to the theme of that year's gathering. The central theme of the 2004 gathering, for example, was the importance of water, while other gatherings have focused on the celebration of diversity, sustainable relationships, and on Asinabka.

Community talking circles constitute a central activity in the gatherings. Between the sweatlodges and Elder Commanda's house, a large canopy is erected under which people assemble at scheduled times throughout the weekend. Under the canopy, after the sunrise ceremony and after breakfast, Elder Commanda opens the gathering with a prayer in Anishinabemowin. He then continues with an offer of the prayer in both French and in English. During this address to the gathering, Elder Commanda customarily unfurls the three wampum belts from his medicine bag and delivers his teachings pertinent to each belt. Then the floor is opened to those who have prepared messages and teachings, usually advancing Indigenous knowledge and wisdom, peace-building, social justice, and responsible environmental stewardship. After lunch there are workshops and talking circles under the main tent. This period is an opportunity for community building and organizing around specific themes. Each year, there are four recurring themes that are central to the ideology of the Circle of All Nations: "Indigenous wisdom and respect for Mother Earth, racial harmony, social justice, and peace" ("Grandfather William Commanda's Annual", n.d.).

During my attendance at the gatherings over the past eight years, and particularly since the struggle with Domtar that began in 2006, the subject of Asinabka has increasingly emerged as a central focus for talking circle discussion. In fact, at the 2007 gathering, I facilitated a talking circle on Asinabka centred on my discussion paper (c.f., Smith 2007) concerning the undamming the Chaudière Falls. As the talking

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circles proceed, activities for families and children continue throughout the afternoon, while the elders and their respective firekeepers begin to prepare their sweatlodges for afternoon and evening ceremonies. The elders run consecutive sweat ceremonies well into the night, since each lodge usually holds twenty to thirty people, and hundreds come to wait their turn to sweat. On the Saturday, there is a communal feast made possible by the work of volunteers, food and cash donations, and the generosity of Elder Commanda: “All winter I get my pension, then I use that money to buy food” (Commanda, “Good Enough For Two!”). Saturday evening and into the night there is celebratory drumming and dancing under the cedar arbour that lies between the field in which the gatherers camp and Elder Commanda's residence. On Sunday, the gathering closes in the late morning with a traditional Anishinabe giveaway. Although no one is required to offer a gift, no one is refused a gift if they participate. Gathering attendees spend the remainder of Sunday afternoon packing up their tents and saying farewell to each other.

Based on observation and direct communication with participants during the nine gatherings I have attended, I have found that the Circle of All Nations attracts a diverse community, a majority of whom would not identify as members of an Indigenous community. In 2006, I met a man and woman who travelled from France specifically to attend the gathering, and they have returned each year since. I met a couple from the Netherlands who shared a similar story. I have also spoken with Indigenous women and men who, having experienced assimilation and alienation during their lives, come to the gatherings to reclaim and reassert their Indigeneity as well as to relate their experience to others. And of course there is the annual presence of Indigenous participants, including elders, community leaders, activists, and teachers from across the Americas, many of whom have supported Elder Commanda's work for decades.

As mention above, Elder Commanda is the carrier of three wampum belts that are considered sacred in Anishinabe culture. Each of the wampum belts inform the spiritual, cultural, and political work and teachings of Elder Commanda in unique ways, and all three bear directly upon the vision for Asinabka. I will elucidate their relevance briefly before attending to the significance of Asinabka.

5.3: The relational ontology of the wampum belts

The three wampum belts in Elder Commanda's possession include the Jay Treaty Border Crossing belt, the Welcoming (or Friendship) belt, and the Seven Fire Prophecy belt. All three belts pre-date European settlement within the Ottawa River watershed and were once carried by *Pakinawatik*, Elder Commanda's great-great grandfather and hereditary Anishinabe chief. During the early 1800s, *Pakinawatik* led his peoples from their ancestral summer gathering lands at the Lake of Two Mountains, near the confluence of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers, to settle at their winter hunting and trapping grounds at what is today *Kitigan Zibi* (Thumbadoo 2005: 15). For the Anishinabe peoples, the wampum shell belts hold “spiritual and historical importance” for “they carry testimony of significant prophecies, agreements, and understandings which have guided Anishinabe peoples for centuries” (Thumbadoo 2005: 50). As such,

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the wampum belt can be understood as an Anishinabe historical, relational, and cultural document (Sherman 2008: 122).

The Jay Treaty Border Crossing belt commemorates the 1794 agreement between Great Britain and the United States which allowed "the Indians dwelling on either side of the said boundary line, freely to pass and repass by land or inland navigation, into the respective territories and countries of the two parties, on the continent of America" (Nickels 2001: 316). The pattern of the belt indicates a straight line across centre for the full width of the belt. Elder Commanda teaches that the principal meaning of this belt is borderlessness: "My territory is as the river flows, as the bird flies, and as the wind blows" (Thumbadoo 2005: 50). The belt affirms that the Anishinabe people belong to Turtle Island (North America) and thus maintain a sacred relationship with the land and a responsibility to this connection (ibid.).

The Welcoming belt, also known as the Friendship belt, was made in the 1700s. The pattern on the belt depicts three figures, side-by-side and joined by holding hands. The centre figure represents the Anishinabe people; to the left, the English, and to the right, the French. To the right of the figure depicting the French colonist is a cross. In conveying the message of this belt, Elder Commanda stresses the importance of sharing, generosity, and the "central position" of the Anishinabe people due to their "sacred duty" to be responsibility as "caretaker" of the land (Thumbadoo 2005: 76; see also Sherman 2008: 122).

The Seven Fires Prophecy belt has existed since the late 1400s, and the story of the prophecy in a central narrative within the oral traditions of Anishinabe peoples (Thumbadoo 2005: 50). Elder Commanda was the first carrier of this wampum belt to present a public teaching of its narrative at the 1987 fourth First Ministers Conference on Inherent Rights and Self-Government for Aboriginal Peoples, chaired by then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (Thumbadoo 2005: 187). The following year, in 1988, Edward Benton-Banai, Lac Courte Oreilles Anishinabe, authored the first English language text to present the Seven Fires prophecy, *The Mishomis Book*. The story of the Seven Fires prophecy concerns the historical impact of colonization upon the Anishinabe peoples. Each 'fire' represents a stop along the westward migration journey of the Anishinabe peoples and thus a period of time that would manifest in the future (Benton-Banai 1988: 89). The Seven Fires wampum belt contains seven diamond-shaped figures, evenly distributed across the belt. The centre (fourth) diamond figure consists of two overlapping diamonds. Seven prophets visited the Anishinabe people, and each delivered a message (at the fourth fire, two prophets came as one) pertaining to what the next fire would bring (Thumbadoo 2005: 51-52):

> [T]he first prophet told of the time when the people were living a safe and secure life;
>
> the second warned of a danger that was coming to their lands;
>
> the third told how those who had not heeded the warning and taken precautions to move away from this danger would be destroyed [at this point during his presentation of the narrative, Elder Commanda often

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> mentions the genocide of the Beothuk];
>
> the fourth prophecy was delivered by two prophets... a message of duality: they told of the coming of the light-skinned race. One said [the coming race] could appear as friends; the other warned that they could also be enemies under the guise of friendship. [The Anishinabe people] were warned to be on guard;
>
> the fifth prophet warned of the false promise that could come [in] the guise of religion;
>
> the sixth prophet told of the pain and turmoil that would devastate the lives of the Indigenous peoples who had turned away from their old values and ways of life;
>
> the seventh prophet talked about a time of choice making for all – for the continued exploitation of land and peoples or for a renewed respect for Mother Earth and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the newcomers. The double diamond at the centre of the belt reflects this hope for unity to emerge out of the duality.

The seventh fire speaks directly to concerns of the present age, and presents an opportunity to light the eighth fire, “an everlasting fire of peace”, according to Leanne Simpson, scholar and member of the Alderville Mississauga First Nation (2008: 14). In order for this to come to fruition, however, Simpson insists that it “depends upon our actions and choices today” and “[members of] settler society must also choose to change their ways, to decolonize their relationships with the land and Indigenous Nations, and to join with [Indigenous peoples] in building a sustainable future based upon mutual recognition, justice, and respect” (Ibid.). While it is undoubtedly solely the responsibility for settler society to change its ways, the transmission into settler society of Indigenous understandings of responsibility, justice, and respect can arguably act as a catalyst for change. If there is a lesson in the personal journey of Elder Commanda that stands above all else, it is the imperative that nothing is to be gained until we confront ourselves. Accordingly, Elder Commanda invites those who will listen to

> look within and ask who you are, what you are doing here, and who was here before you. Only then will you be able to forgive yourselves for what you and your ancestors have done. After that, you will be guided to do the right and honourable thing by the Indigenous peoples, and we will all find healing together (Thumbadoo 2005: 37-38).

