

## The Skirt Project: Resources for Teachers and Communities

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### Using the Resources

The purpose of this Toolkit is to provide resources which can be used to facilitate conversations and build knowledge about the relationships between clothing, colonialism, gender, religion, and identity. The materials are designed to be accessible to and relevant for audiences of different ages and from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. In order to promote accessibility, various types of tools have been developed; these range from academic papers and lesson plans to videos and visual presentations. For example, a high-school social studies teacher might read, “Clothing the Collective: Gender, Identity, and the Skirt Protocol”, in order to better understand the issues explored within and develop a research assignment for their students. Women in indigenous communities who wish to open dialogue about gender-based violence and decolonization may find that the short video provides a helpful introduction and acts as a conversation-starter. Individuals who work with youth in after-school programs might use the “Multimedia Resources and Group Activities” tool to open a deeper discussion about colonialism and sexuality, or about representation in media. The resources need not be used in any particular order and can be used independently of one another. It is hoped that there is something for everyone in the Toolkit.

With that said, the Toolkit does not pretend to be a comprehensive authority on the issues which it discusses. There are many important perspectives and stories which have not been emphasized or included within, and not all materials will be suitable for all audiences. However, the Toolkit can act as a valuable resource for those who wish to better understand the social and political forces that influence how we dress and how we interpret the meaning of clothing, as well as assist people to articulate these issues and cultivate conversations about them in their homes, schools, and communities.

## GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

### ASSIMILATION

Assimilation is the process by which one culture becomes similar to and eventually incorporated into another. It may involve adopting the language, religion, political system, institutional structures, and social practices of another culture. Assimilation may occur by choice; for example, some immigrants may choose to adopt as many aspects of their new home as possible in order to fully integrate into society. However, assimilation may also be forced upon a minority culture by a dominant one, as in the case of settler colonialism, through laws such as those prohibiting the practice of religious traditions or policies such as English-only education. Assimilation requires that the minority group give up their cultural difference in order to obtain rights and recognition in the dominant society. For example, under the *Indian Act* and until 1960, indigenous people in Canada were not enfranchised unless they lost or gave up their Indian status.

### CLASS

The term class refers to a kind of social ordering in which the members of a society are divided into groups based on economic and/or social status. For example, “working class” might be used to describe individuals who have lower incomes and have “blue-collar” jobs as labourers, factory workers, or tradespeople. Members of the middle class and upper class have higher incomes and are more likely to hold “white-collar” or professional jobs. Although the word “class” is most obviously associated with income, it also implicates one’s profession, level of education, manner of speaking, clothing, and lifestyle. “Classism” refers to discrimination against a person based on their social class. Sometimes, classism can be related to other forms of discrimination such as racism, and it is important to consider how these systems of oppression interact.

### COLONIALISM

Colonialism is the domination of one people by another people. It differs from imperialism in that it implies the transfer of one population (the colonizers) to another territory which is already populated by the colonized. Imperialism, on the other hand, may only involve political or military control, rather than physical occupation. This distinction is often blurred, however, with some scholars labelling as colonialism even those conquests which involved minimal settlement as long as political sovereignty was claimed, and distinguishing this from imperialism, which utilized more indirect forms of control and influence. These resources use colonialism to mean the project of European political domination of indigenous peoples and territories from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, with or without significant lasting European settlement.

### DECOLONIZATION

Decolonization refers to the process of undoing colonialism. It can include actions such as learning and teaching indigenous languages, implementing self-governance of nations or communities, and designing programs, services, and education models from indigenous perspectives. It can also include the equally important but more abstract process of working to understand the impacts of colonialism on indigenous cultures and critically evaluating beliefs, traditions, and practices. Decolonizing work can (and must) be done both by indigenous peoples and settlers.

## ESSENTIALISM

Essentialism is the reduction of something complex to a fundamental essence which is fixed, natural, and unchanging. For example, by describing women as inherently good parents, one reduces women's identity to motherhood. This is problematic because it suggests that women who are not good parents or who do not want to be mothers are not truly women - they cannot claim this identity if they lack its fundamental quality. Similarly, if the "essence" of indigenous identity is a connection to traditional territories, urban and displaced indigenous peoples are excluded from being considered authentically indigenous.

## GENDER COMPLEMENTARITY

Gender complementarity is a system of social organization in which the genders perform separate roles, and labour is divided along gendered boundaries, but those roles are equally valued and complement each other. Gender complementarity is often described in terms of harmony and balance, and contrasted with patriarchy, which is described in terms of domination and subjugation.

## HYBRIDITY

Hybridity refers to the individual or group processes of linguistic, cognitive, cultural, or ethnic mixing which create products distinct from their sources and different than the sum of their original parts. Although the term has been used in many contexts, it is perhaps now best known for its relevance to postcolonial theory. In his book, *The Location of Culture*, postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha defines hybridity as an intermingling of cultures which occurs as a result of colonial occupation. The hybrid identity is neither wholly colonizer nor wholly colonized but something separate and new.

## IDENTITY POLITICS

Identity politics refers to the process whereby social groups recognize the commonalities of their experiences, struggle for acknowledgment of the ways they have been marginalized, and use their group identity as the axis for political organizing. These social groups seek rights and recognition as *members* of the different social group, rather than *in spite of* their differences from the dominant society. Identity politics is a contested term which has been the subject of much critique, as some worry that it risks erasing the diversity of experiences within a group itself, positioning a single identity as the only legitimate one.

## PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is a social system in which men are the primary holders of power, through holding positions of political and moral authority and controlling property. A patriarchal society is distinct from a patrilineal society, where property is passed down through male heirs, although many patriarchal societies are also patrilineal. Similarly, matrilineal societies are not necessarily matriarchal. In *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism*, Josephine Donovan condenses the most significant aspects of patriarchy into four elements:

- men belong to the public sphere (workers, politicians, social leaders) and women to the private or domestic sphere (mothers, wives, homemakers).

- men's production is for exchange, while women's production is for use (men create products which are for sale or exchange, while women create products for use in the home or by the family)
- women are politically marginalized or excluded (men dominate positions of political power, and women may be legally or socially disenfranchised)
- women experience significant physical events which differ from those experienced by men (menstruation, childbirth, breastfeeding, sexual abuse, partner violence).

Patriarchal societies justify men's domination of women by assigning different physical and intellectual traits to the genders. For example, men are rational, objective, and strong, whereas women are emotional, nurturing, and weak. These associations are so deeply entrenched that it becomes natural to see men as inherently better political leaders and decision-makers, justifying their dominance in the public sphere, and women as inherently better mothers, justifying their relegation to the private sphere.

## PERFORMATIVITY

Performativity refers to doing an act or acts in a repetitive way, which create rather than simply represent meaning. Instead of identity being the source or cause of acts and behaviours, those acts and behaviours actually participate in constructing identity itself. Judith Butler popularized the notion of gender identity as "performed", but performativity can apply to other kinds of identity as well. For example, the paper *Clothing the Collective* found among these resources will consider how Mapuche women in Argentina construct a cultural and ethnic identity through the actions they perform.

## SECULARISM

Secularism means the separation of organized religion from political power. Religious institutions and political structures are kept separate. Religious beliefs and values are not supposed to influence political decisions, form the basis for laws, or enjoy the state's endorsement. More broadly, secular societies think of themselves as promoting the values of tolerance, religious freedom, and religious equality. While secularism may be posited as a uniform, universal doctrine, in reality there are different types and levels of secularism. Societies may be more or less secular, rather than simply secular or non-secular.

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Social construction is a term used to describe how ideas about concepts are culturally determined, rather than inherent, innate, or inevitable. For example, scholars often refer to "the social construction of gender". By this, they mean that society's ideas about what men and women are like and what masculinity and femininity entail are created through ongoing processes of discourse within the society itself, rather than being natural or essential things that we as members of society have simply noticed or discovered. An example of a socially constructed idea might be that men are "naturally" violent or women are "naturally" nurturing, when social constructionists would argue that men and women are in fact conditioned to behave in these stereotypical ways. Social construction can also be applied to other areas, such as ideas about race and ethnicity.

## SYNCRETISM

Syncretism is similar to hybridity in that it relates to the mixing of cultural practices. However, syncretism does not necessarily produce a new, distinct practice or identity; rather, it remains possible to recognize the parts of the old in the new. Syncretism is more of an intertwining of two cultures, wherein elements of one culture are incorporated into another. Syncretism is often used to refer to the mixing of religious practices, but not exclusively.

## TWO-SPIRIT

Two-spirit is a term which was chosen at the 1994 Annual Native American Gay and Lesbian Gathering in Winnipeg to describe a wide range of gender and/or sexual identities in indigenous communities. It replaced the term *berdache*, which many individuals found offensive, inaccurate, and inadequate. Two-spirit may be used to describe an indigenous person who identifies as possessing both male and female spirits; however, it can also be used to describe an indigenous individual who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, non-binary, transgender, or queer. Additionally, two-spirit can encompass other gender and sexual identities which have historically been recognized in various indigenous communities, but for which there are no equivalent English terms. Therefore, two-spirit may have a specific meaning but may also be an umbrella term. Throughout these resources, I use the acronym LGBTQ2 to refer to the minority sexual and gender identities of indigenous individuals, in the hopes of acknowledging the ambiguity with which the term two-spirit is used, and the fact that a person might identify both as, for example, two-spirit and transgender, or might use different terms depending on context.

For an excellent explanation of why the term two-spirit is necessary to talk about indigenous gender and sexual identities in an English speaking-context, see Cherokee two-spirit scholar Qwo-Li Driskill's article, "Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic", *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 16:2 (2004), University of Nebraska Press.

**Clothing the Collective:  
Gender, Identity, and the Skirt Protocol**

**Introduction**

When I was four years old, my very favourite article of clothing was a frilly party dress made of bright red velvet. One of my earliest memories is of throwing a minor temper tantrum after my mother firmly told me that I could not wear that dress to a funeral: red was not an “appropriate” colour for funerals. This was one of my first encounters with the notion of appropriate clothing. Previously, I’d understood that one wore sweaters in the winter, hats and sunglasses in the summer, and rubber boots in the rain, but I hadn’t really caught on to the fact that choices about what we wear are governed not only by material realities, practical considerations, and personal tastes, but also by various sets of rules related to abstract concepts. Although my four-year-old self quickly recovered from the disappointment of having to relegate my party dress to the closet, looking back, this trivial event became an important moment. I learned that clothing can signify something different to observers than it does to the wearer; what we put on our bodies has the power to convey messages and construct meaning, even if we don’t intend this. I became aware of the existence of unwritten codes of conduct about clothing which I was unable to fully understand but was nevertheless required to accept. Eventually, I recognized that underlying words like “appropriateness”, there are deep and troubling questions about the relationship of clothing to identity, culture, gender, religion, and class.

This paper will examine the ongoing controversy in some indigenous communities in Canada over the requirement that women<sup>1</sup> wear ankle-length skirts while participating in certain cultural and spiritual ceremonies, in order to make visible and explore the complex and fraught relationships between tradition, identity, colonialism, and gender. The skirt protocol is often considered a cultural tradition, and therefore women who do not wear the skirt may be perceived as disrespecting their

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1 Throughout this paper, the word “woman” refers to all self-identified women.

cultures and failing to live up to the ideal of the traditional indigenous woman. Women have been shamed and denied access to ceremonies such as smudging and sweat lodges for failing to dress in the required manner.<sup>2</sup> Some have taken issue with the skirt protocol for various reasons, but there is no general consensus on the value, legitimacy, usefulness, or “rightness” of the skirt protocol, and the debate reveals a myriad of perspectives. The purpose of this paper is not to make arguments about the acceptability of the protocol, but rather to explore and critically analyze the debate and the issues it raises about tradition, identity, colonialism, and gender in indigenous communities.

The first chapter of this paper considers the relationship of dress to identity in various social, cultural, political, and historical contexts, with particular attention to the role of clothing in colonial and post-colonial contexts. The second chapter examines how this relationship is gendered, and explores why women’s bodies and women’s clothing are so often the sites of intense debates about cultural, religious, and national identity. These sections will provide theoretical grounding and context for a more in-depth discussion of the skirt debate itself.

The third chapter focuses on the controversy over the skirt protocol. It seeks to identify both spoken and unspoken bases for the skirt protocol, as well as describe and critically analyze some of the perspectives about the protocol put forth by indigenous scholars, writers, and activists. This section also aims to identify and examine places of tension which are evident in discussions about the skirt. Such places of tension include the relationship of tradition to culture, culture to identity, and identity to politics; the blurring of the lines between tradition, culture, and spirituality and how this affects indigenous identity politics; the impacts of colonialism on gender relations in indigenous communities; and the relationship between decolonization, tradition, and cultural authenticity. The fourth and final chapter will attempt to read the controversy over the skirt protocol in the context of a “politics of

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2 Alex Wilson, “Two-Spirit People, Body Sovereignty, and Gender Self-Determination”, *Red Rising Magazine* (21 Sept 2015) online: <http://redrisingmagazine.ca/two-spirit-people-body-sovereignty-and-gender-self-determination/>.

becoming”, as put forth by political theorist William Connolly in “Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming”.<sup>3</sup>

Before beginning, some discussion of the term “identity” may be useful, as it is an important concept throughout the paper. William Connolly writes:

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. Entrenched in this indispensable relation is a second set of tendencies... to congeal established identities into fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things...Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.<sup>4</sup>

While there may be other valid definitions of “identity”, Connolly’s explanation is particularly apt in the context of this paper because of the way it emphasizes the fine line between acknowledging difference and constructing otherness, as well as the tendency for individuals and groups to see their identities (and the identities of others) as fixed, or to claim that certain aspects of themselves are fundamental to who and what they are. This paper attempts to confront the tension between strengthening community through constructing shared identities and marginalizing those who fail to conform to the vision of the collective. In indigenous communities, the movement to define, access, and revitalize cultures after centuries of colonialism must constantly struggle to separate itself from the drive to essentialization.