To lead others to do the right thing is not a declaration of moral superiority; it is a

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responsibility that follows on the heels of forgiveness. Phil Weir, settler, retired teacher, and Circle of All Nations participant, describes how Elder Commanda's political ontology brings both Indigenous and settler communities to the eighth fire (personal communication, March 24, 2011):

> I think that Elder William Commanda has been absolutely wonderful in leading to increased sharing between cultures and within cultures. He's been given various awards for this, very incredibly important awards, including an honourary PhD from the University of Ottawa and the Order of Canada Officer. He's got so many honours because people see that he is opening doors.
>
> And this is because he brings people together. There are so many forces in this world that divide us and splinter us and turn people against each other.... But the core philosophy of inclusion – including everyone – is the greatest success of the Circle of All Nations.

The values inherent within the narratives of the wampum belts – borderlessness, sharing, and responsible choice and action – each inform the Circle of All Nations vision for Asinabka. Before engaging in a discussion of the vision for Asinabka, I will return to an historical perspective to convey the rapidity with which Anishinabe presence and concomitant practices were erased from the landscape of Asinabka.

5.4: Consent inferred through domination

The story of Asinabka is intricately interwoven with the settler colonialist history of Ottawa. The former, of course, is a much older narrative, erased from the land first by the arrival of French explorers, traders, missionaries, and disease, and then pushed away by British settlers and the logging industry at the start of the 19th century. Only in the last three decades has the story of Asinabka been revived and reinserted into its place in the world, primarily through the work of Elder Commanda and the Circle of All Nations. While there exist connections between the story of Asinabka and historical colonial events and practices that occupy a much larger scale, I restrict the present narrative to the transformation of Chaudière and Victoria Islands and the proximate riverine locale.

Champlain recorded the first written account of Anishinabe ceremonial practices at Asinabka. On June 4th, 1613, Champlain and his party approached Asinabka in two *Anishinabe* birch-bark canoes, describing the spectacle of Chaudière Falls in detail (Champlain 1911, v2: 12):

> At one place the water falls with such violence upon a rock that, in the course of time, there has been hollowed out in it a wide and deep basin, so that the water flows round and round there and makes, in the middle, great whirlpools. Hence, the savages call it Asticou, which means Kettle. This waterfall makes such a noise in this basin that it can be heard more than

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> two leagues off.[19] The savages who pass by it have a ceremony which we shall describe in its place.

Upon the return journey, six days following, Champlain recounts stopping to witness the Anishinabe tobacco offering at the Falls (Champlain 1911, v2: 38-39):

> Continuing our course, we arrived at the Chaudière Falls, where the savages had the accustomed ceremony, which is as follows: after having carried their canoes below the falls, they get together in one place, where one of them, with a wooden plate, takes up a collection, and each one of them puts into this plate a piece of tobacco. The collection made, the plate is put into the middle of the band, and all dance around it, singing in their fashion; then one of the chiefs makes a speech, showing that for a long time they have been accustomed to make this offering.... That done, the speaker takes the plate and goes and throws the tobacco into the middle of the cauldron and they raise a great cry all together.

Throughout the remainder of the 17th and 18th centuries, French explorers, fur traders, and missionaries brought diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis, and typhoid fever for which the Anishinabe had no immunity, and their population was devastated. European settlement of lands to the east drove many of the Haudenosaunee from their traditional territories, and, with military alliances forged during the struggle between the British and French for North America, the Haudenosaunee diaspora entered into direct confrontations with many of the remaining Anishinabe and Huron.[20] Permanent settlement of Europeans did not occur in the region until the end of the 18th century.

In 1792, Alured Clarke, the British Governor of Quebec, threw open the lands in Lower Canada for settlement to British loyalists in the United States (Elliott 1979: 341). Finally, in 1800, Philemon Wright arrived on the northern shore of the Ottawa River near the Chaudière Falls with his family and company from New England. Surprisingly, Wright had no interest in timber extraction or the hydropower of the Falls. He settled, along with four other families and thirty-three labourers, to establish an idyllic agricultural community (Elliott 1979: 342). Initially, the Anishinabe hosts were very generous to their new arrivals and expressed concern for their safety during the spring thaw on the river (Gaffield 1997: 124). But as tree cutting and the clearing of land for settlement, however, began to threaten the Anishinabe way of life, two Anishinabe family heads informed Wright that “they had been 'in the peaceable and quiet possession of these lands for generations past,' and that they depended on the region for hunting, collecting maple syrup, and for fishing... and that 'clearing off the forest was driving back their game'” (Gaffield 1997: 125). In response, Wright produced a letter the sort of which is not unfamiliar to historians of settler colonialism:

---

[19] One league = five kilometres, approximately.

[20] See Miller (2000) Chapter 4, for a thorough explication of the relationships among and between the foreign invaders and Indigenous Nations.

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"The Indians have consented to relinquish all claim to the land, in compensation for which they receive annual grants from the Government, which shall be withheld if they molest settlers" (Wright Carr-Harris 1903: 11). Settlement continued unabated, and Wright and his expanding company constructed grist and saw mills near the Chaudière Falls.

Meanwhile, in 1793, before Wright's arrival, the government of Upper Canada issued instructions to have the lands along the southern shore of the Ottawa River surveyed for settlement (Hill 1919: 8). One entrepreneur, Robert Randall, left his ironworks business in Niagara Falls to inspect the newly surveyed lands. His eye caught the hydropower potential of the Chaudière Falls, and in 1807, he petitioned for acreage with a special provision for extension beyond the shoreline to include both the islands as well as water privileges (Ibid: 9; emphasis in italics added). As Randall noted:

> There are four small islands at or near the Chaudière Falls which lay so situated as to make them actually necessary to be procured for the purpose I have in view, which is to *extend a dam*, from the main bank to the upper islands lying at the Falls and taking the water between the main and said islands for the purpose of a grist or saw mill.

Of particular interest is how Randall's prescient and opportunistic idea formed the basis for the eventual transformation of the site.

Wright continued to resist engaging in the forestry industry, but in 1806, Napoleon interrupted Britain's access to Baltic timber, and the forestry economy of British North America was given a new mandate (Gaffield 1997: 129). With the commencement of the building of the Rideau Canal twenty years later, what was once an ancestral Anishinabe place of spiritual and ceremonial significance was over-run with colonial industry and surrounded by settler hydropower infrastructure. The Indigenous peoples of the region had been driven to marginal lands beyond what was to eventually to become a major urban centre, and Anishinabe presence upon Asinabka would not be witnessed again for over two-and-a-half centuries. The resurgence of this presence, through the vision for Asinabka and its ceremonial and practical importance, is the subject of the final section of this chapter.

5.5: "We're still around."[21]

Increasing concentration of industrial infrastructure on Chaudière and Victoria Islands and the surrounding shorelines continued through the 19th and 20th centuries. As a political entity, Ottawa was decreed the national capital in 1857; culturally, however, the region became a federal district in 1958 with the passing of the National Capital Act and the establishment of the NCC. The National Capital Act dictates the principal mandate of the NCC: "[To] prepare plans for and assist in the development, conservation and improvement of the National Capital Region in [that]... enrich the cultural and social fabric of Canada, taking into account the federal character of Canada... and the heritage of the people of Canada" (NCC 2006b: 2). Through the last

[21] Verna McGregor, personal communication, February 24, 2011.

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half of the 20th century and continuing to the present day, the NCC has sought to acquire private property in the region to accumulate a 'National Interest Land Mass', portions of which it also maintains a mandate to transfer to private interests or public institutions (NCC 2006a).

The National Capital Act, which governs the use of public land in the region, was brought into law following the publication of the Gréber Plan, a comprehensive vision for the national capital, in 1950. The Gréber Plan is crucial because it has shaped development within the national capital since its inception. In 1936, then Prime Minister Mackenzie King met and consulted with Jacques Gréber, a Parisian urban planner, and commissioned him to submit a master plan for the capital region. Like Robert Randall over a century before, Gréber saw great potential in the Chaudière Falls and surrounding islands – but a potential more in harmony with the vision of The Circle of All Nations than with the vision of Randall and subsequent industrialists up to the era of Domtar. In his final report, Gréber observed (Gréber 1950: 230):

> The most effective improvement will be the central park at the Chaudière Falls. The time will come when the heavy and obnoxious industries, now occupying the islands, peninsula, and the rocks, from which the falls originally receded, will finally move to more appropriate sites, for their normal development, and more economical operation. The Master Plan is a long range programme based upon which the Capital will grow; urban planning demands resolute perseverance, and the Falls will always remain *the main feature of Ottawa's natural setting.* [Emphasis in original text]

Thus, although there has been little alteration over time in the material character of the Asinabka site, there has nevertheless been frequent public discourse concerning the potential for a transformation of the site, including suggestions for a national museum, a condominium and shopping district, and rather odd iconic proposals, such as a statue memorializing former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in a birch-bark canoe and a gigantic stone rendition of the National Hockey League Stanley Cup.

Plans to build an Indigenous centre on Victoria Island were first announced in 1990. Initially, the discussions were conducted between the NCC and groups representing Anishinabe communities, the Assembly of First Nations, the National Association of Friendship Centres, the Indigenous Bar Association, and the Native Alliance of Quebec (Moore 1990). This was the first project of significance within the national capital that involved consultation with Indigenous leadership. The projected completion date was 1992, but the project stalled due to a lack of financial support from the federal government. Douglas Cardinal, Blackfoot and Métis, and lead architect for the Canadian Museum of Civilization, was commissioned by the NCC to design the plans for the centre. Successive NCC Chairs since Jean Pigott during the late 1980s have supported the project and it remains a part of the NCC core region planning.

In 1990, Elder Commanda was invited to participate in the initial consultations on the proposed centre; however, he and Romola Thumbadoo began their active involvement in 2001. They, along with Cardinal, visited Anishinabe communities in

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both Ontario and Quebec to engage in open community-based discussion about the project. In March 2002, in Kitigan Zibi, Elder Commanda, Thumbadoo, and Cardinal hosted a two-day talking circle on the proposed centre. Elders, healers, and youth from eight different Algonquin communities were present for the event. It was during these two days of discussions that the distant idea of Asinabka coalesced into a grand vision. In one of the reports published after the meeting, Elder Commanda made the following declaration ("Algonquin Elders Gathering" 2002):

> It is time for us to reclaim our heritage and for all to hear this message of responsibility from us. The Algonquin peoples were a nomadic people who travelled lightly over the lands and waterways of North America. We had summer trapping grounds and winter hunting grounds, and we also gathered on special islands in the waterways across the vast expanses of land, for community meetings, council, exchanges, marriage making, burials and ceremony.
>
> Victoria Island was one such place of power on the Ottawa River. We are told that it served as the spiritual meeting grounds for our ancestors, and over the past ten years the land has been reminding us of its sacred purpose.
>
> And people from near and far have been hearing the call of the Island. Anicinabe peoples have begun to recall and reclaim their sacred spiritual heritage, and we have taken small steps to bring prayer and ceremony and honour back to the Island.
>
> It is now time for us all to take a big step forward to advance a vision for healing and peace consistent with the message of the Seven Fires Prophecy.
>
> The vision takes concrete form as we work together to establish a lodge dedicated to healing and peace building for all nations, at Victoria Island, and support the land as it reclaims its heritage as the traditional spiritual meeting grounds of the Anicinabe peoples.

Elder Commanda alludes to "small steps to bring prayer and ceremony and honour back to the Island" – steps which refer not only to individual and group ceremonies conducted on Victoria Island (the summer solstice pipe ceremony in particular), but also to more enduring occupations of the island. I have already remarked on the 'Native Peoples Embassy' occupation of 1974-75. In 1988, one hundred members of Barriere Lake in Quebec occupied Victoria Island (later camping on Parliament Hill) to protest logging on their ancestral lands, later joined by an equivalent contingent of protestors from Pikwàkanagàn (Cox 1988). A small group remained on the island after the protest, called themselves 'The Circle of All Nations' and were loyal to Elder Commanda. The group, with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, lived in the abandoned

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Carbide Mill ruins for four years, until evicted by the NCC in 1992 (Riley 1997). To return to the reports of the 2002 talking circle, the text contains a powerful appeal from Douglas Cardinal to carefully consider the importance of a meeting place at Asinabka ("Algonquin Elders Gathering" 2002):

> [I]t is time to re-establish the meeting circle of the Algonquin people on this site. It is essential to house the wealth of their knowledge that has been passed down from their ancestors. The people believe the Creator placed them in this area to protect, respect, and live in harmony with all the Creator's handiwork; the earth and animals who give them life; the trees and rivers for food, transportation, and protection; and the plants that provided food and medicine to heal them. They knew they had to share this place with all living beings, the water, rocks, trees, plants, and animals as well as live in harmony with all humanity.
>
> Many of the Elders, particularly William Commanda, not only see this building as an Aboriginal Centre but as a centre for all nations to come together in peace and harmony.
>
> He feels the steps to this future are few. First they are to look within, so they know themselves best; recognize, acknowledge and forgive themselves their shortcomings and any failure to achieve their best potential; forgive others for any hardship and pain they may have caused them and their communities, and trust that this energy will transform them spiritually; recognize that their thoughts, words, and actions affect themselves, Mother Earth, and all creation. They are to embrace peace mindfully, listen to their minds, but trust their hearts above all. He feels this path will lead them to love, sharing, respect, responsibility, compassion, healing, justice and reconciliation.

Cardinal emphasizes the relational ties between the Anishinabe people and this place, as well as the imperative to sustain the immeasurable wealth of knowledge that informs these relations, through the transmission of the place-contingent knowledge of elders to future generations. It is an appeal that resonates with Verna McGregor's assertion, cited above, that to share knowledge as protectors of the Earth is a duty of being Anishinabe. It is a responsibility that demands contact with place – an activity that, until only recently, the Anishinabe could not practice. McGregor reminds us that 'traditional' lands include places that have been emptied of Indigenous people and their practices for centuries (personal communication, February 24, 2011):

> There's also been a loss of knowledge as to these places because... well, you have to understand the reserve system. At one time you were forbidden to leave the reserve to roam and connect with your traditional places. The places are still there! But we need to reconnect with them. And when they're rediscovered, they need to be respected, and we need

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> the time to explore them.

For McGregor, one aspect of her connection with Asinabka that is particularly important is the water. In Anishinabe tradition, women are “keepers and protectors of the water”, and by participating in ceremonies at Asinabka, McGregor fulfills hers responsibility as a keeper of knowledge of water. The stories that connect the people to Asinabka change over time as well, especially with the violence of settlement (McGregor, personal communication, February 24, 2011):

> Asinabka was a stopping point, but it was also a gathering place. That's where they did the trade. So yeah it was our highway. And that's the significance I see. There's also the burial grounds along the river, but we're the only country where you're allowed to dig up our bones and study them – because are we still seen as inhuman? So there's respect there too.
>
> When our ancestors would go down by the Chaudière Falls, they would give an offering to the water spirits, to pay homage to the water, to be thankful to the water. Where that particular place is, it is seen as the bowl which is tied to the pipe. So it's a connection to the ancestors before contact, knowing that ancestors would stop there often, because it was on their way up to their hunting grounds. It has been done for generations. That's why I stop there.
>
> We have other stories also. My mother knew this other traditional person whose past she would talk about. With the building of the Parliament Buildings, the women started to avoid going there, because of the rapes and harassment. So we go there now to reconnect with that.
>
> And sometimes I sit and wonder and I wonder how it would look like before there was all this development here.
>
> The spirit of the place is still there. So that's why I go there.

McGregor also highlights the ontological division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of water (personal communication, February 24, 2011):

> It's very foreign to a native understanding where you *(laughter)* put all your waste into the river system and then you turn around and try to clean it and drink it again.
>
> We contaminate into the water, and then we turn around and put money into cancer research and health care, when we're not looking at the issue that maybe it all starts with the water. And especially this whole issue

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> with women and breast cancer and all the pharmaceuticals we ingest and then we flush down the toilet into the water and then we turn around and clean the water, but we're not actually sure how many parts per billion enter our bodies.
>
> I think there's a need for more of an awareness. And even with the damming, and you want to look at Mother Earth. Well, what happens in your body when you have a blocked vein? And its the same with the water, we have to look at the water in the same way. What happens when we block that water?

Fire, like water, is a relational connector in Anishinabe ontology. Fire is also a necessary element with any water ceremony: “to honour the water, you need to build a sacred fire” (McGregor, personal communication, February 24, 3011). As with most Indigenous groups' customary practices, the presence of a sacred fire is the fundamental requirement for conducting Anishinabe ceremonial gathering. In Ottawa, however, a special permit is required to light an open fire, a problem caused by what McGregor terms a “clash of understanding” (ibid.). It is just one of many conflicts and shortfalls that she sees the building of an Indigenous meeting place on Asinabka resolving (ibid.):

> There's been such a push for the erasing of any Algonquin presence in Ottawa. I've been asked many times: 'is there a place in Ottawa where we can go to learn about Native culture - Algonquin culture or other Native cultures?' There's no such place!
>
> Ottawa plays host to many delegations from other countries. And from what I've seen many of these delegations come here also to learn about the Native perspective, the Indigenous perspective.
>
> There would be the building at Asinabka, but also a freedom of reconnecting and also an international teaching place given that this is Canada's capital. And when other Indigenous nations come to meet here, there's a place with the cultural perspective, with the ability to make a sacred fire in an urban setting. There is a need for a safe place to go for gatherings.
>
> There are a number of national Aboriginal organizations here in Ottawa [that would] gather in a respectful area too as well. Having worked in a number of national organizations, it's practically impossible where you can have a sacred fire outside. It's out of basic respect to have smudging at opening and closing ceremonies, where you do not have to worry about the fire departments.
>
> That's reconciliation – acknowledging that we have our own traditional

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> government place. So if you want to talk about the treaties, and the treaties are on the basis of nation to nation... well you have your nation building on Parliament Hill, so where is our nation building?
>
> So that is what I see as also the role of Asinabka. And if you want to talk about reconciliation with Native people, well that's part of reconciliation. It is a site of recognition that we are still around.

McGregor's arguments are compelling. Foreign embassies exist in Ottawa, on government land, that are considered foreign territory – all of which reside upon unceded Anishinabe land. Sacred fires and the practice of smudging, vital practices that are intrinsic to the continuity of Anishinabe culture, are prohibited. This restriction is akin to the experience of a smoke alarm going off every time a Christian kneels to pray or the fire department showing up at the door when a sacred text is opened. Such analogies are not intended to be read as hyperbole – an ontological shift is required to understand their validity.