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3 William Connolly, “Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming”, *Why I Am Not A Secularist*. University of Minnesota Press (USA: 2000), 47. [“The Politics of Becoming”]

4 William Connolly, “Confessing Identity/Belonging to Difference”, *Democracy, Pluralism, and Political Theory*. Routledge (USA: 2008), 130. [“Confessing Identity/Belonging to Difference”]

## Chapter 1

### The Significance of Dress in Various Cultural, Historical, and Political Contexts

*Our body is... the very center of our symbolic universe... riddled with cultural and political implications.*

-Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "In Defense of Performance"<sup>5</sup>

Clothing plays a special role as a signifier and constructor of individual and collective identities.

In an essay about miniskirt bans in Africa, Karen Hansen writes that "the dressed body mediates between the self and society... people both create and are created by the clothes they wear and the bodies with which they are worn".<sup>6</sup> In his 1980 essay, anthropologist Terence Turner makes the argument that dress and body modification are of social significance across diverse human societies, referring to the dressed body as a "social skin":<sup>7</sup> the place where the personal and the public meet and interact. If, as Gomez-Peña writes, the body is the center of the symbolic universe, then clothing mediates how that center is perceived, accessed, and performed. The ability of clothing to subvert, unsettle, or inflame is visible in a wide variety of contexts, from the sumptuary laws of Elizabethan England to contemporary high-school dress codes banning leggings and skinny jeans. This section will provide a few illustrations of the many ways in which clothing impacts the construction of identities.

#### Clothing and religion

Clothing often carries religious or spiritual significance. Items such as the niqab, the cross, the turban, or the yarmulke directly invoke Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Judaism respectively, and act as signifiers of the bearer's religion. Other articles of clothing or styles of dress are connected to religious values, without being obviously linked to any specific faith. For example, a woman may wear

5 Guillermo Gomez-Peña. "In Defense of Performance", *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy*, Routledge (New York, 2005), 19-39, also available online:

[http://www.pochanostra.com/antes/jazz\\_pocha2/mainpages/in\\_defense.htm](http://www.pochanostra.com/antes/jazz_pocha2/mainpages/in_defense.htm)

6 Karen Tranburg Hansen, "Dressing Dangerously: Miniskirts, Gender Relations, and Sexuality in Zambia", *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, ed Jean Allman, Indiana University Press (USA, 2004) at 167. [Hansen]

7 Terence Turner, "The Social Skin" (reprint) (2012) *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2:2, at 486.

non-revealing clothing such as a long skirt and loose-fitting shirt because she values sexual modesty as an aspect of her Catholic faith, but it is not possible for an observer to tell simply by looking at her to which religion she ascribes. Clothing can also be an important signifier of a-religious or secular identity: in societies in which secularism is a foundational value, clothing comes to symbolize the false dichotomy between gender equality and religious freedom, and is the site of intense debate about the appropriate relationship between religion and the state.

The niqab<sup>8</sup> has lately been the focus of debates about gender equality, religious freedom, citizenship, and xenophobia in both Canada and France. Interestingly, while religious articles of clothing clearly connote a certain identity - if they were meaningless, why would anyone care who wears them? French President Nicholas Sarkozy describes the niqab as an oppressive item which *prevents* the wearer from possessing her own identity: “We cannot accept in our country women who are imprisoned behind a grid, cut off from society and deprived of any identity.”<sup>9</sup> This is a curious contradiction, indicating a belief that Muslim women are not “allowed” to express their identities, when in fact wearing the niqab might simply be the means through which they choose to do so.

Both the French and the Quebecois governments promote the idea that secularism protects women from oppressive religions seeking to limit their rights. In decrying the niqab and calling for state neutrality, however, these governments have simultaneously promoted a narrow image of the ideal secular female body, one which is “free” to express femininity and sexuality. This is illustrated by the obsession with a bare face,<sup>10</sup> where “bare” denotes “unveiled” rather than free of makeup - although a

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8 The niqab is a veil which covers the face worn by some Muslim women. It is distinct from a hijab, which covers the hair, or a burkha, which covers the entire body from the top of the head to the ground. There are various kinds of head, face, and body coverings worn by Muslim women in various countries, and their names vary depending on language and place. I have chosen to use the term niqab as it appears to be the most recognizable and commonly used term in the Canadian context.

9 Jennifer Selby and Mayanthi Fernando, “Short Skirts and Niqab Bans: On Sexuality and the Secular Body”, *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, blog post, Social Science Research Council (4 Sept 2014) online: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2014/09/04/short-skirts-and-niqab-bans-on-sexuality-and-the-secular-body/>. [Selby and Fernando].

10 *Ibid.*

case could be made that makeup is also detrimental to gender equality. Why is makeup seen as a tool through which women choose to express themselves, whereas the niqab is seen as a tool for preventing them from doing exactly that? What is the difference between Muslim women wearing niqabs and non-Muslim women wearing makeup? Just as Muslim men are not expected to cover their faces in public, secular men are not expected to wear makeup. When Muslim women speak up and claim that they choose to wear the niqab, they are often not taken seriously. Secular women also lack choice when it comes to wearing makeup. In many social and professional situations, there are tangible consequences for choosing to be bare-faced. Even when job performance has nothing to do with physical attractiveness, women who choose to go makeup-free are punished: in the U.S. decision *Jespersen v Harrah's Operating Company Inc.*,<sup>11</sup> the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the firing of a female bartender who had refused to comply with a dress code that required women to wear makeup to work, despite the fact that her performance reviews had been consistently excellent. In Canada, the Ontario Human Rights Commission has acknowledged the prevalence of gender-specific dress codes in employment and its corresponding impacts on women – particularly in the restaurant industry – and has encouraged employers to review their dress policies.<sup>12</sup> In fact, a friend of mine recently told me about her experience as a 17-year-old hostess at a popular chain restaurant, where management described the dress code to her as “classy provocative”. This meant makeup, tight pencil skirts, and heels. Male employees, on the other hand, were burdened only with the vague requirement that they dress “professionally”. Clearly, sexism manages to pervade secular societies, as well as religious ones. Yet Quebec and France have shown little interest in protecting gender equality by policing the use of gendered articles of dress besides the niqab, such as makeup or high heels. One can therefore be

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11 *Jespersen v Harrah's Operating Company Inc.*, 392 F.3d 1076 (9th Cir. 2004).

12 The Ontario Human Rights Commission has stated that gendered dress codes may reinforce stereotypical and sexist notions about how women should look, and has recognized that women are more vulnerable to sexual harassment when required to dress in a sexualized manner for work. See “Sexualized and Gender-Specific Dress Codes: Frequently Asked Questions”, Ontario Human Rights Commission (8 Mar 2016), online: [http://ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Dress%20Codes%20FAQs\\_1.pdf](http://ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Dress%20Codes%20FAQs_1.pdf).

skeptical of the claim that banning the niqab is solely about protecting Muslim women from gender inequality. As Selby and Fernando argue in “Short Skirts and Niqab Bans: On Sexuality and the Secular Body”, secularism is also intimately connected to ideas about national identity, citizenship, and xenophobia.

In opposition to the niqab’s perceived oppressiveness, the mini-skirt has been taken up in France as a secular symbol of gender equality and “liberation”. Short skirts allow women to express their femininity, while niqabs prevent them from doing so; wearing a skirt is an act of resistance, and wearing a veil is an act of submission.<sup>13</sup> What this presumes is that every woman wants to express her femininity, and would choose to do so in the same manner. Selby and Fernando write:

...certain aesthetic practices—wearing makeup and short skirts... have become essential to that femininity... this model of femininity is naturalized, such that wearing makeup and revealing clothes corresponds to taking up one’s natural qualities and desires as a woman and an individual.<sup>14</sup>

This discourse naturalizes femininity, thereby collapsing gender into sex and allowing opponents of the niqab to “champion simultaneously hyper-normative femininity and—indeed, *as*—sexual equality.”<sup>15</sup>

An act as seemingly personal as veiling one’s face can quickly become a flashpoint for heated discussions about nationhood and citizenship, while an act as seemingly mundane as putting on a skirt can make one into a national symbol of freedom and equality.

### Clothing, culture, and place

Clothing helps to express cultural identity or signify the place from which one comes. In remote Andean regions of Peru, for example, indigenous<sup>16</sup> women wear *polleras*, long, thickly layered skirts

13 Claire Hancock. “The Republic is lived with an uncovered face (and a skirt): (un)dressing French citizens”, *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 22:7 (2015) at 1033. [Hancock]

14 Selby and Fernando, *supra* note 9.

15 *Ibid.*

16 In the interests of clarity, I use the term “indigenous” to describe people in the Andean highlands in the Arequipa region of Peru as it is used by Blenda Femenías in *Gender and the Boundaries of Dress in Contemporary Peru*. However, it is worth noting that the terms “indigenous”, “Indian/*indio*”, and “native” are almost always labels imposed on the people of the Andean highlands, rather than terms used to self-identify. In Peru, the term “*indio*” is imbued with negative connotations that may explain people’s unwillingness to utilize it. It is also frequently conflated with “peasant”, although not all peasants are actually descended from pre-hispanic populations. “Indigenous” is a more value-neutral

covered in bright embroidery. Not only does the use of these skirts reveal a woman's membership in an indigenous group, but subtle differences in embroidery patterns, techniques, and the way the skirts are worn also allows those inside the community to determine from which village or region the wearer hails<sup>17</sup> – and even, sometimes, identify the individual artisan who made the garment.<sup>18</sup> This provides an opportunity to recognize and strengthen community and kinship ties. Andean women are well aware of the power of their *polleras* and the relationship between clothing and identity. Some wear their *polleras* while travelling, as they know that other indigenous women will treat them with greater hospitality as a result.<sup>19</sup> Other women, who proudly boast elaborate *polleras* in their own communities, trade them for western wear when visiting the nearest big city, Arequipa. The *polleras* signify to the Arequipeños that the wearers are *indios* (indigenous; but also more broadly, peasants) and they view them with disdain as a result.<sup>20</sup> Without their distinctive skirts, indigenous women can pass unnoticed in the city and do not have to experience the “shame” of being looked down upon as a rural indigenous person.<sup>21</sup>

The Argentinian government has begun to recognize its indigenous population in the last twenty-five years,<sup>22</sup> after a long history of colonialism, assimilation, and nationalist rhetoric about the nation's so-called homogenous racial and cultural character. But as the public and political will to

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term, but is still often unclaimed by the people it describes: they do not call themselves indigenous, but neither do they prefer to refer to themselves as members of a specific tribe or nation, as might be the preference in Canada or the United States. Even individuals from communities where pre-colonial languages such as Quechua are spoken would generally not call themselves indigenous people. They are simply “from” a certain place. This too can be confusing, as the term “*originario*” (meaning “originally from”) does not necessarily implicate race or ethnicity: both a Spanish-speaking *mestizo* and an indigenous Quechua-speaker could call themselves “*originarios*” of the same place. As a result, while academic literature and even Peruvian schoolbooks describe the country's population as some 50% indigenous, it's difficult to find a person who identifies as such. This could be partly because class, race, and ethnicity have become highly conflated in Peru. For example, “indigenous” people may describe some of their family members who have achieved wealth as “white” simply by virtue of their socioeconomic class, knowing that their ancestry is not what North Americans would consider “white”. For a more fullsome discussion on indigeneity and self-identification, see Chapter 2 of Femenías, *infra* note 17, especially 83-94.

17 Blenda Femenías. *Gender and the Boundaries of Dress in Contemporary Peru*, University of Texas Press (Austin, 2005) at 23. [Femenías]

18 *Ibid* at 17-8.

19 *Ibid* at 123-4.

20 *Ibid* at 78-9.

21 *Ibid*.

22 Sarah Warren, “How Will We Recognize Each Other as Mapuche?” *Gender and Society* 23:6 (Dec 2009) at 777-8. [Warren]

acknowledge and enforce indigenous rights grows, historically undefined Mapuche communities seek ways to assert their identity and benefit from more favourable government policies on issues such as land claims. Many Mapuche people support employing “traditional” women’s clothing, typically described as long wool dresses, silver jewelry, and woven belts, as a visual signifier of cultural identity and, by extension, political legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> As one Mapuche woman asks, “If we don’t [wear our clothing], how will we recognize each other?”<sup>24</sup> This sentiment reflects a desire for intracommunity recognition. There are few other visible markers of identity available, few are still able to speak their indigenous language, and the majority of Mapuche people are scattered throughout urban centres, so they lack access to a shared geographical community.<sup>25</sup> As a result, clothing is one of the only ways they can express their membership in the group. Mapuche people also view clothing as a tool which helps them to fit into the perceptions of indigeneity held by the state and the wider Argentinian public. They:

...actively create the cultural markers that draw performative boundaries between Mapuche and non-Mapuche people... women's use of Mapuche clothing reflects an explicit desire to politicize Mapuche ethnic identity.<sup>26</sup>

Anthropologist Sarah Warren notes that while men and women member of the *Coordinación de Organizaciones Mapuches* (Coordination of Mapuche Organizations, or COM) generally dress in jeans, women put on “traditional” clothing for interviews, political gatherings, rallies, and marches. And although many Mapuche women are critical of the discourse of traditionalism and what it might mean for gender equality, they also value the visibility that comes along with performing their indigeneity in the traditionalist way. Being physically visible is important, one Mapuche woman states, “to show we continue to exist”.<sup>27</sup> Her words indicate a desire for extra-community recognition and illustrate how clothing can be an effective marker of identity as well as a tool for constructing it.