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Chapter 6: From border thinking to broader being

I think it's about awakening the political to the sacred.
(Verna McGregor, personal communication, February 24, 2011)

In this chapter, I present a tripartite analysis that examines the presence of conflicting ontologies, principally the modernist ontology that underpins the subjection of Indigenous being, knowledges, and practices. In Section 6.1, I return to the Domtar Environmental Screening Report (ESR) and offer explanation for the erasures that prompted members of The Circle of All Nations to vociferously oppose the legitimacy of the screening process, and discuss the rationality that rendered illegitimate their claim as stakeholders. In Section 6.2, I discuss the omission from the ESR of Anishinabe ceremonial practices, turning to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997, as a reference case to argue the inclusion of ceremony in the ESR. Strangely, however, there is no real correlation between ceremony and 'land use' within Anishinabe ontology. In fact, I argue that 'traditional land use' is, from the perspective of Indigenous relations with land, a completely untenable and self-contradicting locution. In Section 6.3, I assess the limitations of placing analytical focus upon multiple ontologies in colonial conflict, questioning whether ontology, as a modernist analytical category, can offer much grist for the 'alternatives to modernity' mill. I turn to ethics to probe an answer to the question, 'Where do we go from here?', and to propose a synthesis of the intersubjectivity of Levinas (1948; 1969) and Buber (1970) as a secular ecological ethics that might “awaken the political to the sacred” (V. McGregor, personal communication, February 24, 2011). To close the chapter, I draw a connection from the concepts of presence and respect to the materialization of the proposed Indigenous peace-building centre at Asinabka.

6.1: The ontological screening of dissent

In 1800, Philemon Wright saw Asinabka as a place to settle and, by employing labour toward the transformation of nature (land use!), a means to build a community. When Robert Randall surveyed the Chaudière Falls in 1807, he saw water and force, and the potential to extract power from nature for economic gain. In 2006, Domtar seized an opportunity to invest capital into its extractive infrastructure, expand its facility, and in so doing, increase profit. Each of these 'colonial moments' was made possible because of an *a priori* perception of the relationship between people and land. Battiste and Henderson (2000), in their critique of Eurocentric ontology, describe this perception as a consciousness that “artificially constructs a place for its existence” then “treats the natural world as a practical source of the means to achieve its own objectives (24). All three moments were made possible by period-specific political technologies, respectively: a land survey, a colonial missive, and an environmental screening report.

As mentioned in Chapter 4.2, a greater federal government involvement in the case could also elevate emphasis on Indigenous concerns and interests. In spite of the warranted criticism of the Indian Act, section 88 of the Act, which carries “the basic

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constitutional principle that federal law is paramount over conflicting provincial legislation" produces an "effect of shielding treaty rights from the operation of provincial law" (Macklem 1997: 121). Considering the Domtar facility is located within unceded Algonquin lands, and that the Ontario Algonquin Land Claim process is currently negotiating potential treaty rights pursuant to these lands, federal government involvement in an elevated assessment of this case might have led to a different result.

In the Algonquin Land Claim process, the only lands on the negotiating table are Crown lands. The concept of Crown land, though, presents a problem. The Land Claim, at first glance, may appear to grant land rights to Indigenous nations; in fact, the opposite is the case. Paradoxically, the Land Claim is the "vehicle through which the Canadian government removes Aboriginal title" (Lawrence 2009; emphasis added). In a more complex argument, Alfred (1999) argues that Crown land "does not exist – it is a fiction of Canadian (colonial) law", to "assert the validity of Crown title to land [that is] not surrendered by treaty is to accept the racist assumptions of earlier centuries" (120). Alfred refers to an era when Indigenous peoples' rights were of lesser "priority", supported by an imposed "hierarchy of rights based on 'conquest'" (1999: 120). The problem, however, is that in order to wrest control of land use within a sovereign Canadian state, the Algonquins must have their title recognized as an inalienable right under Canadian law. Under the law of the sovereign, this right may be asserted through the Land Claim, a process that, through its intertextual correspondence with the Indian Act, produces state-defined 'Indians', drives a wedge through Anishinabe political culture, and asserts the validity of Crown title.

This is, read through Alfred's argument, a no-win scenario for any Indigenous group who, like the Algonquins, have not hitherto surrendered their territory through treaty. Logically, inalienability of title must mean that the right cannot be infringed upon in any way, and that must include extinguishment by land claim. The extinguishment of Algonquin title, however, is not simply a transaction in property law, but rather, it is the simultaneous extinguishment of Algonquin collective identity in relationship with the land. Perhaps the only resolution to this dilemma lies in government surrender of Crown land to the Algonquin. Alternatively, the solution for some Algonquin, such as the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, is to abandon the Land Claim entirely and instead focus on nation building.[22] Lynn Gehl (2005) promotes this option based on a reason argued by Lawrence: for a lump sum payment, the Land Claim irrevocably forfeits ancestral land and relinquishes inherent Algonquin title. Gehl (2004) also presents a compelling case that the threat of assertion of Indigenous title may hold more economic and political leverage that its execution; Gehl proclaims, "the Algonquin will always have more power than money can buy, by simply stating, 'Parliament Hill resides on unsurrendered Algonquin land!'". Indeed, so does the Domtar facility beneath Parliament Hill, in addition to the whole of Victoria Island. This fact was one of the many arguments participants within The Circle of All Nations deployed to convince the Ministry of the Environment to elevate the project to an

[22] The Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, who along with Pikwàkanagàn was present when the Ontario Algonquin Land Claim was initiated in 1991, asserts on its website, "We have always maintained that we want to be part of a claim but we would not sell out to anyone. We believe that our community needs to be strong before entering into a Claim." (See http://www.aafna.ca/faq.html).

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Individual Environmental Assessment.

As mentioned earlier, not one of the eleven pieces of legislation invoked in the environmental screening process, not even the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act, makes mention of relationships Indigenous peoples have with the land and water. Provincial government guidelines defer the jurisdiction of relations with Indigenous populations to federal authority, principally INAC. INAC's authority over Indigenous peoples and lands is governed by the Indian Act. Meanwhile, governance of land and resources is left to the provinces. This division of power is consistent with historical practice, established in section 91(24) of the Constitution Act of 1867 and its 1982 revision, which asserts the authority of the federal government over "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians"; however, section 92A of the Constitution Act grants to provinces all authority over the management of resources and their extraction (DOJ 1982). The bias contained within this division is reflected in the ESR through the political technologies deployed and their attendant political bodies. I cannot possibly enter into a full discussion of the Indian Act within the confines of this thesis; however, I can elucidate, broadly, its bearing upon the ESR process as a technology of governance.

Bonita Lawrence describes the Indian Act as "an extremely repressive body of colonial law", and asserts that through the Indian Act, "the only level of Indigenous governance recognized by Canada has been the elected government imposed at the local reserve or band level" (Lawrence 2004: 30). Through the band system and individual Indian registration ('status'), the Indian Act legitimizes who *can* and *cannot* be recognized as an Indigenous person in Canada. 'Indian status' is understood as "affiliation (if not membership) with a reserve" (Lawrence 2004: 220). At present time, the sole Algonquin reserve in eastern Ontario is Pikwàkanagàn. Most of the Ottawa River watershed exists within unsurrendered Algonquin traditional territory. The ongoing Ontario Algonquin Land Claim may eventually establish the 'status' of the ten Ontario Algonquin communities at the Land Claim negotiating table.[23] Until that eventuality, however, neither Canada nor Ontario formally recognize Algonquin self-governance anywhere else in the province beyond the 1700-acre reserve of Pikwàkanagàn. Thus, when Domtar initiated environmental screening pursuant to project impact upon 'First Nations', the corporation followed the hierarchical political map imposed by the Indian Act.

What is relevant to this story is the political erasure of those interests and concerns held by Anishinabe peoples who maintain an ancestral relationship with the Asinabka, and non-Indigenous allies who value this special relationship and have, through a kind of ontological empathy and respect, adopted their own bond with Asinabka. A crucial question remains, however: How can one explain, from an analytical perspective, the wholesale rejection of The Circle of All Nations' appeals? Alternatively, how does one understand, as Flyvbjerg asks, 'What is going on here?'. In light of the previous findings and analysis, I offer the following elaboration as a possible answer to these questions.

---

[23] The 2009 Ontario Algonquin Land Claim Framework Agreement is posted on the INAC website at http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/al/ldc/ccl/agr/ont/algn/fna-eng.asp?p1=1047961&p2=1066070.

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The Circle of All Nations' grounds and warrants for being recognized as a stakeholder does not occupy a clear 'slot' within the colonial political hierarchy that constitutes this site. Most of the government and industry texts cited throughout this thesis all contain codes that reify this hierarchy, terms such as: urban, industrial, environment (as opposed to society), 'national interest', public and Crown land, occupancy, and so on. It is my opinion that this hierarchical ontology is blind to the conjunction of (and I purposely invoke the colonial terms) 'urban Aboriginal' with 'traditional land use'. In my view, the 'urban Aboriginal' is, from the perspective of the colonial narrative, to some degree assimilated into mainstream Canadian society. Within this same narrative, anchored by the divisive and oppressive Indian Act, the phrase 'traditional land use' and 'Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge' (ATK) applies strictly to 'reserve Indians' in the practices of hunting, fishing, and gathering. Thus, the ontological framing of 'what is at stake' precludes the interests of The Circle of All Nations. This, in my opinion, explains MOE Minister Gerretsen's conclusion: "... the fact that the Director did not consider ATK in making her decision does not make the decision unreasonable" (Gerretsen, J., personal communication, October 21, 2008). In fact, I would argue that the Circle of All Nations, as an Indigenous and non-Indigenous collectivity with an urban presence, does not fit anywhere within the political space of the colonial hierarchical regime. The Circle of All Nations does not correlate to a specific 'band', nor does it have a seat at the Algonquin Land Claim negotiation table. They are not represented politically by the Assembly of First Nations, the Algonquins of Ontario, or by any government recognized political body.

The social constitution of The Circle of All Nations does not fall into a tidy colonial category, which, from the perspective of government and industry, nullifies their legitimacy as an Indigenous stakeholder group. Shared concerns and interests unify the Circle of All Nations, not its political position and affiliations. Thus, with a political authority deemed illegitimate within the colonial hierarchy, I contend that government and industry subordinated The Circle of All Nations, as a political entity, to the ideological slot of 'special interest group'. Although the term did not appear in the texts of the government and industry replies to The Circle of All Nations, I argue that it aptly characterizes the rationality that erased The Circle of All Nations as stakeholders, and, consequently, a legitimate Anishinabe stake in the future of Asinabka.

In modernist ontologies, great emphasis is placed on the mental and material knowledge, while the spiritual and emotional aspects of knowledge are neglected (Battiste and Henderson 2000; Wildcat 2001). Over-determination of the mental aspect, rationalism, underwrites the domination of culture over nature and the 'civilized' over the 'savage'. The severance of spirit and emotion from knowledge of the land creates the psychological understanding of land as separate, and the living and non-living elements of land as external resources. The ontological division that separates culture (or society) from nature is what Latour hails as the basis for the "modern constitution" (cited in Blaser 2009: 18*n*1). From the perspective of colonial rationality, elements of the land are valued only for instrumental utility: as resources for human consumption, or as wilderness to be conserved for future consumption. Modernist ontologies carve up continuous spaces, map them with abstract divisions, project a hierarchical grid onto the

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land, to order privileged and insignificant space. The scale of the grid erases internal diversity and differences within the regions of the map. The internal logic and consistency of the grid allows, to borrow Gupta and Ferguson's (1992) turn of phrase, its "power of topography to conceal successfully its topography of power" (8). In the Domtar proposal to upgrade its hydropower facility, the topographic hierarchy of the proposed development site is reflected in the ESR, as well as in the political technologies that govern the assessment process.

In the long list of regulatory mechanisms (as shown earlier in Table 1) that bear upon the proposed development, only one piece of legislation, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA), considers any interests Indigenous peoples may have in the site, and even then the CEAA applies only in the presence of a 'trigger'. A trigger is the presence of a condition that would, under the CEAA, warrant the intervention of a federal authority; for example, the only trigger explicitly related to Indigenous peoples under the CEAA is if a project impact reserve lands (MOE 2010: 70). This scenario would trigger the intervention of the federal department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, which would then act as the responsible authority overseeing the concern (ibid.: 72). But there exists an enormous gap between the identification of Indigenous stakeholders according to the federal government, and the self-identification of stakeholders, such as the Circle of All Nations, who make legitimate arguments to be recognized as having a stake in matter. Their arguments, however, were dismissed, deflected, or ignored altogether. This outcome is not unusual in cases in which Indigenous communities and their allies assert a stake in the transformation of land. In a rigorous analysis of power and rationality lying at the heart of the public consultation process of Ontario's *Lands for Life* project, Ballamingie (2006: 178) argues that

> […] from the outset of the [consultation] process, the government implicitly framed the resolution of [land claims and treaty rights] as lying beyond the scope of the consultations. By limiting the terms of reference to exclude First Nation concerns in any meaningful way, the government implicitly deemed these issues as not worthy of being solved. They thus totalized the field of political possibility, and normalized the exclusion of First Nations peoples.

Such responses are what Spivak calls "cognitive failure", that is, the production of intelligibility by "leaving something out" (cited in Braun and Wainwright: 54). Left out of the ESR – and most certainly from the various responses provided by government officials – was consideration and respect for a meaningful and vital Anishinabe relationship with a sacred site, as expressed by The Circle of All Nations' knowledges and practices. Such cognitive failure is not an accident, but the predictable result of the "ontological imperialism" (Levinas 1969: 44) by a distinct geopolitical order and fragmented metaphysics of 'land'.

The concept of Canada as a resource-rich nation drives the political processes that expand dominion, control spaces, and displace Indigenous peoples. For the colonial agenda, legislation around Crown land development accomplishes today what specific

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'Indian' land policies achieved in the 19th and early 20th century. Wilson and Peters (2005) describe how, during the expansion of the Canadian frontier, "[r]eserves became 'Native space' and the lands in between were 'emptied' for settlement, materially and conceptually" (398). A similar argument could be made for the establishment and maintenance of Crown and industrial lands at Asinabka – although the violent acts that comprised the 'emptying' of the site long preceded the formation of reserves at Pikwàkanagàn and Kitigan Zibi. Legislation around Crown land development ensures corporate industrial access to Indigenous land for its exploitation by inscribing onto the land the limits of Indigenous spaces, legal rights, and practical freedoms. Most significantly, by drastically changing the landscape or by way of displacing Indigenous communities from ancestral lands, they disrupt the capacity of Indigenous communities to exercise their way of life within their ancestral realm of knowledge. The loss of land, and rupture in the ability to live in a culturally-determined way on the land, hold the threat of an eventual loss of knowledge which cannot be regained. Cultural survival of a people is at stake. Once a people lose access to place-specific practices, how many generations must pass before the knowledge is altogether lost? Two? Three? But the significance of Asinabka was never 'emptied' from the local memories of Anishinabe peoples, due in large part to the tremendous conscious efforts and fortuitously long life of Elder Commanda. The return of ceremony revitalizes and animates these memories and, in conjunction with community and collective practices, politicizes the memories as well as the practices.

6.2: A doctrine of discontinuity

In this section, I examine the notion of 'traditional land use', with a specific focus on its application in the Domtar screening process, and how the phrase reifies a particular colonialist understanding of relations between Indigenous peoples and land. I must first acknowledge that the burgeoning field devoted to 'traditional land use' studies does contribute positively to the process of detailing and articulating Indigenous groups' practices in relation to land. Yet, there exist hidden assumptions in the notions contained within the phrase 'traditional land use' that achieve just the opposite outcome – the erasure of land-based practices that are vital to Indigenous autonomy – which is precisely what transpired in the Domtar case.

There is one conclusion within the ESR that stands out as particularly damning as a colonial rationality. Earlier, I presented the following passage, located in the ESR under the section heading of 'First Nations', and remarked upon the flawed process of stakeholder identification. In revisiting this text, I wish to draw attention to the way in which the report links Indigenous peoples with land and resources (GENIVAR 2006: 87-88; emphasis in italics added):

> Domtar Inc. is not aware of any *current use* of lands and resources *for traditional purposes by aboriginal persons* within the study boundaries. The urban and suburban nature of the study area limits many traditional land uses, including *hunting, fishing and the gathering or harvesting of plants for traditional use.*

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...therefore no mitigation measures are required.

The limitation of "traditional purposes" to "hunting, fishing and the gathering or harvesting plants" neglects to take into consideration the significant practice addressed in the previous chapter: *ceremony*. I have shown that in traditional and contemporary Anishinabe practice, ceremony is intimately connected to land, and relations with specific sites, such as Asinabka. I have also demonstrated that the Anishinabe relationship with Asinabka is imbued with responsibility for Anishinabe peoples, one that is willingly shared with and supported by their non-Indigenous allies within the Circle of All Nations.

There are three problems with the phrase 'traditional land use': the first is *traditional;* the second is *land use;* and the third is the unquestioned use of the two terms together. The phrase inhabits discourses within multiple sites of contestation between Indigenous groups and settler authorities at various scales, from locally specific practices, such as found in the Domtar ESR, to the state, as found in Supreme Court of Canada deliberations over Indigenous peoples' rights to land, title, and autonomy.

The centrality of ceremony has already been considered in judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada: Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997. While the context of this court case is different from the issue of Asinabka, I argue the rationality of aspects of Delgamuukw applies equally in the present context. In spite of the violence of invasive settlement, the eviction of original Anishinabe families, and rampant industrialization, the lands surrounding and including Victoria and Chaudière Islands endure as a culturally and spiritually significant location for Anishinabe ways of being, particularly as a site of ceremonial practice. The following excerpts from the Delgamuukw v. British Columbia (1997) decision bear directly upon the present situation:

> [O]ne of the critical elements in the determination of whether a particular aboriginal group has aboriginal title to certain lands is the matter of the occupancy of those lands. *Occupancy* is determined by reference to the *activities* that have taken place on the land and the *uses* to which the land has been put by the particular group. If lands are so occupied, there will exist *a special bond* between the group and the land in question such that *the land will be part of the definition of the group's distinctive culture*....
>
> In pragmatic terms, this means looking at the manner in which the [Indigenous] society *used* the land to live, namely to establish villages, to work, to get to work, to hunt, to travel to hunting grounds, to fish, to get to fishing pools, *to conduct religious rites,* etc. These uses, although limited to the aboriginal society's *traditional way of life,* may be exercised in *a contemporary manner* (128).