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23 *Ibid* at 779.

24 *Ibid* at 781.

25 *Ibid* at 776-7.

26 *Ibid* at 781.

27 *Ibid* at 783.

### Clothing as a tool of nation-building

In addition to acting as a kind of visual border of cultural, ethnic, and religious identity, clothing also plays an important role in the development of national identity. Newly independent nation-states are particularly pre-occupied with dress; Tanzania's 1969 miniskirt ban offers an interesting example. Miniskirts were prohibited in Dar es Salaam on the basis that they were "indecent", "decadent", and antithetical to Tanzania's "national culture".<sup>28</sup> The country's political elites possessed strong opinions about what national culture should look like, despite the fact that the nation as such had only existed for six years. The former Tanganyika achieved independence in 1961, and did not merge with the island of Zanzibar to form Tanzania until 1963.<sup>29</sup>

While some of the rhetoric around the ban suggested a concern with sexual morality, miniskirts were decried publicly not only as too revealing but also as un-Tanzanian. Leaders of the Tanzania Youth League (quite literally the fashion police) grounded the prohibition in the contention that as miniskirts were foreign in origin, they undermined Tanzania's own culture.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the miniskirt was associated with urban "decadence", the stark opposite of the hardworking, humble farmer invoked by President Julius Nyerere's vision of African socialism.<sup>31</sup> Tanzania's government elites sought to construct a national identity which was *modern* without being foreign or decadent, and *traditional* without being primitive or backwards. For example, Maasai people in Tanzania who dressed in traditional bark, beads, and skins were often described in the same disparaging terms as miniskirt-clad women.<sup>32</sup> The government envisioned an efficient, modernized Tanzania where traditions could be a source of cultural pride - as long as they did not impede economic development.

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28 Andrew Ivaska, "'Anti-Mini Militants Meet Modern Misses': Urban Style, Gender, and the Politics of 'National Culture' in 1960s Dar es Salaam, Tanzania", *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, ed Jean Allman, Indiana University Press (USA, 2005) at 104. [Ivaska]

29 *Ibid* at 104-5.

30 *Ibid* at 107.

31 *Ibid* at 108.

32 *Ibid* at 109.

Post-Revolutionary Mexico also provides an example of how clothing can be used to unify a fragile, politically divided state. The Revolution began in 1910 and a significant period of upheaval and instability ensued, lasting until the early 1930s.<sup>33</sup> Political power changed hands many times, and strong regionally-based armies fought hard to prevent the centralization of power. National unity in the post-Revolutionary period was a precarious achievement in the face of deep cultural and class divisions, and Mexico struggled to develop a cohesive national identity through a process of hybridization and appropriation, rather than assimilation.<sup>34</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in the image of artist Frida Kahlo.

I recently stumbled across a think piece about Frida Kahlo, published on the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the artist's death, which decried the use of Kahlo's image to sell everything from shoes to refrigerator magnets in the United States. The writer described Frida Kahlo thus: "[E]verything she represented was and is resolutely specific, and completely immersed in and of the culture of México at that time."<sup>35</sup> She suggested that Kahlo would have hated this commodification, and hated her image and her art being stolen or appropriated by non-Mexican people in the United States. Perhaps this is true. But what the writer neglects to mention is that Kahlo herself was, in many ways, a master of what the American author would likely deem cultural appropriation. An upper-middle class, light-skinned woman of both Mexican and German heritage who belonged to a group of elite Mexico City intellectuals,<sup>36</sup> she nonetheless resides in the popular imagination - and in her own self-portraits - wearing the *Tehuana* suit, the traditional dress of indigenous women from the itismus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico.<sup>37</sup>

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33 See generally Alan Knight. *The Mexican Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press (Jan 2016).

34 See generally Stephen E. Lewis. "The Nation, Education, and the Indian Problem in Mexico, 1920-1940", *The Eagle and the Virgin: National and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen Lewis, Duke University Press (USA, 2006), 176-195.

35 Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, "Never Forget Who Frida Kahlo Really Was", *Pictorial*, jezebel.com (13 July 2016). online: <http://pictorial.jezebel.com/never-forget-who-frida-kahlo-really-was-1783606373>.

36 Rebecca Block and Lynda Hoffman-Jeep, "Fashioning National Identity: Frida Kahlo in "Gringolandia"" (1998-9) *Woman's Art Journal* 19:2 (1998-9) at 10. [Block and Hoffman-Jeep]

37 See Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego on my Mind)*, Mexico, 1943.

Kahlo took up these symbols of indigeneity and peasantry, using her celebrity and cultural capital to transform them into broader symbols of contemporary *mexicanidad*, or “Mexican-ness”.<sup>38</sup>

These categories of identity – religious, cultural, ethnic, and national – are not separate compartments. They overlap and interact with one another in complex and dynamic ways. Religion may be a marker of national identity, just as certain spiritual beliefs can signify a cultural identity, and of course many nation-states have been founded, fought for, or annexed on the basis of ethnic identity. As a result, clothing often if not always signifies more than one thing, both to the wearer and to the public. Claire Hancock explores how the niqab ban in France is connected not just to religious identity but to ideas about what French national identity means and what a French citizen should look like. She writes:

It is important to seize the extent to which, in France, denying difference is seen as progressive, and... belonging to a community is seen as slowing progress toward full citizenship, if not threatening the entire fabric of French egalitarianism.<sup>39</sup>

Given this context, Muslim women who wear the niqab regularly do not simply represent a blurring of the boundaries between the private sphere, where religious belief is acceptable, and the public sphere, where secularity is expected. By refusing to relinquish the visible markers of membership in their religious and cultural communities, they challenge the Republican idea that lack of difference means or creates equality. In a country where national identity is inextricably bound up with the French Revolution and classical liberalism, this constitutes a “threat to the French nation”<sup>40</sup> itself.

#### Dressing to assimilate, dressing to decolonize

*My mom had prepared me in Native clothing. She had made me a buckskin jacket, beaded with fringes.... And my mom did beautiful work, and I was really proud of my clothes. And when I got to residential school, that first day I remember, they stripped us of our clothes.*

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38 Block and Hoffman-Jeep, *supra* note 36 at 11.

39 Hancock, *supra* note 13 at 1034.

40 *Ibid* at 1024.

-Martin Nicholas, student at the Pine Creek, Manitoba residential school, 1950s.<sup>41</sup>

As this paper focuses on contemporary debates in indigenous communities in Canada about the use of the skirt in certain ceremonies, it is important to acknowledge not just the significance of clothing as a marker and constructor of identity generally, but also to examine the specific ways in which clothing functions in colonial contexts. Clothing has particularly potent and contested meanings in the context of colonialism. Many of the examples discussed above occur in nations which have recently achieved independence from a colonial power, or in settler societies where indigenous peoples struggle to resist colonialism and begin the process of decolonization.

I have attempted to weave my own stories of interacting with the codes, rules, and protocols governing dress into the fabric of this paper. At this point, I wish to note that my experiences and perspectives are those of a middle-class white settler Canadian, and do not necessarily speak to, conform with, or represent how indigenous people navigate and understand similar issues. Although many diverse women could share stories about gendered employment uniforms, the relationship between clothing and victim-blaming, or a myriad of other moments when ideological battles were waged over their dressed bodies, the experiences of settler women are often markedly different from those of indigenous women. The impacts of colonialism and the ensuing drive to decolonize alter both the way debates about clothing, gender, and identity are understood and the way that they must be addressed. My anecdotes, therefore, while provided in the hopes of offering readers a variety of accessible pathways into these debates, are not intended to be illustrative of the experiences of all women, and they should be contrasted with the stories of indigenous women in order to promote a

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41 *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015), online: [http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf) at 39. [*Final Report*].

better understanding of how colonialism complicates the relationships between clothing, gender, culture, and identity.

Because dress is a highly visible marker of difference, colonizers have used it as a way to Other<sup>42</sup> colonized peoples. In Africa, indigenous groups' perceived "nakedness" bolstered European arguments about their primitive nature and intellectual inferiority.<sup>43</sup> Failure to cover the body adequately contributed to the perception that African men possessed unrestrained and dangerous sexuality, and that African women lacked virtue.<sup>44</sup> Philippa Levine, in an essay about colonial understandings of nakedness, writes:

The associations between a state of nature and a potent sexuality were both long-standing and deep. Women of color were frequently tied to a fecund sexuality illustrated quite literally by their bare-breastedness ... to be sexual, to be savage, to be primitive was more frequently than not illustrated, signified, and marked by a state of undress.<sup>45</sup>

The belief that nakedness indicated primitivism and savagery helped to justify colonial actions such as the taking of land, slavery, and residential schooling. Colonial powers have also used clothing as a tool of assimilation. For example, indigenous children taken to some boarding schools in the United States were issued military uniforms to replace their previous clothing,<sup>46</sup> while missionaries in western Australia sought to cover up children's near-nakedness with government-issued garments.<sup>47</sup> It did not matter if this clothing was dignified or comfortable<sup>48</sup> – it only mattered that indigenous children appeared less different. In Canada, children's hand-made traditional clothing was often taken away

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42 Othering is a process whereby one group of people attribute negative characteristics to another group of people, defining them as that which is opposite to themselves. The group comes to fear or despise the Other as a result of this process. Paul Rohleder, "Othering", *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, pp 1306-08, online: [http://link.springer.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7\\_414](http://link.springer.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_414).

43 Philippa Levine. "States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination", *Victorian Studies* 50:2 (2008) at 189-90. [Levine]

44 *Ibid* at 193.

45 *Ibid*.

46 Margaret Jacobs. "Indian Boarding Schools in Comparative Perspective: The Removal of Indigenous Children in the United States and Australia, 1880-1940", University of Nebraska: Department of History Faculty Publications (USA, 2006) at 218. [Jacobs]

47 *Ibid*.

48 Some clothing in Australian missionary schools was made from recycled bags of flour. One woman recalls how embarrassed the students were to have flour brands emblazoned on the seat of their dresses. Jacobs, *ibid* at 217.

from them upon their arrival at residential schools and burned or discarded.<sup>49</sup> The fact that articles of clothing were casually thrown away by school authorities demonstrates a devaluing of indigenous labour and a disregard for the sentimental value of such objects. Not only were indigenous children not permitted to wear traditional clothing, but they were not even allowed to possess a pair of hand-embroidered moccasins or a buckskin jacket as reminders of their families. The fact that many residential school survivors still recall the shame and sorrow of being stripped of these garments speaks to the power of clothing to embody love and care.

Conversely, colonized peoples have used clothing to resist oppression. In Peru, some indigenous women wear *polleras* in order to speak out against racist attitudes that see them, by virtue of their dress and therefore their Indian-ness, as backwards and powerless. Clothing allows them to resist assimilation and “insist on their right to be” who they are.<sup>50</sup> The significance of clothing goes beyond the symbolic in this respect; it can also be a materially valuable part of resistance efforts. Painstaking labour, creative vision, and many hours of sewing are required to design and produce a single set of good *polleras*. The community-based production and exchange of such intricate garments provides women with opportunities to build relationships, strengthen local networks, and share skills and knowledge. Similarly, in Argentina, some Mapuche people have taken up a certain way of dressing in order to construct a collective identity and achieve political recognition. Clothing is seen as an essential resource because indigenous identities were for centuries not merely ignored in Argentina but actively denied, resulting in a lack of legal, political, or cultural definition, and because lifestyles and practices have been severely disrupted by colonialism.

Various African countries can also provide examples of the significance of dress in post-colonial contexts. Andrew Ivaska compares Operation Vijana, the Tanzanian initiative to ban the miniskirt, with Operation Dress-Up, the simultaneously-implemented initiative encouraging Maasai citizens to

49 *Final Report*, *supra* note 41 at 39.

50 *Femenias*, *supra* note 17 at 146.

abandon traditional dress. Despite their disparate targets, Ivaska argues, both projects stemmed from “a single aesthetic idea of ‘modern decency’ that had its roots, in part, in the mission-school culture within which Tanzania’s political elite of the 1960s had largely come of age.”<sup>51</sup> Although Tanzania is not a settler society in the same way as Peru, Argentina, or Canada, colonial values continue to impact Tanzanian discourses post-independence. Tanzania freed itself from its oppressors, but colonial ideals remained embedded in the national psyche, manifesting themselves in the way that the first independent government sought to construct a national style of dress.