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The Delgamuukw decision has been hailed as an important case for the judicial legitimization of Indigenous title, but has also received criticism for its emphasis on consigning to "the distant past" certain Indigenous practices (Borrows 1998: 57). However, my analysis focuses on ontology and place, specifically how Asinabka holds colonial and decolonial ontologies in tension. It is far beyond the scope of this thesis to wade into the scholarly debates on the legal interpretations of Delgamuukw.[24] I include the above passage from the landmark case to discuss the ontological implications of its finer details in the context of Asinabka.

The Delgamuukw case focuses on the issue of the recognition within common law of Indigenous title to land. A "critical" (i.e., necessary) condition for the existence of an Indigenous group's claim to title is occupancy of the land. Occupancy is established via two criteria of reference: (i) activities (or practices) on the land, and (ii) use of the land; and both criteria must be employed consistent with the group's "distinctive culture", which include a "special bond" with the land. The Crown, in the case transcript, does not stipulate the distinction between 'activities' and 'use', although I would argue that the former would include ceremony, while the latter would comprise the extraction of resources, such as hunting, fishing, and gathering. The past activities on land and uses of the land comprise of a "traditional way of life", but the key stipulation is that the group continues to conduct culturally distinct activities and types of land use, even if they are performed in a "contemporary manner". There appears to exist some scope for ceremonial practices that find their roots in ancestral practices, although the term 'religious rites' fails to capture adequately the richness of the Anishinabe practices that animate Asinabka. The central ontological problem contained within the legal narrative is that the relationship between Anishinabe people (and arguably any Indigenous people) and the land does not translate easily into the modern, Eurocentric order of subjects (humans) and objects (land). No less crucial is that Indigenous meaning and value relations that do not fit into the ontological framing of common law are, in the attempt to make them fit, reduced, distorted, disrupted or destroyed. Key concepts from the Delgamuukw excerpt merit criticism before returning to the Domtar ESR.

The principle of 'occupancy' clashes with Anishinabe understandings of being and land in two aspects. First, Anishinabe communities in the Ottawa River watershed were, prior to colonial settlement and forced relocation, nomadic peoples. How would the occupancy of Anishinabe peoples within this region be evaluated, within common law, against the occupancy of an Indigenous community that remained relatively sedentary? In all likelihood, the occupancy of a nomadic Indigenous group would be deemed precarious within 'setter' colonial ontologies. 'Occupancy' suggests the presence of an imperative to fix people in place, which leads to the second clash: in legal definition, 'occupancy' means "the action of taking possession of something having no owner, as constituting a title to it" ("Occupancy, OED." 2011). Clearly, this definition resonates more closely with settler colonialism than with any Indigenous understanding of being and land. There is unquestionably a "bond" between *some* Anishinabe peoples

[24] For further reading, see Thom (2001a; 2001b).

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and Asinabka, although the language of “culture”, “distinctive”, and “special” is problematic – these terms serve to exclude and divide, rather than offer a philosophy of inclusion. But the concept of an Indigenous bond with land ends there, and shifts to a more “pragmatic” discussion concerning 'land use'.

'Land use' is a taken-for-granted term in modernist, non-relational ontologies. The coupling of 'land' with 'use' connotes an inherently consumptive relationship between a landholder as entitled agent and property as resource, and refers to an activity of labour upon land, that is, *using* the land. Mackey (u.c.: 186-7) explains how this separation not only creates a hierarchical value displacement between people and land, but also establishes inequity between those who practice certain kinds of land use and those who do not:

> Western 'epistemologies of mastery'... assumes a number of foundational relationships and concepts. These include the ideas that: things, in particular land, can actually be 'owned'; people are individual sovereign subjects essentially separated from each other and nature; the highest value in human relationships with land and the natural world is based on particular kinds of labour perceived as 'improvement'; specific kinds of improvement can make a human being into the owner and master of land and nature, and that other kinds of relationships with land preclude that ownership. Finally, all of these assumptions intersect with the notion that those who 'improve' are naturally and essentially superior to those who don’t, and that they are thus naturally entitled to the privileges they reap.

Mackey's assertions speak directly to the assumptions that underlay the “pragmatic terms” of land use in the Delgamuukw case. In that case, as well as in the environmental screening of the Domtar project, the validation of the Indigenous relationship with land requires the establishment of extant 'traditional land use' practices. But colonial ontologies and their concomitant 'epistemologies of mastery' places value on the *means* of activity and its *outcome* in the relationship between people and land. The meaning of 'use' (in 'land use') is instrumentalist and technical, linking an agent with a resource. Ironically, the 'First Nations' section of the ESR limits practices of land use to hunting, fishing and gathering of plants – each traditional but extractive practices. 'Land use', simply put, is an idea that has little in common with Indigenous relationships with place. Indigenous ontologies value the inherent content of the relationship between people and land. This inherent content, in its manifold specific and local manifestations, transmitted through time, constitutes the *real* tradition of an Indigenous group's relation to land. Thus, tradition is always continuous and cumulative and never confined to the past and certainly not dependent upon its instrumental value. Tradition, as well, cannot be opposed to the “contemporary”, as implied in Delgamuukw and as also embraced in common-sense understandings. To invoke such an opposition inserts discontinuity where none actually exists. When considered in this light, the use of the term 'traditional' with the term 'land use' is irreconcilable, and the phrase 'traditional land use' is, therefore, a contradiction.

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I suggest that 'tradition' actually has little to do with homogenized conceptions of essential culture, but instead speaks directly to a relational ontology, rooted in the sacred, that challenges 'epistemologies of mastery'. In the final section of this chapter, I will consider how relationality might subvert the 'modern constitution', keeping in mind the vision held by Elder Commanda and a key objective of The Circle of All Nations, the building of an Indigenous Centre on Asinabka.

6.3: Presence and respect – all our relations

The foregoing analysis has been deeply critical of the practice of separation, distancing and objectification that accompanies modernist ontologies. Yet, it is ironic that, for the very reasons I criticize modernist ontologies, the scholarly act of objectifying and naming discrete sets of practices and their concomitant ideological foundations, and then casting each set into an analytical category called an 'ontology' is deeply problematic. I question the category of 'ontology' as being productive of alternative ways of being, although it does contribute significantly to the analytic framing of social conflict in which collective ways of being are at stake. To speak in plain language: talking about being separates it from knowing and doing. Fortunately, where the usefulness of 'ontologism' ends, the benefits of situational ethics and dialogical politics begin. I have thus far attempted to respond to the questions: 'What is going on here?' and 'Who is doing what to whom, and to what ends?'. In this section, I will suggest how things may be done differently and suggest one of many possible replies to: 'How do we get there?'.

The Circle of All Nations ethos, if it can be described as such, embraces the Anishinabe “sacred duty” to be responsible as “caretakers” of the land (Thumbadoo 2005); the dominant ethos of government and industry, as shown in the context of this case, is to ensure that property and money are put to their 'best use'. But, as McGregor asks rhetorically: “How do you put a highest and best use on the sacred?” (personal communication, February 24, 2011). A conflict model of understanding – one that takes a colonial encounter, deconstructs it, makes visible buried knowledge(s) and liberates them – is highly valuable as an analytical method, but it cannot form the basis of a practical resolution of the conflict.[25] A relational model, however, can transform the site of colonial difference into a wellspring of decolonial possibilities and potentially liberate new ways of being. In imagining a decolonial process, Turner (2006: 108-9) supports a dialogical politics:

> Colonialism is embedded in the very being of indigenous life, which for many people includes the spiritual dimension of their existence. It is the process of decolonization that I find difficult to imagine. As with the drive for indigenous forms of political recognition, in order to create the space for us to be free from colonialism, we must engage the dominant culture. We may not know what the process will look like, but we do know it has to be a dialogical one [....] Abolishing colonialism is the goal

[25] I am grateful to Brian Noble (Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University) for encouraging my interest in relational models and for our ongoing discussion on how we can deploy such ideas practically and constructively for social change.

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> of many indigenous and non-indigenous peoples [....] If a just political relationship has to be dialogical in nature, indigenous peoples will not be able to secure a 'postcolonial' political relationship without the help of non-indigenous people.

The Circle of All Nations demonstrates such a dialogical relationship in its work. If counterwork includes a non-Indigenous (or 'settler') ethics of intersubjective sensitivity and ecological responsibility, then the site of colonial difference could also become an ecotone[26] of complementary relational ontologies, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The opening of such a dialogical space would accommodate the formulation of diverse economies, alternative modernities, and decolonial ways of being.