Darrel Dennis is a Secwepmec actor, playwright, and comedian. His semi-autobiographical one-man play, *Tales of an Urban Indian*,<sup>52</sup> provides a good example of the troubling relationship between clothing, colonialism, and identity for indigenous people in Canada. Seven-year-old protagonist Simon moves to Vancouver from the Coyote Lake reserve with his mother, Tina, and her white boyfriend, Alistair, who quickly becomes disillusioned with Tina’s inability to live up to his stereotypical notions of what an indigenous woman should look like. Alistair complains that Tina’s wardrobe has become “urban and cliché”, and suggests that she is “trying to assimilate”.<sup>53</sup> He also laments that drinking has affected her “beautiful red complexion”.<sup>54</sup> Tina asks, “How am I supposed to look? You want me in a little buckskin miniskirt? ... You don’t want a real Indian woman, you want some primitive sexual fantasy... I don’t act Indian, because I *am* Indian!”<sup>55</sup>

Alistair’s disappointment with Tina’s “urban” dress reveals that he has bought in to the colonial notion of cultural authenticity, where indigenous people exist in a romanticized past. Women who distance themselves from the past by wearing urban clothing are no longer truly indigenous; they have not simply adopted new practices and changed over time (as every other culture has been permitted to

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51 Ivaska, *supra* note 28 at 110.

52 Darrel Dennis. *Two Plays: Tales of an Urban Indian and The Trickster of Third Avenue East*, Playwrights Canada Press (Toronto, 2005). [Dennis]

53 *Ibid* at 14.

54 *Ibid* at 15.

55 *Ibid*.

do) but have “assimilated”, thereby ceasing to exist as indigenous. He is angry when Tina’s performance of her identity doesn’t match his expectations. The implication is that Tina must conform to Alistair’s colonial ideas in order to be worthy of his respect – paralleling the notion that indigenous people must perform a certain kind of authenticity in order to be worthy of legal rights. Tina resents the implication that she is “supposed” to look a certain way. She is also aware of how ridiculous Alistair’s expectations are: the image of a “little buckskin miniskirt” is both stereotypically traditional – made of animal skins – and sexualized in a very anachronistic way, given that miniskirts are a relatively modern article of clothing. This scene demonstrates how colonialism impacts the ways in which clothing serves not just as a marker of identity for people within a certain community but also as a signifier of cultural authenticity to those outside the community. Similarly, the ankle-length skirts implicated in the skirt protocol function both as internal and external identity markers.

Tina’s differentiation between *acting* and *being* is also illuminating as it relates to issues of indigenous identity. Tina implies that acting Indian is a kind of performance put on for white people like Alistair; a tactic and façade which has little to do with true identity. Her words push back against the notion that Indian-ness as it is expected to be performed is the same as Indian-ness as it is actually experienced. By stating that she doesn’t “need” to act Indian because she *is* Indian, Tina rejects the idea that particular outward signifiers are the ultimate indicators of identity; her failure to dress a certain way has no bearing on her Indian-ness. For Tina, clothing may *represent* identity, but does not *create* it. Her statement also suggests that only those who are not truly Indian feel the need to “act out” their identities. I am curious as to how those individuals who see deep value in the relationship between clothing and culture – such as enforcers of the skirt protocol – would react to this insinuation. Would Tina accuse them of placing too much importance on the outward representation of indigenous identity? Does their focus on physical appearance indicate a kind of existential insecurity about group identity? How might they respond? This paper has already discussed how cultural, national, and ethnic

communities use clothing to recognize one another, signify belief and affiliation, construct a collective identity, and strengthen community bonds. It is interesting how such communities deliberately employ clothing in these projects, while simultaneously denying that clothing contributes to creating identity itself.

These are somewhat tangential questions, as the audience understands that Tina's statements are directed at Alistair, and that they are meant to critique his stereotypical ideas about indigeneity and reject the notion that she should perform a certain version of herself to fulfill his expectations. But Tina's words are not themselves entirely unproblematic. Her adamantness that there is no overlap between "being" and "acting" suggests that she views her identity as something innate, which exists unaltered and unaffected by circumstances, behaviour, appearance, and performance. So what does Tina really mean by "I am Indian" (emphasis mine)? Does being Indian mean having a status card, or growing up on a reserve? Is it based purely on biological ancestry? Does Tina's insistence on the separation between being and acting risk an insidious descent into essentialism?

#### "Enclothed cognition": clothing and behaviour

Critically examining the concepts of being and acting raises another interesting issue about clothing and the performance of identity. There is compelling evidence suggesting that what we wear influences not only how others see us but also how we behave. A recent study on this phenomenon, christened "enclothed cognition", conducted an experiment in which a group of fifty-seven individuals were dressed in identical white coats. Some members of the group were told they were wearing lab coats, while the others were told they were wearing painter's smocks. Preliminary research had established that lab coats tend to be associated with medical professionals, and by extension with thoroughness and attention to detail. Both groups then participated in tasks designed to assess their sustained attention skills. Despite spending equal amounts of time on the tasks, those participants who

were told they were dressed in lab coats scored significantly higher, demonstrating better sustained attention abilities than those who believed they were dressed as painters.<sup>56</sup>

Enclothed cognition may be a new term, but it is not a new phenomenon. Clothing has long been used as a tool for creating the kind of identity it is seen to represent. This is made evident when we examine the history of dress regulations in prisons. In the Victorian period, it was believed that by providing inmates with uniforms, the state could improve both the orderliness of the institution and the moral character of the offender. Following strict regulations would increase prisoners' self-discipline, and "external discipline would bring about internal discipline, which would surely reform the convict's depraved character."<sup>57</sup> Although such dress codes have not been found to further rehabilitation, the Victorians were right about one thing: clothing does influence behaviour. For example, women's prison uniforms were abolished in the United Kingdom in 1971, primarily as a cost-cutting measure. Allowing women to choose their own clothing actually reduced disciplinary incidents, and men's uniforms were subsequently abolished in the 1990s.<sup>58</sup> Inmates who were permitted to dress themselves felt humanized. One British inmate states, "...the thing about clothing is it makes you feel a certain way. If you're dressed scruffily you feel lazy and unmotivated."<sup>59</sup> As Gregg Marcantel, secretary of Corrections in New Mexico, notes, "I think you get from people what you expect of them."<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, uniforms for male inmates were reintroduced in order to combat the perceived "soft touch" of British prisons in 2013.<sup>61</sup> Evidently, the public's desire to reinforce social hierarchies through imposing visual boundaries

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56 See generally Adam Galinsky and Hajo Adam. "Report: Enclothed Cognition", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48 (2012), 918-925.

57 Jessica Pishko. "What Inmates Really Wear in Prison", *Racked* (24 June 2015), online: <http://www.racked.com/2015/6/24/8834387/why-inmates-wear-prison-uniforms>. [Pishko]

58 Juliet Ash. *Dress Behind Bars: Prison Clothing as Criminality*, IB Taurus & Co Ltd (London, 2010) at Ch 5, 113-121 [Ash].

59 Ash at 113.

60 Maurice Chammeh. "Prison Without Punishment", *The Marshall Project* (25 Sept 2015) online: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/09/25/prison-without-punishment#.Cv0PXo0AX>.

61 Alan Travis. "Prison perks: inmates must wear uniforms as Grayling cracks down", *The Guardian* (30 Apr 2013), online: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/apr/30/prison-uniforms-perks-chris-grayling>.

between “good” citizens and “bad” prisoners has been deemed more valuable than the social and fiscal benefits reaped by allowing inmates to dress themselves.

The lab coat experiment and the effects of prison uniforms hint at clothing’s ability to construct identity, but many questions remain unanswered, and the extent to clothing’s power to influence behaviour is unclear. Does dress operate the same way in all contexts? Are some people more susceptible to acting differently depending on what they are wearing than are others, and if so, why? If dressing like a prisoner makes one more likely to break the rules, does – to be somewhat flippant - dressing like a firefighter make one more courageous, or does wearing a habit make one feel more devout? Where is the line between clothing oneself and costuming oneself?

## Chapter 2

### Dress, Identity, and Gender

The red dress incident I describe at the beginning of this paper may have been my first encounter with the notion of appropriate clothing, but it certainly wouldn't be my last. I was in the ninth grade when I was sent home from school for wearing shorts that didn't reach the middle of my thighs. Detained in the hallway by the vice principal, I was required to place my arms against my sides and measure whether the hem of my shorts reached the tips of my fingers. When I was found to have violated the dress code, I was given a choice: go home and change or don a pair of slightly musty, ill-fitting sweatpants from the Lost and Found. Needless to say, I went home.

This was the point at which I realized that the word "appropriate", while it might be used to refer to both mens' and womens' clothing, actually meant different things when applied to different genders. "Inappropriate" for boys meant t-shirts displaying swear words or clothing that was insufficiently formal for a given occasion. It had little to do with how much skin you showed. "Inappropriate" for girls meant revealing and immodest. Girls who violated the dress code "distracted" their male peers, thereby negatively affecting the learning environment. Being sent home from school in the middle of the day, however, was not deemed a distraction for the individual to whom it occurred. Evidently, it was more important that boys not be distracted by my knobby kneecaps than it was for me to actually attend math class. Nor was it considered inappropriate to place the responsibility for maintaining a positive learning environment squarely on the spaghetti strap-clad shoulders of teenage girls.

The intimate relationship between clothing and gender can be clearly illustrated by returning to the history of prison dress regulations in the United States. Prison dress codes are to some extent gendered in most places, and violating a regulation is no small issue: inmates who fail to comply can be held in solitary confinement, denied privileges, or required to perform extra labour, and any credit they

have accumulated toward release can be revoked.<sup>62</sup> The state is deeply invested in reinforcing gender binary “norms” through regulating prisoners’ bodies. While male inmates have worn some form of prison uniform for centuries, when female prisoners began to be housed separately from men, their “reformatories” took a different attitude toward clothing. Criminality among women was seen as a deviation from women’s inherently passive, non-violent nature; women who committed crimes were insufficiently feminine, and as a result, rehabilitative programming in reformatories was aimed at rectifying this problem.<sup>63</sup> The importance of femininity was espoused in dress, and women’s clothing on the inside often differed little from clothing on the outside. At the California Institution for Women, for example, inmates used to sew their own dresses from fashionable patterns, and were encouraged to choose their own fabrics and prints.<sup>64</sup> This is no longer the case in women’s institutions, but normative gender appearances continue to be reinforced in other ways. While men in various states are required to keep their hair short, women in some prisons are actually required to keep their hair long. In Idaho, men are explicitly prohibited from possessing “effeminate” hairstyles, while women can be punished for wearing their hair in a “masculine” fashion. Neither of these terms are defined in the regulations, demonstrating that legislators and prison administrators see masculinity and femininity as possessing meanings so obvious that they require no elaboration.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, recent tough-on-crime policies have highlighted the symbolic power of clothing to create gendered meanings. In Georgia, male inmates are now required to wear hot pink jumpsuits. Prison staff freely admit that the purpose of this policy is to shame prisoners, the idea being that tough, macho criminals will hate having to wear such effeminate clothing and will ostensibly be deterred from reoffending.<sup>66</sup>

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62 Gabriel Arkles. “Correcting Race and Gender: Prison Regulation of Social Hierarchy Through Dress”, *NYLR* 87:4 (Oct 2012) at 902-3.. [Arkles]

63 *Ibid* at 892.

64 Pishko, *supra* note 57.

65 Arkles, *supra* note 62 at 898.

66 Myriah Towner. “Pink is the New Black”, *Daily Mail Online* (26 Jan 2015), online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2926956/Prison-chic-Georgia-inmates-forced-dress-hot-pink-uniforms-collecting-litter-street.html>.

My high school anecdote is not unique; many women have stories about their own school dress codes and other gendered rules imposed upon them by parents, teachers, and employers. Similarly, the examples explored in Chapter 1 demonstrate that more often than not, the clothing at the center of debates about religion, nationhood, culture, and identity is women's clothing, and women are disproportionately impacted by the associations between dress and identity. In Canada, indigenous women are required to dress "traditionally" to participate in indigenous ceremonies, while men are free to wear what they wish. In France, it is women's bodies which are subjected to scrutiny: the skirt-wearing young woman represents the ideal model of French citizenship while the niqab-wearing immigrant represents an oppressive belief system supposedly alien to the essence of Frenchness. Muslim men are implicated in the niqab controversy, of course, but their clothing and bodies are not directly policed the way that women's are. In post-independence Tanzania, male politicians freely donned Western safari suits, while women who wore "foreign" mini-skirts were harassed, arrested, and beaten. Why is women's clothing the frequent site of such contestations about identity?

#### Birthing the collective: women as biological reproducers

Women are the biological reproducers of communities, and have historically been responsible for raising and educating children in many societies in the world. By extension, women are constructed not just as reproducers of people but also as reproducers of culture, responsible for passing down traditions, language, values, and religious beliefs. A woman who disrupts or subverts those traditions is more dangerous than a man who does so, because she is the "symbolic bearer of the collectivity's identity and honour".<sup>67</sup> Women's bodies, then, become the place where battles over culture and identity are fought.

The concept of women as biological carriers of the collective is most easily illustrated in the context of the nation-state. Nations are frequently personified as female, and often as mothers as well;

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67 Nira Yuval-Davis. *Gender and Nation*, SAGE Publications Ltd (UK, 1997) at 45. [Yuval-Davis]

consider, for example, the symbolism of “Mother Russia” and “Mother India”.<sup>68</sup> Womanhood is tied to reproduction, and through reproduction is tied to nationalist projects. These connections operate in a variety of ways. One is through a conception of “people-as-power”:<sup>69</sup> nations need people for labour and war, so it is a woman’s duty, not just in fulfillment of her gender role, but also as a patriotic citizen, to bear children. For example, the Soviet Union gave prizes to “heroine mothers” who bore more than ten children,<sup>70</sup> and politicians justified the criminalization of abortion in Poland by arguing that the nation required a large population to support a strong military and protect itself.<sup>71</sup> A eugenicist discourse operates on the other side of this coin: some nation-states care less about the *quantity* of citizens they possess than about their perceived *quality*. Only certain women are encouraged to bear and raise children, and the state may attempt to disincentivize or prevent reproduction by poor, minority, or otherwise “undesirable” women. In Singapore, for example, President Li Kuan Yew offered \$10,000 in cash to low-income women who consented to have hysterectomies, while sterilization and long-term birth control programs in the United States have consistently targeted poor, black, single mothers.<sup>72</sup> These examples demonstrate that women’s bodies and reproductive capacities are perceived as essential to the very existence of the nation, and are also seen as capable of determining the quality of the nation.

While the nation-state examples illustrate the ways in which a hegemonic, dominant group reinforces and maintains its own power, identity narratives centered around women’s roles as biological reproducers also occur in groups struggling to resist such dominance, and in minority groups experiencing conflict over contested land or resources. This is visible in some indigenous communities

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68 *Ibid* at 30.

69 *Ibid* at 29.

70 *Ibid* at 30.

71 *Ibid*.

72 *Ibid* at 32.

in Canada. The 2008 documentary *Club Native*<sup>73</sup> explores Mohawk identity and the impacts of both Canadian blood quantum laws and Mohawk ancestry criteria on group membership. Several Mohawk individuals interviewed in the film claim that they feel a cultural or political imperative to reproduce with other Mohawk members, expressing concerns about the disappearance of the Mohawk culture.<sup>74</sup> Child-bearing is seen as a path to recovery after centuries of colonial violence and disruption; one of the film's subjects states, "I wanted to be the most native that I could... and have the most native babies." Another succinctly summarizes the pressure placed on Mohawk women: "It's your job to perpetuate the nation."<sup>75</sup> Individuals can be removed from the Mohawk registry if they marry a non-member, demonstrating what one interviewee refers to as a community desire to "strengthen the bloodline".<sup>76</sup> Lisa Charleyboy, a prominent indigenous writer and actor, has also attracted attention (and vitriol) for professing her desire to only date and procreate with an indigenous man who possesses at least 25% blood quantum and a status card.<sup>77</sup> Yet not all members of these communities agree. In *Club Native*, some argue that the Mohawk membership laws simply reproduce *Indian Act* ideas in different form, dividing indigenous peoples based on arbitrary criteria that fail to capture what it truly "means" to be Mohawk. They note that traditionally, adoption was common in indigenous communities, and having a parent from outside the nation didn't preclude one from holding membership.<sup>78</sup> Another rejects the notion of bloodlines altogether, claiming that the Mohawk people have survived precisely because they have been able to adapt. Post-*Indian Act* membership laws perpetuate the legislation's essentialism and divisiveness, a phenomenon which director Tracey Deer refers to as "the secret ugliness of belonging".<sup>79</sup>

73 *Club Native*, directed Tracey Deer, produced Rezolution Pictures and National Film Board of Canada (2008). [*Club Native*]

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 Lisa Charleyboy, "Looking for First Nations love: Indigenous dating life 'complex'". *CBC Aboriginal* (19 Apr 2014), online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/looking-for-first-nations-love-indigenous-dating-life-complex-1.2615016>.

78 *Club Native*, *supra* note 73.

79 *Ibid.*

### Raising the collective: women as cultural reproducers

*The status of the Maori girl becomes increasingly important. She is the wife and mother of the future generation; she is going to be responsible for the perpetuation of the Maori people as a race; on her influence will be molded the characters and habits of men and women who will be future citizens of our state.*

-Miss Freda Lily Sharp, teacher at Rakaumanga Native School, New Zealand, 1938<sup>80</sup>

As the above quote illustrates, girls and women are constructed as more than mere biological vessels. They also serve as cultural reproducers - passing down knowledge, skills, values, and family structures to the children they raise. In doing so, they come to stand in for the community itself, “embody[ing] the line which signifies the collectivity’s boundaries”.<sup>81</sup> The concept of women as symbolic carriers of culture pervades the nation-state but has also been taken up by other types of collective entities such as ethnic and religious groups. Quechua-speaking women in the Andes, for example, use traditional clothing as a way of signalling that they are authentic members of their ethnic community, and thus possess the authority and legitimacy to speak on its behalf.<sup>82</sup> In Argentina, Mapuche women represent the “health” of their communities, and they do so through their manner of dress. Traditional clothing is seen as better for women’s health: dresses are less constrictive than jeans, and handwoven belts provide sturdy back support for women as they fulfil their gendered duties, such as carrying babies or cooking meals.<sup>83</sup> The roles of women and the perpetuation of culture are so closely bound together that it is often impossible to separate them. For example, are women often responsible for preparing food because of its centrality to cultural continuity and the narrative of cultural distinctiveness? Or is traditional or unique cuisine viewed as an important part of cultural identity because women are responsible for producing it?

80 As cited in Michelle Erai, “A Queer Caste: Mixing Race and Sexuality in Colonial New Zealand”, *Queer Indigenous Studies: Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, ed Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen, University of Arizona Press (USA, 2011) at 75.

81 Yuval-Davis, *supra* note 67 at 46.

82 Femenias, *supra* note 17 at 220; 236.

83 Warren, *supra* note 22 at 782; 784.

The significance of the perception that women are the reproducers of collective cultural identity is evident when one considers the ways in which women are victimized, brutalized, or marginalized as a result of it. There is a Cheyenne proverb which states:

A nation is not conquered until  
the hearts of its women  
are on the ground  
Then it is done, no matter  
how brave its warriors  
nor how strong their weapons.<sup>84</sup>

This proverb makes clear that when women are the part that represents the whole, damaging women is key to destroying the unity or continuity of that whole. The use of systemic rape as a tool for dismantling communities and blurring ethnic and cultural boundaries illustrates this. Cherokee scholar Andrea Smith notes how massacres of indigenous people were often accompanied by rape, equating these acts of sexual brutality with the desire to obliterate not just individuals but entire cultures. She writes, “the goal of colonialism is not just to kill colonized peoples, but to destroy their sense of being people.”<sup>85</sup> For example, Serb military documents uncovered after the Bosnian War explicitly endorsed rape, noting that “[Muslim] morale, desire for battle, and will would be crushed more easily by raping women, especially minors”.<sup>86</sup> The statement reveals a chilling awareness of the social and cultural implications of inflicting harm on women’s bodies. The aim of rape in the context of armed conflict is to destroy the fabric of society; the harm inflicted on individual women is merely an ancillary effect.

Similarly, rules about clothing in prisons indicate the importance of women’s bodies as spaces in which power is enacted and social hierarchies are reinforced. The treatment of American suffragists provides an apt example: because the suffragists were already challenging social structures and gender

84 Recorded in Mary Crow Dog’s *Lakota Woman*, as cited in Cynthia Kasee’s “Identity, Recovery, and Religious Imperialism: Native American Women and the New Age”, *Women & Therapy* 16:2-3 (1996) at 84. [Kasee].

85 Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: the Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism”, *Queer Indigenous Studies: Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, ed Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen, University of Arizona Press (USA: 2011) at 59.

86 This phrase is taken from what is known as the “RAM Plan”, a Serb military policy document written in late 1991. See Todd A. Salzmann, “Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia”, *Human Rights Quarterly* 20:2 (1998) at 356.

roles through their political activity, restoring the usual hierarchy in prison became even more important. When in 1917, members of the radical wing of the women's suffrage movement, the National Women's Party, were arrested for protesting, they were required to don the shapeless, uncomfortable prison uniforms.<sup>87</sup> The women – all white, and overwhelmingly upper-middle class – criticized the state of the prisons generally, but still saw themselves as distinct from their fellow inmates. They struggled to be recognized as political prisoners and felt that being forced to wear prison dress was a tactic designed to humiliate them and identify them with common criminality. They physically resisted having their personal clothing taken away, and faced harassment about this resistance during their interrogations. This reveals that many wardens were “aware of the submission inherent to the garment.”<sup>88</sup> Indeed, there is evidence that the suffragists were given deliberately soiled uniforms, and some were made to wear uniforms which formerly belonged to black prisoners.<sup>89</sup> Given the popular discourses of race and class in place at the time, these acts suggest that prison wardens and guards sought to reduce the status of the suffragists through clothing them in the garments of their perceived social inferiors. As one warden noted, “If you can just make what a woman does look ridiculous, you can sure kill it.”<sup>90</sup>

By the time the suffragists were released, however, they had appropriated prison uniforms for their own purposes. At rallies around the country, members of the NWP would dress up in their old prison uniforms to present speeches. Katherine Kelly writes, “The suffragists’ use of prison dress emphasized privilege and existing discourses of race, class, and morality to shock their audiences into sympathy with their cause.”<sup>91</sup> The juxtaposition of these high society women clothed in drab, scratchy, industrial prison garb was viscerally upsetting for audiences, who often left the rallies convinced of the

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87 Katherine Feo Kelly. “Performing Prison: Dress, Modernity, and the Radical Suffrage Body”, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body, and Culture* 15:3 (2011) at 299.

88 *Ibid* at 312.

89 *Ibid* at 308.

90 *Ibid* at 304.

91 *Ibid* at 319.

justness of the suffragists' cause and dismayed by their treatment at the hands of the state. The suffragists had succeeded in employing dress to represent, construct, and reinforce intersecting facets of identity including race, class, morality, gender, and political status. The case of the NWP demonstrates how women's clothing in particular is powerful and affecting, and is often imbued with important cultural connotations.

### Chapter 3

#### The Skirt Debate

*Did you not come onto this earth / Unclothed?  
You came by choice from a place of / Creation – unbraided, unskirted.*

*Wonderful thoughts from strong, loving / Knowing grandmothers.  
What are they projecting?  
What are they teaching you in these / Double-edged teachings?  
Does the Creator know the value / Of the spirit no matter what we wear?*

-Shirley Bear, *Women's Ceremony*, in "Culturing Politics and Politicizing Culture"<sup>92</sup>

As we have seen, it is impossible to discuss the cultural, social, or political significance of dress without also considering gender and, in many cases, colonialism. The skirt debate among indigenous communities in Canada provides an apt example of a place in which these themes intersect. I wish to reiterate that the purpose of this paper is not to argue for the "rightness" or "wrongness" of the skirt protocol, nor conclusively determine how it came to be. Rather, I attempt to make visible the diversity of perspectives about the skirt, explore the rationales supporting them, and identify the systems, values, and historical forces which impact both the practice of skirt-wearing and the rich debate surrounding it.

#### Rules, rationales, and enforcement

In some indigenous communities in Canada, women are encouraged to dress "traditionally", which is usually interpreted as wearing an ankle-length skirt. They may be requested or required to wear such skirts when participating in certain ceremonies, such as smudging or attending a sweat lodge. In some cases, women who either do not have skirts or who decline to wear them have been turned away from ceremonies, forced to change into skirts or towels provided by the ceremonial leader or event organizers, and even publicly shamed. The requirement to wear a skirt is often called a cultural "protocol", and I use that term to refer to it here.

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<sup>92</sup> Shirley Bear, *Women's Ceremony* (poem), "Culturing Politics and Politicizing Culture", *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed Joyce Green, Fernwood Publishing (Nova Scotia, 2007) at 206.

The rationales given by those who advance the skirt protocol vary in content and depth. Explanations range from vague assertions of “tradition” or “respect” to more specific rationales about female power, spirituality, and cultural symbolism. Sometimes, the skirt protocol is mentioned without any context or explanation at all. Documents produced by universities are often guilty of this: when hosting or promoting an indigenous ceremony, they simply state that women are requested to wear a long skirt; see, for example, the syllabus for Social Work 555 at the University of Calgary<sup>93</sup> and the “Protocols for Traditional Gatherings and Ceremonies”<sup>94</sup> at the University College of the North. As a result, it can be difficult to determine upon what basis some proponents of the skirt protocol find it meaningful. I must here acknowledge that there may be other rationales for skirt-wearing beyond those discussed in this paper which I have failed to discover or recognize.

One of the rationales for requiring women to wear skirts argues that the garment, as a circle which touches the ground, symbolizes feminine power and women’s special connection to mother earth.<sup>95</sup> Pants impede women’s energy and power from connecting to the earth, while skirts allow this energy to flow.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, wearing the skirt is a way for women to connect to their spirituality, tap into their power, and honour and revitalize the spiritual beliefs of their communities. Whereas white settler culture might see the requirement to wear a long skirt in terms of sexual modesty, those indigenous proponents who support the skirt on this basis argue that it is unconnected to this Christian, patriarchal value and instead encodes a message of empowerment. Kim Anderson states that the skirt is “a symbol related to the woman’s ability to produce and nurture life”.<sup>97</sup> She describes interactions with several women for whom the skirt has been “transformational in terms of understanding their power”.<sup>98</sup>

93 “Course Outline”, Social Work 555, University of Calgary (Spring 2016), online: <https://fsw.ucalgary.ca/files/fsw/sowk-555-16-s03-sowk-among-aboriginal-peoples-i-bodor-makokis-spring-2016.pdf>.

94 “Protocols for Traditional Gatherings and Ceremonies”, University College of the North, online: <https://www.ucn.ca/sites/elders/Pages/Protocols-for-Traditional-Gatherings-and-Ceremonies.aspx>.