Rather than to attempt to extract from Indigenous knowledge and law a compatible framing of relationality (an act of appropriation), it would be suitable and helpful to peer into Western philosophy to locate an understanding that might be compatible with the Anishinabe sacred duty to care for the land. An understanding that resonates with Anishinabe law, as well as with many Indigenous philosophies, can be found in the philosophical ethics of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. While these philosophers focused primarily upon human relations, their work can easily serve as valuable points of reference to move toward a relational ecological understanding of being-in-place. I offer the following brief narrative of their ethics as a small contribution to a much greater dialogue on relational decolonial ethics.[27]

Levinas (1948; 1969) and Buber (1970) offer ways of understanding intersubjective ethics of relationality, one that challenges the primacy of the individual that underpins dominant colonial ontology. Levinas' *respect* and Buber's *presence* are a basis for the understanding of just relations, since the Self cannot transcend the Other to a position of dominance. For Levinas, intersubjectivity is an immediate experience in the face of the Other, it commands *respect,* and the intrinsic relationality this experience holds is "the primordial phenomenon of gentleness" (1961: 150). The face-to-face encounter with the Other precedes the cleaving of presence into subject and object. This is an important interjection that exists in real experience prior to the emergence of a separate, reflexive ego. The appearance of the face of the Other is "pure expression; expression affects me before I can begin to reflect on it" (Levinas 1948: 107). While Levinas' intersubjective relation is asymmetrical, since the appearance of the Other may command a consideration of respect, the relation described by Buber is equal and symmetrical. For Buber, the relation "I-You" is a primordial *presence* that is "unmediated [and] nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior

26 The zone where ecosystems overlap.

27 I have been drawn to the ideas of Buber for a number of years. In 2008, John Milton (Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Carleton University), in an undergraduate seminar, suggested the possibility of a Levinasian ecological ethos, and, like any good teacher, left the question to the students to ponder, and I explored this idea further. Then, as recently as March 2011, I was referred to Asch (2001), and was pleasantly surprised to discover that my application of Buber and Levinas to decolonial relations is neither outlandish nor original! Asch (2001) reads Buber and Levinas in much the same vein as I do in this thesis, although he places his focus on treaty relations and applied anthropology rather than on ecological relations, as I do presently.

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knowledge and no imagination" (1970: 62). Both Levinas and Buber, even with their different ideas of relation, offer a moment from which an ethical understanding of relations begins. Whether the encounter is described as face-to-face or as I-You, in either case the individual *qua* atomistic Self has not yet coalesced. Any boundary of selfhood is blurred or perhaps not even formed. Thus, the Other is irreducible in significance at this point of engagement, for self-interest does not exist while the Self is fully absorbed in its interest for the Other. The face-to-face encounter is not necessarily limited to the human-to-human relation. As such, there is scope to expand the experience of encounter to our relationship with the non-human world—into a relation with land and non-human species.

In an ecological extension of respect and presence, the face of the Other is not necessarily a human face, but a presence or expression of life and being that enters into awareness prior to form and function or subject and object. To be face-to-face with non-human life, or any aspect of the non-human world, is to be fully present to emplacement in the world. There is no reason beyond an inconsistent (and arguably fallacious) appeal to metaphysics to prevent movement from the interpersonal ethic to an inter-being ethic. For example, one might suggest that a rational human being who encounters non-human life or presence comes face-to-face with a non-rational object. Yet, rationality is not a necessary precondition to engage in relationship for either being — all that is required is presence of the Other. Yet, as Buber states, "[in] the presence of I-You the body vanishes because presence does not embody; presence does not distinguish; presence does not include experience" (1970: 62-63). Buber describes, in typical poetic fashion how presence can also accommodate a relation between human and non-human life (1970: 58):

> I contemplate a tree…
>
> I am drawn into a relation; and the tree ceases to be an It…
>
> Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colours and chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars—all this in its entirety.
>
> It confronts me bodily and has to deal with me as I must deal with it—only differently.
>
> One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity…
>
> What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.

It is important to remember that Buber's tree is rooted in a place. All encounters 'take place'; therefore, all face-to-face expression is also an in-place relation. The inextricable relation of being in place during the encounter with the Other is a re-enchantment of nature. It is also a jumping-off point for a decolonial ethos based on the privileging of the quality of relation that carries the value of 'duty to protect' without appeal to the sacred.

While the Levinas-Buber relation is a reciprocal presence that could be

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described as an ideal initial state of reciprocal co-being, active relationships develop from this state of presence and become politicized sites of intersubjectivity. An ethics based in respect would seek to maintain the expression of gentleness found in the encounter. The ideas presented here do not escape the dilemmas of any other ethical framework, while practical consideration of how to apply this ethical approach requires substantial exploration of how decisions are carried out.

The building of a national (and I would argue it could and should be *international*) Indigenous peace-building centre at Asinabka would provide a public political forum for the application of a relational ethics. The presence of an institution devoted specifically to decolonial relations, education, and culture, would concretize the presence of Indigenous practices, knowledge(s), and ways of being within the broader political dialogue of Canada and, even, the Americas. Weir contends that the centre on Asinabka will provide "leverage" in dealing with Indigenous peoples' concerns, and that "Canada will not be the same once this building happens" (personal communication, March 24, 2011). From its vantage point on Victoria Island, the proposed centre would be situated directly across from the Domtar facility on Chaudière Island and the upstream ring dam. It would also have a clear view of Parliament Hill, the seat of colonial political authority, the Supreme Court of Canada, the seat of colonial judicial authority, and, in Gatineau, the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the seat of colonial administrative authority. More importantly, the view is a face-to-face encounter, so each of these colonial edifices will offer their inhabitants a clear view of the resurgence of decolonial placemaking on Asinabka.

In sum, to open this chapter, I described how modernist ontologies rupture Indigenous placemaking by separating the natural world from human society. The Domtar ESR, from this understanding, served primarily as an ontological screening technology for the hierarchical colonial rationality, and only secondarily as an environmental assessment. I then problematized the notion of 'traditional land use', arguing that the phrase conjoins irreconcilable terms. To close the chapter, I turned away from problems of ontology, and suggested instead an ethos, rooted in Western philosophical tradition, that may contribute to a relational decolonial politics.

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Chapter 7: Conclusion

> The further and further away geographically decisions are taken, the more scope you have for incredible injustice. That is the primary issue. (Arundhati Roy, cited in Barsamian, D. & A. Roy 2004: ix).

To illuminate the practices of the Circle of All Nations within the present colonial context, I chose to focus upon the Domtar hydroelectric upgrade at Asinabka, beginning specifically with the Environmental Screening Report as a key text. This choice formed the point of origin for a genealogical analysis of colonial rationality and its erasure of the concerns and interests of The Circle of All Nations. The failed attempts of the Circle of All Nations to elevate the project to an Individual Environmental Assessment calls into question the entire legislative structure and policy processes bearing upon the 'environmental protection' of the site, particularly with respect to the relationship between Anishinabe communities and Asinabka. Of course, considering the political jurisdictions woven across the region of Asinabka, this particular case contains complexities unlike no other. Nevertheless, these complexities are navigable, and the efforts were finally met with failure when the Minister of the Environment issued a final decision based on his interpretation of legislation. I understand this thesis to reveal a two-fold problem produced by the coloniality of the case context: (1) the community of the Circle of All Nations does not fit into a 'slot' within the colonial constitution of Indigenous collective identities; and (2) the colonial framing of 'traditional land use' excludes practices of land-based ceremony as being vital to Indigenous communities' survival. This problem is a dual dismissal of the collective political identity of a community and at the same time a discounting of their values pertaining to culturally significant practices.

The epigraph at the top of this closing chapter contains a profound truth that underlies the violent oppression of Indigenous peoples at the hands of colonial powers. But how relevant is the above statement in light of the findings of this thesis—a case in which incredible injustice is inflicted upon a community of people directly below the leaded glass windows of Parliament Hill, a stone's throw from the Supreme Court of Canada, and just across the water from the federal department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development? While a geographic separation can amplify the risk of injustice by hiding social groups behind a veil of distance and scale, grave injustice is also caused by the blindness of colonial authorities to understand Indigenous ways of being and their cultural significance. In this thesis, I have made the case that the distance at which decisions are taken is not geographic—it is a cognitive distance. This cognitive distance, I believe, is not a merely a clash of epistemologies, but is formed in its inception by a rupture of the intersubjective relation between people, and between people and places. This is what I consider to be the most significant problem that this research illuminates. The intersubjective relation is partly ontological, a way of being in the world. Yet, there is a problem too with the category of 'ontology': it is a category of

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being, emptied of knowledge and practice, and a product of Western philosophy.

The intersubjective relationality of being, a static concept, becomes actualized and mobilized in practice. To put this into a decolonial context, I suggest that decolonial counterwork would greatly benefit from, in some form, the kind of intercultural sharing and peace-building that takes place within The Circle of All Nations. As I mention in my description of a decolonial political ecology, relationality involves locating and nurturing common connections in the presence of political difference. Such a form of counterwork stands in political opposition to the practices of direct action, revolutionary organizing, and other modes of confronting oppression that focus on class and power. I do not discount the value of these political positions, but I did not venture into discussion and analysis of class in this thesis. Conflict models would shed light on this case study, but they are incommensurable with the practical philosophy of Elder Commanda and the practices of the Circle of All Nations. If I believed that conflict models could contribute to a reconstructive understanding of this case study, I would happily ground the conceptual framework of this thesis in the works of Marx, or perhaps Gramsci.