95 Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Sumach Press (Toronto, 2001) at 144. [Anderson]

96 *Ibid.*

97 *Ibid* at 145.

98 *Ibid* at 144.

For some of the women interviewed, the skirt serves as a gentle reminder not only of their power but also of their femininity. It reminds them to “walk like a woman... sit like a woman... conduct yourself as a woman.”<sup>99</sup> It is not clear whether these women find the skirt representative of femininity and power, or if to them, femininity is power. Anderson herself subscribes to this positive reading of the skirt. She mentions a teaching session in which an elder flexed her knees so that her skirt touched the ground and described the skirt as a tipi surrounding the body. This was a moving image for Anderson, who writes:

What I do know... is that the teaching around the skirt/tipi speaks to the pure physical, creative, and spiritual energy of woman as life giver and it speaks to her responsibilities as one who must nurture life after it is produced.<sup>100</sup>

Clearly, then, the wearing of the skirt is connected to ideas about womanhood, femininity, and childbearing. These ideas, in turn, relate to the way in which women are seen as biological (“life-giver”) and cultural (“one who must nurture life”) reproducers of the community. Anderson quotes Ivy Chaske, who states that women are “the life force of the nation”:<sup>101</sup> it is within this role that women’s power lies, and within this role that they are worthy of great respect. The way in which the teaching conflates womanhood with motherhood will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

It is not always clear from where the rules about the skirt protocol come, as it is not a tradition imposed evenly or directly by one person, body, or group – such as political leaders – on another, such as political subjects. Practically speaking, the elders or spiritual leaders running a given ceremony have the power to determine how that specific ceremony will function and to exclude participants based on their failure to conform with rules such as the skirt protocol. But other actors also contribute to enforcing the skirt protocol in less direct ways; for example, by disseminating information about the practice in texts for non-indigenous service providers, through community programming like youth

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid* at 145.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

groups, or through more generalized discourses about “traditional” dress. The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) produces a document entitled “Daughter Spirit in Action Handbook”.<sup>102</sup> The DSIA program is a national suicide prevention program focused on promoting mental health for indigenous girls and young women through cultural education. The Handbook’s intended audience is service providers who want to run a DSIA program in their own community.<sup>103</sup> As a result, it includes sections on cultural and spiritual protocols such as skirt-wearing. According to NWAC, “most Aboriginal ceremonies require women to wear skirts to honour their womanhood”,<sup>104</sup> although the document unfortunately does not elaborate on what “womanhood” means, why it should be honoured, and why wearing a skirt honours it. The Handbook includes instructions for how to facilitate activities such as making tobacco ties, participating in a sharing circle, smudging, making a traditional rattle, and teaching girls about their menstruation or “moontime”. All of these activities require women to wear skirts. Similarly, the document claims that women must wear skirts when handling sacred medicines, as this demonstrates respect for the medicines.<sup>105</sup>

NWAC places responsibility for ensuring these protocols are followed on the individual facilitating the DSIA program or event. Although the Handbook includes a disclaimer stating that many traditions are different and allowing for facilitators to use the instructions in the way their own teachings provide, the Handbook contains statements which appear to contradict this message of inclusiveness. For example, the first instruction for the group leader for making tobacco ties is “Ask that all women are wearing skirts”,<sup>106</sup> and step two for making a traditional rattle reads, “Be sure that all

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102 Native Women’s Association of Canada. “Daughter Spirit in Action Handbook”, self-published (2014) online: <https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2014-NWAC-DSIA-Handbook.pdf>. [Handbook]

103 It appears that the intended audience is indigenous service providers, but this is not explicitly stated.

104 Handbook, *supra* note 102 at 16.

105 *Ibid* at 18.

106 *Ibid* at 31.

women are wearing skirts”.<sup>107</sup> The use of skirts is emphasized throughout the document, implying that this protocol is perhaps not truly open to debate, interpretation, or culturally-specific variance.

The authority to require that women dress a certain way, and to exclude those who refuse or are unable to comply, generally stems from appeals to tradition and spirituality. It is unclear who has access to these sources of authority. Who makes pronouncements on the legitimacy and value of spiritual beliefs and practices, and who is permitted to interpret and disseminate spiritual beliefs emanating from stories, histories, traditions, and laws? Similarly, it is unclear who has the power to declare which practices are “traditional” and which are not. Who is allowed to police the ways in which traditions are carried out, and how are these decisions made? Different indigenous communities will of course have different answers to these questions; for example, what is decided by a specific elder in one community may be determined by consensus in another. Whatever these processes are, however, it is important to consider how these decision-making processes may themselves be gendered. Are women and LGBTQ2 people prevented from accessing spiritual knowledge or obtaining positions of spiritual leadership? If so, why, and what impacts might this have on the development, practice, and meaning of traditions and spirituality?

#### The skirt protocol: perspectives and criticism

##### *The meaning of “tradition”*

A significant aspect of the debate about the skirt protocol centers around the meaning of tradition, a term which is not clearly defined either by those who argue that skirt-wearing is traditional or those who argue that it is not. It sometimes appears that writers on all sides of the debate use the word “tradition” to refer to a practice which is pure, or free from colonial influences, and which was practiced in a substantially similar way in pre-contact times. If this is what is meant, however, it is never explicitly acknowledged. Instead, “tradition” is only really defined in opposition to what is

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid* at 37.

deemed untraditional. Throughout this section, I use “tradition” because it is the word used by the indigenous writers whose ideas I attempt to describe, and because despite the slipperiness of the term, there does not appear to be a better one available. The word offers only a vague description of a practice which was developed at some time in the past, and performed by a group of people who retrospectively recognize this practice as a shared one. This group of people may now be outwardly defined or self-identify differently than they have in the past. Similarly, the practice itself has been modified, and the meanings it imputes have shifted.

Attempts to determine the “authenticity” of a tradition – precisely when and how it came to be – are likely both irrelevant and futile. Traditions are not necessarily less meaningful because of their relatively recent advent. In Peru, for example, evidence suggests that wearing *polleras* is a product of Spanish influence, and what is more, the addition of the now-famous embroidery can be traced to the 1940s at the earliest.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, embroidery has come to be synonymous with the garments themselves: Femenías writes that when she dons a plain denim skirt to work in the fields, the Andean women ask her why her *polleras* are not “finished”.<sup>109</sup> Indigenous people in the region have become known for their skillful embroidery, and stylistic distinctions help to differentiate between regions, villages, and even individual tailors. Clearly, the embroidery tradition’s relatively recent development does not render it less important or powerful. Furthermore, attempting to identify authenticity can actually have negative impacts on a group struggling for political recognition or cultural resurgence. It fails to challenge ways of thinking that relegate indigenous cultures to the past, and promotes a kind of “authenticity one-upmanship” that can be divisive and hurtful. It also risks silencing criticism of unsafe or oppressive traditions.

Various indigenous writers and scholars argue that skirt-wearing is not a truly traditional practice. Instead, indigenous values have been distorted by colonialism, resulting in the skirt being

<sup>108</sup> Femenías, *supra* note 17 at 163-4.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid* at 143.

taken up as traditional. This so-called “tradition” now functions as a tool of oppression, requiring the subjugation of women in the interests of the cultural revitalization movement. The drive for political unity and the desire to build a sense of cultural identity based on shared practices takes precedence over the need to more closely examine those practices, and any unequal impacts are glossed over or ignored. These critics are not content to allow this to happen, pointing out the gendered nature of the skirt protocol with insight and humour. Writer Lee Maracle quips that if elders want her to dress traditionally, she should really go topless, like her Coast Salish ancestors did in the summers. Similarly, men should revert to donning breech-cloths, which she snarkily terms “mini-skirts”.<sup>110</sup> Maracle is not the only woman to advocate for a healthy skepticism about the purposes traditionalism serves. Métis academic Emma Larocque acknowledges the centrality of tradition to collective cultural identity, but cautions that “as women we must be circumspect in our recall of tradition. We must ask ourselves whether and to what extent tradition is liberating to us as women.”<sup>111</sup> Maracle’s brash, confrontational statements and Larocque’s scholarly warning differ in tone but not in content: both women understand that just as tradition is a tool which can unite, so too is it a tool which can subordinate.

Leanne Simpson, a writer and musician and member of Alderville First Nation, and Alex Wilson, a Opaswayak Cree professor at the University of Saskatchewan, go further in teasing out connections between the gendered double-standard and colonial Christian ideas about sexual purity. They argue that these ideas have infiltrated indigenous beliefs through mission work and residential schools. Indigenous communities have internalized structures of patriarchy and Christian values, and these now assert themselves in the guise of tradition, with particularly negative consequences for

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110 Maracle, as cited in Drew Hayden Taylor. “The Shame of Skirt-Shaming”, *Windspeaker*, blog post (1 June 2016) online: <http://www.windspeaker.com/blogs/the-urbane-indian-drew-hayden-taylor-945801/entry/4/>. [“The Shame of Skirt-Shaming”].

111 Emma Larocque. “The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar”, *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength*, ed Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk, University of Manitoba Press (Canada, 1996), at 14.

women. Wilson notes that the concept of gender-specific clothing itself is a European notion that her people did not possess prior to colonization:

If you talk to elders here, they can remember a time, or they tell stories of their grandparents' time, when people made their own clothes and it didn't have to do with cloth and it didn't have to do with long skirts.<sup>112</sup>

Wilson believes that the skirt protocol originated with “prudish Victorian-era Europeans” and was later enforced by missionaries and the Canadian government through policies in residential schools.<sup>113</sup>

Leanne Simpson agrees, stating:

We were forced to wear skirts in residential schools, at church and in missions in order to assimilate us from being Nishnaabeg women into the ideals of settler housewives. Under colonialism the skirt has been and still is in many cases a tool of oppression.<sup>114</sup>

Simpson and Wilson’s concerns shed light on how requiring colonized peoples to dress a certain way has historically been an act of racism and violence. And although some women may feel that by wearing the skirt in ceremonies they are reclaiming their indigenous identities and resisting assimilation by practicing their traditions, others may actually feel re-victimized by having their clothing policed. For women who attended residential schools, skirts might be associated with sexualized violence and other kinds of trauma. Being required to wear a skirt, in what is supposed to be a safe and healing space, is a symbolic reinscription of that trauma on those women’s bodies.

Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore provides an illustration of the possible connections between skirts and violence. In *Vigil*,<sup>115</sup> a 2002 performance art piece commemorating missing and murdered indigenous women, Belmore dons a long red dress and furiously nails her skirt to a telephone pole at the corner of Hastings and Gore, in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side. She proceeds to forcibly

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112 Alex Wilson, as cited in “Indigenous ceremony at University of Winnipeg sparks sexism debate”, *CBC News* (22 June 2015) online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/indigenous-ceremony-at-university-of-winnipeg-sparks-sexism-debate-1.3123568>.

113 *Ibid.*

114 Leanne Simpson, as cited in “The Shame of Skirt-Shaming”, *supra* note 110.

115 Rebecca Belmore. “Vigil”, performance (Vancouver, 2002), excerpts available online: <http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html>

tear herself loose, her small body sometimes actually lifting off the ground with the effort of struggling to free herself. Once free, she repeats the process, looking more and more exhausted as her skirt is torn to shreds. Belmore's skirt is a marker of vulnerability. It draws attention to her. It traps her. It prevents her from running away. Far from facilitating women's access to power, as it does for some who choose to wear skirts in ceremonies, Belmore's skirt is distinctly disempowering, and even dangerous.

*Gender complementarity: separate but equal?*

Implicit in Maracle, Simpson, and Wilson's arguments that the skirt is a colonial corruption rather than a truly traditional practice is an assumption that indigenous societies did not historically possess gendered ideas about modesty or sexuality, were not patriarchal, and did not employ double-standards for men and women. Instead, they are often described as "complementarian" societies, where the genders (not only men and women but also two-spirit people) fulfilled different but equally valued roles in their communities and were treated with dignity and respect. There is evidence to support this claim; research suggests that there was widespread respect for and acceptance of two-spirit identities in many indigenous societies in North America,<sup>116</sup> demonstrating a nuanced understanding of gender distinct from the rigid binary view of colonial society. Some societies were matrilineal, meaning that clan or group membership was passed down through the mother's side, or matrilocal, meaning that husbands would live with their wives' families after marriage.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, non-capitalist, land-based societies facilitated – indeed, necessitated – greater flexibility regarding the gendered division of labour.<sup>118</sup>

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116 Jill Alaers. "Two-Spirited People and Social Work Practice: Exploring the History of Aboriginal Gender and Sexual Diversity". *Critical Social Work* 11:1 (University of Windsor, 2010), online: <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/two-spirited-people-and-social-work-practice-exploring-the-history-of-aboriginal-gender-and-sexual-d>. [Alaers]

117 See generally "Marginalization of Aboriginal Women", UBC Indigenous Foundations, online: <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/community-politics/marginalization-of-aboriginal-women.html>. It is important to note that matrilineal and matrilocal societies are not necessarily also matriarchal. They are more specific, narrow terms. For example, a society could be matrilineal in the sense that names, membership, and property are inherited via the mother's side, but men might still hold all positions of political and religious power.

118 Emma Larocque, "Métis and Feminist", *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed Joyce Green, Fernwood Publishing (Nova Scotia, 2007) at 55.

Lee Maracle's novel, *Ravensong*,<sup>119</sup> provides an opportunity to explore the differences between indigenous and settler cultures as they pertain to gender relations. *Ravensong* follows 17-year-old Stacey, who lives with her family on a semi-urban reserve in the Greater Vancouver area in 1954. When a white classmate commits suicide as the result of taunting after engaging in sexual activity, she begins to question the gender and family relationships she has always known, and explore how they differ from those of her white peers and their families.

The clearest example of this is Madeline, a Salteaux woman who married into Stacey's community and whose husband beats her and abuses their daughter. Madeline's husband is referred to only as "the old snake" and it is explained that he is violent because he has adopted white men's ways.<sup>120</sup> "He's just like them", says Stacey, "them" meaning white people. "He hated his wife for the same reason any old white man could conjure."<sup>121</sup> At the end of the novel, the old snake is exiled from the community after it is discovered that he has raped his daughter.<sup>122</sup> He is the only man in the community who physically abuses his wife or children, suggesting that indigenous men do not engage in acts of family violence unless influenced to do so by settler culture.

The Snowden family provides another opportunity for Stacey to study the familial relationships of her non-indigenous peers. Stacey's closest school acquaintance is Carol Snowden, whose white picket fence existence conceals domestic strife. Carol's mother is punished by her husband with stern looks and silence if she speaks up about a topic not within her sphere of influence. Stacey struggles to understand "why Mrs. S. had no more rank in her own house than the children".<sup>123</sup> Even asking a question about her husband's work is treated as inappropriate and Mrs. Snowden is chided. Stacey cannot fathom these seemingly arbitrary rules, because the rules are so different in her own family and

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119 Lee Maracle. *Ravensong*, Press Gang Publishers (Canada, 1993). [*Ravensong*]

120 *Ibid* at 149.

121 *Ibid* at 161-2.

122 *Ibid* at 162.

123 *Ibid* at 35.

community. Over the course of the novel, Stacey comes to understand her community's rules more clearly, and her respect for them grows. Through watching her younger brother come of age and take on new responsibilities, Stacey learns about men's and women's roles. At first, she is annoyed when 13-year-old Jim decides he is too "manly" to pick berries with the women. But when she complains, her mother reminds her that she never has to chop wood, hunt, or carry the canning kettle because Jim performs those tasks. Stacey reflects:

Women in this family do one kind of work, men do a different type. It wasn't a matter of being allowed to do this or that, it was choice born of some ancient string of normal action...<sup>124</sup>

In *Ravensong*, gender complementarity is positioned as a more just structuring of society than its colonial counterpart, patriarchy.

One problem with the discourse of gender complementarity, however, is its potentially essentializing effect on these "separate but equal" spheres of influence. Acknowledging the equal value of each gender's roles is all very well, but what happens to women and men who would prefer to hold a role not associated with their gender? What happens to non-binary individuals? Although Stacey suggests that fulfillment of men's and women's duties is a "choice born of some ancient string of normal action", she also describes how one woman who chose not to marry and to take up men's tasks like hunting and fishing was, albeit not excluded from the community, not fully accepted by it either. "Custom must be some sort of invisible policeman channeling everyone through a tube of unspoken discipline,"<sup>125</sup> reasons Stacey. At one point, Stacey even considers whether her father simply has a "more subtle" way of ordering her mother around than does Carol's father. The thought makes her uncomfortable and she "shoves it... quickly out of her mind",<sup>126</sup> preferring to view her parents as possessors of a mutual understanding on how to share work and raise children. Yet Maracle never fully resolves the complementarity question, leaving the reader with a lingering sense of uncertainty. Though

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid* at 77.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid* at 34.

*Ravensong* is in many ways a scathing indictment of white settler codes of conduct and gender relations, the novel does not provide a clear way to identify if and when complementarian gender relations can truly be called egalitarian, and when they may still constitute a covertly oppressive social structure. In advocating for the decolonization of what they consider false or corrupted traditions such as skirt-wearing, do some writers and scholars simultaneously promote the revitalization of traditions which embody gender complementarity, and if so, what effects might this have in indigenous communities?

Emma Larocque critically considers the discourse of complementarity in “Métis and Feminist”.

She writes:

While much has been made of “balance” between genders in Aboriginal traditions, there is overwhelming evidence that, by and large, Aboriginal women’s roles have been confined to the domestic sphere... does the rhetoric of balance necessarily or automatically mean gender equality?<sup>127</sup>

Larocque suggests that although complementarity is often conflated with equality, the notion of balance may sometimes have more to do with preserving the symbolic “harmony” of the status quo – in which women work as mothers and caregivers in the domestic sphere while men wield most of the political and economic power – than it does with creating material equality between the genders. Sarah Warren echoes some of Larocque’s concerns in her essay about Argentina. Across the Americas, there is a persistent envisioning of pre-contact indigenous societies as gender complementarian. This discourse holds sway in Argentina, and has been taken up by Mapuche communities. Warren writes:

Many indigenous groups argue that gender is a Western concept not applicable to indigenous peoples, who had complementary, balanced relationships before colonization. This interpretation... can justify women's subordination to men under the guise of complementary relationships.<sup>128</sup>

However, Warren also notes that the discourse of complementarity has in some circumstances been successfully utilized to support women’s arguments that they belong in the public sphere and should

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<sup>127</sup> Larocque, *supra* note 118 at 55.

<sup>128</sup> Warren, *supra* note 22 at 773.

participate in community affairs on an equal footing with men. Gender complementarity can disguise sexism in some situations, but provide a liberating framework in others:

In places where indigenous groups are discussing which "usos y costumbres" (customs) govern internal affairs, women have been able to utilize notions of gender complementarity to participate and define these traditions and what they mean for women.<sup>129</sup>

Here, we see again the paradoxical relationship between gender complementarity and tradition. In some circumstances, each concept is used to reinforce the other and maintain the status quo: our traditions are complementarian – they are balanced and harmonized, therefore women have no need to question them. In other circumstances, women claim that complementarity means that they have the right to define what certain traditions mean and which ones remain relevant and valuable. These ways of understanding and using the discourse of gender complementarity appear irreconcilable, but they exist simultaneously nonetheless.

The criticisms put forth by Wilson, Simpson, Maracle, and Larocque illustrate the power inherent in the very act of calling something traditional. They also raise important questions about the meaning of tradition and the effects of traditionalism on marginalized members of a group. As Dawn Martin-Hill writes, "In the name of resisting colonial domination, ideologies develop in which a complex multilayered colonial version of traditionalism justifies the subordination of indigenous women."<sup>130</sup> Whether we accept the skirt protocol as an "authentic" tradition or whether we see it as the corrupt result of colonialism, underlying questions about how and why certain cultural practices are passed down, legitimized, and disseminated remain unanswered. Why do some practices escape scrutiny on the basis that they are "traditional"? Why are some adopted practices deemed acceptable while others are rejected as un-traditional? Who gets to decide which traditions are important and which are not, and how are these decisions made?

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Dawn Martin-Hill, "She No Speaks and Other Colonial Constructs of the Indigenous Woman", *Strong Women Stories*, ed Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence, Sumach Press (Toronto, 2000) at 107. [Martin-Hill]

*Gender essentialism and exclusivity*

Another important criticism of the skirt protocol makes visible who it excludes from cultural participation. Regardless of which rationale is accepted as the basis for the skirt protocol, certain groups of people are excluded as a result. Both the “traditional” or “religious” reasoning<sup>131</sup> may exclude straight or queer cis women who do not feel comfortable wearing skirts, two-spirit individuals such as trans women who may want to wear the skirt but are prevented from doing so or trans men who do not identify as women but are perceived that way and therefore required to dress that way, and non-binary people who do not identify as either gender, or who identify as both. The essentialization of womanhood as cis and heterosexual precludes other identities from being seen as women too. Alex Wilson recalls a sweat lodge ceremony in which the elder leading the sweat demanded that certain two-spirit participants change their clothing in order to conform with what he perceived their gender to be. He even warned that those who failed to do so would be made to “prove” their gender to him before being allowed to join the ceremony, an affront which Wilson calls “a direct assault on their body sovereignty and self-determination”.<sup>132</sup>

Incidents such as this are especially problematic in light of the fact that indigenous women and two-spirit people already experience severe marginalization both inside and outside their communities. Although many indigenous communities historically respected and honoured two-spirit identities, colonial powers strongly disapproved of their existence, and today many two-spirits face homophobia, violence, and erasure. Indigenous women in Canada are six times more likely to be murdered than their non-indigenous counterparts.<sup>133</sup> And the intersection of indigeneity, gender diversity, and sexual orientation compounds these dangers: according to a study of American Indian and Alaskan native

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131 These rationales are not mutually exclusive. The spiritual arguments supporting the skirt protocol also benefit from the claim that they are “traditional” beliefs, and the tradition can be explained through reference to its spiritual underpinnings. I use the terms separately because it is possible that the tradition could have a different basis than the belief in women’s feminine power.

132 Wilson, *supra* note 2.

133 Zoran Miladinovic and Leah Mulligan, “Homicide in Canada, 2014”, *Statistics Canada* (25 Nov 2015) at 3.

women, two-spirit women are twice as likely to be sexually and physically assaulted than indigenous heterosexual women and non-indigenous lesbian women alike.<sup>134</sup> The indigenous LGBTQ2 population also suffers from extremely high rates of poverty. One study performed in Manitoba indicated that nearly half of indigenous trans people reported pre-tax incomes under \$10,000.<sup>135</sup> Women and two-spirit people are often excluded from positions of political power both in the Canadian state and within their own communities' governance structures. For example, indigenous women are underrepresented as band chiefs and council members; in 2012, female chiefs made up only 17.5% of chiefs across Canada.<sup>136</sup> I have been unable to find information on whether or not there are or have been openly LGBTQ2 individuals serving in positions of power in indigenous governments.

Jill Alaers, a Cree two-spirit social worker, writes about her experiences with the skirt protocol, describing several sweat lodge ceremonies in which she was required to wear a skirt, which she found "incredibly uncomfortable".<sup>137</sup> She also didn't like being made to sit in the way that women were supposed to, calling it "awkward and even painful".<sup>138</sup> Alaers grew frustrated by seeing the men across the lodge wearing shorts and sitting as they pleased. Wearing a skirt also made Alaers feel like she was not being true to her two-spirit identity. She writes:

Since this time I have attended several events and ceremonies, and continued to be hypervigilant to the fact that I am either "honouring" my womanhood and the Elders by wearing a skirt and sitting like a woman, thus dishonouring myself.<sup>139</sup>

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134 Keren Lehavot, Karina Walters, and Jane Simoni, "Abuse, Mastery, and Health Among Lesbian, Bisexual, and Two-Spirit Native American and Alaskan Native Women" *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, Vol 15:3 (July 2009) at 275.

135 Catherine Taylor. "Health and safety issues for Aboriginal transgender/Two Spirit people in Manitoba", *Canadian Journal of Aboriginal Community-Based HIV/AIDS Research* Vol 2 (2009) at 69.

136 It's worth noting that this percentage is actually slightly higher than the percentage of female mayors across Canada, which the Federation of Canadian Municipalities pegged at 16% in 2014. Online: <http://www.fcm.ca/home/media/news-releases/2014/fcm-campaign-school-encourages-women%E2%80%99s-participation-in-municipal-government/fact-sheet-women%E2%80%99s-participation-in-local-government.htm>. Heather Scoffield, "How Women Became Leaders in Aboriginal Politics", *The Globe and Mail* (22 July 2012) online: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/how-women-became-leaders-in-aboriginal-politics/article4435084/>.

137 Alaers, *supra* note 116.

138 *Ibid.*

139 *Ibid.*

Other two-spirit individuals share similar stories of exclusion and silencing. One woman discusses attending a women's gathering that involved a sweat. She did not wear skirts, and in fact did not even own one. She had emailed the elder running the sweat in advance to inquire about the skirt protocol and explain that she was two-spirit. At the ceremony, the elder singled her out in front of all the participants, said that she had received an email about two-spirits but "didn't know what that was" or how it fit with the traditions, and that she would just have to wear a skirt. The elder in this situation dismissed the very existence of the two-spirit identity and was unwilling to engage with a respectful questioning of the protocol. The two-spirit individual did not feel comfortable putting on a skirt and ended up not participating in the sweat. She lamented, "If you're a woman you must embrace and adore wearing a skirt. I identify as a woman but not someone who's comfortable with a skirt and sometimes I feel like I'm being policed for that."<sup>140</sup>

The skirt protocol means that indigenous women and LTBTQ2 individuals are not just marginalized in terms of political participation, physical and mental health, and safety, but also in terms of social, cultural, and spiritual participation. Ironically, the ceremonies from which they are excluded are often aimed at healing emotional and physical trauma. Sweat lodges feature prominently in addictions and recovery programming for indigenous people, and may be utilized by inmates in federal prisons as well.<sup>141</sup> Women and LGBTQ2 people often already lack access to such healing ceremonies. Cynthia Kasee explores how the commodification and appropriation of indigenous spirituality have monopolized rare cultural resources such as medicine men and women and knowledgeable elders. In "Identity, Recovery, and Religious Imperialism", she argues, "if Indian religions can be bought by any dilettante with a credit card, they lose their ability to require commitment, reform, and diminution of ego,"<sup>142</sup> thus ceasing to function meaningfully as a healing tool. Furthermore, the commercialization of

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140 "Laura", interviewed by Dana Wesley. "Reimagining Two-Spirit Community: Critically Centering Narratives of Urban Two-Spirit Youth", MA Thesis, Queen's University (2015) at 76-7.