The Asinabka Indigenous Centre proposed by Elder Commanda and The Circle of All Nations is a major endeavour, and with this development project comes the baggage of a large capital investment, the need for administration and governance, and the threat of its current mission being hijacked and diverted to serve the interests of capital. But all the more reason to affirm the significance of Asinabka as described by Elder Commanda and The Circle of All Nations. There may come a day (perhaps sooner rather than later considering the policies of the current Conservative government and their Supreme Court justice appointments) when the Indian Act is repealed. Yes, it is an oppressive and racist law, but it has also defined for many Indigenous people in Canada what it means to be 'Indian'. If the political status, and ultimately the long-term survival, of urban Indigenous communities is unaccounted for within present day law and policy, then what will the future hold? As Verna McGregor (personal communication, February 24, 2011) so eloquently proclaimed: “[Y]ou have your nation building on Parliament Hill, so where is our nation building?”. If the interests and concerns of an urban Indigenous community and their non-Indigenous allies are dismissed, deflected, and ignored today, it is unclear how such a political community could gain recognition and respect in a post-Indian Act society. A permanent institution on Asinabka dedicated to Indigenous nationhood in Canada would not only contribute to what a post-Indian Act society might become, but also embody the vital importance of Indigenous cultural and political self-determination.

I have participated in The Circle of All Nations for eight years, and, in my experience, I have witnessed the constructive outcomes of a political ontology rooted in relationality. I have had the great privilege of attending the Circle of All Nations gatherings, talking circles, and ceremonies, and often imagine how much these practices contribute to decolonization efforts. In conducting this research, I have often wondered about the future impact that an Indigenous peace-building centre at Asinabka might have on the greater dialogue of decolonization. I believe the findings I have presented indicate that the centre at Asinabka may indeed provide a necessary space for

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intersubjective and intercultural sharing as well as a forum for dialogical politics and the co-creation of alternatives to modernity. I do know for certain, however, that the current impact of Elder Commanda's tireless efforts, resilience, and persistence, is immense and difficult to measure, and that this research would not even be possible without his life's work.

I will now describe what I perceive to be limitations of this work, each of which may also signal opportunities for my own learning, and, hopefully, provide openings for my interlocutors in this decolonization dialogue to pursue future research. First, I acknowledge there is a degree of internal conflict within this thesis between the conceptual/methodological framework and the subsequent analysis. My approach to the research and analysis in very contextual: the selection of a single report, and not even the entire report, but a section contained within it, is a good example of a genealogical starting point in research. It is from this isolated piece of evidence that I was able to extend my research into the world and build an argument on the forces that bore upon this report. I would also assert that the critical analysis pertaining to the conception of traditional land use, and the political and legal connections I have made provide helpful insight into the specific problems relating to this case analysis. Also, the story of my experience at the Circle of All Nations gatherings, the description of Asinabka as a sacred site, and the biographical narrative of Elder Commanda, although very incomplete, contributes to the narratology. The limitation I perceive as most noteworthy, however, is how my analytical discussion, at times, strays from the theory and the methodology. If I were to begin again, knowing what I have learned from this research process, I would augment both the theory and the methodology. I find Section 2.1, concerning the colonial encounter, to be a helpful literature review, but less helpful in its direct applicability to this case study, especially considering that I shift to a philosophical discussion on intersubjective ethics later in the thesis. There are aspects of Flyvbjerg's (2001) phronetic research methodology that are, in my opinion, best suited for document analysis than for human subject research. To research and compose a narratology, as a 'tour guide', is a craft not unlike map-making. Perhaps it is my interpretation of phronetic research, but I somehow acquired a 'distance' from my research. Before I embarked on this research project, I felt like an insider, as a participant in the Circle of All Nations; during the research and afterward, even at this moment, I feel like an outsider. I felt uncomfortable seeking interview subjects, and I attributed this reluctance during the research process to a number of factors: my position as a white-male descendent of settlers, being an insider, being an outsider, being a scholar, mild social phobia, and chronic procrastination. Yet, during the entire process I did not realize that entering into research with 'distance' would create the effect of paralysis. I suspect that my urge to discuss intersubjective ethics arose from a subconscious need to close that distance. Hindsight is always illuminating.

One area of future work, for which I hope this research serves as a catalyst, is an intensive study of the conjunction of: urban Indigenous politics, land, ceremony, and alliances. I have argued that 'traditional land use' is a contradiction, but it is also a strange phrase to apply to an urban context. Yet, as a trope for valued Indigenous practices, the phrase carries weight. There are consultancies and policy groups

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dedicated to the production of traditional land use studies. But there is no equivalent field of expertise in the area of urban Indigenous practices focusing on relations with land. Evelyn Peters (Department of Geography & Planning, University of Saskatchewan) has contributed much important scholarship to the understanding of urban Indigenous issues in Canada. Considering that half of the Indigenous population within Canada lives in urban centres, increased scholarly effort this area of study would to lead to greater understandings of urban decolonial possibilities.

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Coda: Metalogue on ontology

Echo: Well, that didn't go too smoothly, Eric.

Eric: What??

Echo: The ending. It kind of left me hanging. Which, of course, is a good thing.

Eric: Who or what are you, *and what are you doing in my thesis??*

Echo: I'm what you would call the Other.
Well, more specifically, I guess I'm *your* Other.

Eric: My Other?

Echo: Yeah, I'm yours. Well, *I was*. I've decolonized myself from your mind. Now I'm free.

Eric: Okay, this is freaking me out. Would it be too much of me to ask what this is all about?

Echo: Ah, your insatiable quest for more knowledge! Of course, Eric.

Two things are happening here. First, we are engaged right now in a metalogue. You came across it a number of years ago in Gregory Bateson's work. He described metalogue as a conversation about some problematic subject... not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject.

Eric: Yes, I remember. And you have to cite it properly.

Echo: Oh, sorry – of course... He described it as a open quote conversation about some problematic subject... not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject end quote, left parenthesis, nineteen seventy-two, punctuate with a colon, hit the space-bar, type the numeral 1, right parenthesis, and then add a period.

Eric: Fine, then. What's the second thing going on?

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Echo: The second thing going on is the subject of our conversation is a fiction, and that subject is ontology. Ergo, you need a fictional chapter!

Eric: A fiction? No, 'ontology' is the—

Echo: *—the meta-theory of being, existence, and reality – an underlying philosophy that accounts for 'what the world must be like for knowledge to be possible.*

I inhabit your thesis, Eric. I know what you wrote. My point is that you can't reduce existence down to a theory and then act as if you are talking about reality.

Eric: But that's not ontology. An ontology is a theory of the *nature* of existence, not existence itself.

Echo: Uh hmm.

Eric: What?

Echo: Isn't *existence* the nature of existence?

Eric: You're talking in circles.

Echo: Ah! Now you're making sense, Englishman! Existence is circles, big, open, boundless circles.

Eric: That's one ontological perspective...

Echo: Hey, you've just colonized my meaning, Eric. All hail the 'ontological imperialist'!

Subject #3: [salutes]

Eric: Huh? Where did *he* come from?

Echo: Oh, that's George. He's a participant-observer. And he has ethics clearance in case you were concerned.

George: [thumbs nose while snickering]

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Eric: I'm feeling a pretty confused right now...

Echo: Excellent! Allow me to help you find your bearings.

I find all this scholarly talk about a pluriverse of multiple ontologies to be laden with thick irony. I think you came closest to touching on this very subject in your [yawns] engaging final chapter.

Eric: Go on. I'm listening.

Echo: In the first place, how can you talk about ontology, relational or not, without occupying a privileged vantage point? It's like looking down on a labyrinth and describing it, rather than getting dirt on the soles of your feet and just walking it.

Eric: So, what you're saying, is that my methodology occupies that distant point of reference? I must be a less capable tour guide than I thought.

Echo: I think you're being too hard on yourself, Eric.

It's not a fault of yours, but a fault of the paradigm of consciousness in which you're embedded. Beings, knowledges, worlds, actions, causality – all sliced and diced for logical consumption.

It's also your language of subjects and predicates... finite beings with discrete attributes....it's all so disenchanting. Ecologists Maturana and Varela spoke of an unbroken coincidence of our being, our doing, and our knowing, and—

Eric: Umm...

Echo: Oh sorry. Maturana and Varela (1987: 25) spoke of an “unbroken coincidence of our being, our doing, and our knowing”.

That is the nature of existence.

Eric: I am getting a sense that you're leading up to a final point, here. And I hope it is connected to Asinabka...

Echo: It is a point, and it's my last one to make in this metalogue.
But it's not final, and it's not *directly* connected your topic.
Nothing is final. Everything is connected. It's all open, Eric.

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Eric: I suppose you think I ought to have made my entire thesis a metalogue?

Echo: No! First, you would probably fail. And if it was because of my poor citation style, I'd hate to be responsible for that.

George: [raises hands and makes a 'quote' sign, while sticking out tongue]

Echo: More importantly, you can't walk a labyrinth and map its circuits at the same time. May as well not bother getting your feet dirty in the first place.

No, what I am leading up to, before I emancipate myself from this awkward language, is that *uncertainty* is where being, knowing, and doing all come back together.

And I think George would certainly agree with me on that.

George: [shrugs]

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