141 Kasee, *supra* note 84 at 84-5.

142 *Ibid* at 86.

indigenous spirituality has practical impacts on indigenous women's ability to access their ceremonies and teachings. Because women tend to be more economically marginalized,<sup>143</sup> they are less likely to be able to afford to participate in ceremonies and learn about their own cultural heritage once those things are put up for sale rather than passed down through families and communities. Indigenous women and LGBTQ2 people are trapped in an unenviable position: oppressed and traumatized by both the dominant society and their own communities, while simultaneously excluded from the very practices held out as the path to healing from those experiences.

The strong association between womanhood, femininity, and life-giving power promoted by a spiritual reading of the skirt protocol is also reductive, even for those cis, straight women whose identities constitute "acceptable" examples of their gender. It suggests that women who cannot bear or raise children, or those who choose not to, are somehow less in touch with their spiritual power and less worthy of being granted access to ceremony and healing. It also implies that all women should feel the same way about fertility, conception, childbirth, and motherhood. For example, Sylvia McAdam, one of the organizers of the Idle No More (INM) movement, encouraged women to wear ankle-length skirts during INM protests and rallies. She referred to the skirt as "honouring the empowering gift of creation."<sup>144</sup> But possessing the ability to physically reproduce is not necessarily an empowering gift for all women. Becoming pregnant and giving birth are not always the result of women's free and active choices; these women may not view their fertility as a source of power but rather as a piece of biology which is emotionally inseparable from trauma. Similarly, those individuals who do not feel that their gender matches the way they usually present or are perceived may not wish to honour their

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143 The most recent Statistics Canada report on women and income, "Women in Canada: Economic Well-Being" was released in 2010. The Report found that in 2008, women earned an average annual income of \$30,100 per year, while men earned an average of \$47,000. Similarly, female single-parent families had median assets of \$60,000, while male single-parent families had median assets of more than triple that amount: \$200,000. "Women in Canada: Economic Well-Being", Statistics Canada (2010) online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/101216/dq101216c-eng.htm>.

144 "Sacred Protocol is Invoked", Idle No More archives (10 Dec 2012), online: <http://www.idlenomore.ca/articles/latest-news/saskatchewan-news/item/25-sacred-protocol-is-invokedat-idle-no-more?tmpl=component&print=1>.

reproductive capacity in this way. Whenever a practice is validated on the basis that it is empowering, it is important to ask why, and for whom.

Métis scholar Emma Larocque confronts this problem in “Métis and Feminist”.<sup>145</sup> The piece is in conversation with Kim Anderson’s *A Reconstruction of Being*, and the views expressed therein regarding the spiritual and symbolic value of the skirt. Larocque takes issue with Anderson’s foregrounding of motherhood as central to indigenous women’s identities. She criticizes the assertion that the skirt constitutes a way of connecting with the earth and an example of feminine power that somehow cannot be accessed by women who choose not to wear skirts.<sup>146</sup> For Larocque, this is an essentializing discourse which reduces women to their ability to bear and raise children. Although Anderson is careful not to exclude women who cannot have children from laying claim to this idea of womanhood, by including aunts and other non-biological nurturing figures as “life-givers”, for Larocque, this does not fully address the problem. It does not consider the women – cis, trans, non-binary, or queer – who choose not to have children and who are not interested in raising and nurturing other people’s children either. Their choices are denigrated because they do not fit the mold of proper femininity and womanhood.

It is undeniable that traditions are important to people. They offer opportunities for bringing communities together and strengthening social and cultural bonds, which can be understood as particularly valuable in the context of decolonization. They can act as markers of identity, used to achieve political recognition and access legal rights. They may provide a source of pride and a space for healing. But as we have seen, they can also rely on their authority *as traditions* to promote essentializing discourses and limit the expression of different gender and sexual identities. Are there ways to negotiate this tension between the meaningfulness of traditions and the harm of essentialization in more inclusive, flexible ways?

<sup>145</sup> Larocque, *supra* note 118.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid* at 62-5.

### *Spirituality and identity politics*

Others criticize not only the gendered nature of the skirt protocol but also its alleged spiritual underpinnings. Even if we agree that the skirt protocol is “traditional”, and we do not consider it to be sexist or the result of Christianity corrupting indigenous beliefs, we are left with a religious rationale that limits the ability or willingness of secular indigenous people to comply with it. Métis artist and critic David Garneau raises this point as he discusses the example of celebrated Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore, who refused to enter the *Walking With Our Sisters* art installation<sup>147</sup> because women were required to wear skirts and pass through a smudging and cedar brushing ceremony at the entrance. Belmore stated that she did not enter because she did not appreciate the gendering of the space and as a secular person, did not participate in ceremony.<sup>148</sup>

There is some scholarly debate about the meaning of the term “spirituality”, whether spirituality is analytically distinct from religion, or if they are two points on the same line.<sup>149</sup> When referring to practices and beliefs held by indigenous peoples in this paper, I use the terms “spiritual” and “religious” interchangeably. It is worth mentioning, however, that much of the literature about indigenous societies uses the term “spirituality”. It is not clear why this might be the case. It may represent these communities’ understandable desire to distance their belief systems from the Christian church, responsible for centuries of violence and oppression, and to express the perception that their belief systems are less hierarchical than other organized religions.<sup>150</sup> However, the term “spirituality” may also be problematic in that it serves to de-legitimize indigenous belief systems: “spirituality” is

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147 *Walking With Our Sisters* is a community-based, travelling art installation made of hundreds of embroidered and beaded moccasin vamps, designed to commemorate missing and murdered indigenous women. More information is available here: <http://walkingwithoursisters.ca/>.

148 David Garneau. “Indigenous Criticism: On Not Walking With Our Sisters”, *Border Crossings* 34:2 (Jun-Aug 2015) at 78. [Garneau]

149 Anna Fedele and Kim Knibbe, “Introduction”, *Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality: Ethnographic Approaches*, ed Fedele and Knibbe, Routledge (New York, 2013). [Fedele and Knibbe]

150 Fedele and Knibbe refer to Pamela Klassen’s study, which found that people self-identifying as spiritual often draw a distinction between “age-old traditions, encrusted with hierarchy” and spirituality, which offered a “more immediate, accessible, personal relationship with God (or another deity)”, at 4.

perhaps a gentler term than “religion”, but it is also taken less seriously. It connotes subjectivity and individual inner development.<sup>151</sup> The word implies that indigenous beliefs and practices are informal, individual manifestations of faith, rather than portraying indigenous communities as collective religious groups fully entitled to the rights and privileges granted to other organized religions. On March 17, 2016, the Ktunaxa Nation was granted leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada in a dispute over the proposed development of a ski resort in their traditional territory.<sup>152</sup> The Ktunaxa claim that the development of a year-round resort in the Jumbo Valley violates their section 2(a) right to freedom of religion.<sup>153</sup> Although the Ktunaxa do not observe any rituals within the contested territory, they assert that the Jumbo Valley is the home of the Grizzly Bear Spirit and if humans are permitted to be in that territory full-time, the Grizzly Bear Spirit will die and their religious practices related to the Spirit will become meaningless. The Ktunaxa asserted in judicial review that the Minister did not consider the section 2(a) right during the consultation process:

The Ktunaxa submit that based on the Minister’s Rationale, it is clear the Minister “never even put his mind to the Charter right at issue” despite the Ktunaxa having raised it several times. The Ktunaxa further argue that the Minister’s focus on “**spiritual interests**” rather than the associated “practices and beliefs” is evidence that the Minister never considered the asserted s. 2(a) right.<sup>154</sup> (emphasis mine)

The BC Court of Appeal held that the Minister’s failure to use the language of the *Charter* was irrelevant as long as he considered the principles implicated by it.<sup>155</sup> However, I would argue that “spiritual interests” is a weaker, more vague term than “practices and beliefs”, and is more easily cast aside – clearly, this view is shared by the Ktunaxa themselves. I consider this case not in order to claim that the BCCA decision was incorrect, but simply to illustrate how the words used to describe a faith

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151 Fedele and Knibbe at 4; 6.

152 *Ktunaxa Nation Council and Kathryn Teneese, on their own behalf and on behalf of all citizens of the Ktunaxa Nation v Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, et al.*, 2016 CanLII 13739 (SCC).

153 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c 11. [*Charter*]

154 *Ktunaxa Nation v British Columbia (Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations)*, 2014 BCSC 568 at para 269.

155 *Ktunaxa Nation v British Columbia (Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations)*, 2015 BCCA 352 at para 52.

might have practical effects on the treatment of its adherents. In order to acknowledge this issue, I have chosen to use both “religion” and “spirituality” in this paper.

There is little scholarly discussion of secularism, atheism, or agnosticism in indigenous communities. Indeed, in Canada and the United States indigenous cultures are often treated as synonymous with a particular kind of spirituality, exemplified by the appropriation of indigenous symbols and practices by New Age culture.<sup>156</sup> Across the globe, the notion of an indigenous worldview evokes ideas about spiritual beliefs. In “Who Is Indigenous?” Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel explores the middle ground between outwardly imposed legal, political, or anthropological definitions of indigeneity and definitions used for self-identification.<sup>157</sup> Corntassel ultimately proposes his own definition, based on the Peoplehood model put forth by Holm, Chavis, and Pearson.<sup>158</sup> His definition considers the group’s relationship to the land, language, common spiritual bond and use of “ceremonial cycles”, and sacred history as the four relevant factors in assessing indigeneity.<sup>159</sup> In a later essay by Corntassel and Taiake Alfred, the two scholars “build on this notion of a dynamic and interconnected concept of Indigenous identity constituted in history, ceremony, language and land.”<sup>160</sup> They also find the concept of the Fourth World<sup>161</sup> valuable, writing:

...the Fourth World is founded on active relationships with the spiritual and cultural heritage embedded in the words and patterns of thought and behaviour left to us by our ancestors. The legacies of their struggles to be Indigenous form the imperatives of our contemporary struggles to regenerate authentic Indigenous existences. A Fourth World theory asserting Indigenous laws on Indigenous lands highlights the sites of ongoing state–nation conflicts while reaffirming the spiritual and cultural nature of the struggle.<sup>162</sup>

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156 Kasee, *supra* note 84. See also Martin-Hill, *supra* note 130.

157 Jeff Corntassel, “Who Is Indigenous? Peoplehood and Ethnonationalist Approaches to Rearticulating Indigenous Identity” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 9:1 (Aug 2003). [Corntassel].

158 As cited in Corntassel, *ibid* at 91. See also Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis. “Peoplehood: a Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies”, *Wicazo Sa Review* 18:1 (2003) at 7.

159 *Ibid*.

160 Taiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism”, *Politics of Identity – IX*, Blackwell Publishing (Massachusetts, 2005) at 596. [Alfred and Corntassel].

161 See generally George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, Collier Macmillan Canada (New York, 1974).

162 Alfred and Corntassel, *supra* note 160 at 610.

Kim Anderson too weaves spirituality into ideas about indigenous identity, arguing that strong families, grounding in community, connection to land, language, storytelling and spirituality are “fountains of resistance” which form a basis for decolonizing action and thought.<sup>163</sup> Blair Stonechild, a professor at the First Nations University of Canada, goes even further, writing, “...an attack on First Nations spirituality is an attack on First Nations identity, since spirituality pervades all aspects of the First Nations lifestyle.”<sup>164</sup> These scholars do not necessarily assert that a certain spirituality is at the heart of indigenous identity; however, the fact that the mere existence of spirituality is consistently included as an element of indigenous identity suggests that it is widely considered important and that religious belief of some kind is frequently associated with what it means to be indigenous. This association between spirituality and indigeneity persists in the colonial eye, and colonialism bears great responsibility for the limitations placed on the boundaries of indigeneity. Settler society’s stereotypical perceptions play a role in the construction of indigenous identity. Because the dominant society has the power to recognize and enforce legal rights, indigenous communities and individuals are under enormous pressure to conform to settler expectations in order to access those rights. This is most clearly illustrated through legal tests which restrict the development of Aboriginal rights in Canada by invoking the idea of an authentic indigenous person, such as the “Integral to a Distinctive Culture Test” developed in *R v Van der Peet*.<sup>165</sup> By requiring that any Aboriginal right asserted be a “distinctive” aspect of the claimant’s culture, the court relies on a debunked anthropological understanding of culture as made up of discrete items and corresponding institutions. Michael Asch writes, “...culture is a system and a process rather than merely items and arrangements. It is inappropriate to attempt to ferret out whether a practice, custom, or tradition is ‘distinctive’”.<sup>166</sup> Focusing on cultural difference limits the

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid* at 608.

<sup>164</sup> A. Blair Stonechild, “Foreword”, in Katherine Pettipas. *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies*, University of Manitoba Press (Canada, 2014) at x.

<sup>165</sup> *R v Van der Peet*, [1996] 2 SCR 507.

<sup>166</sup> Michael Asch, “The Judicial Conceptualization of Culture After Delgamuukw and Van der Peet”, *Review of Constitutional Studies* 5:2 (2000) at 129.

court's ability to take into account natural processes of syncretism, cultural exchange, and adaptation, meaning that practices which are integral to Aboriginal communities today may not be recognized as legitimate rights if they were not also integral in a substantially similar form prior to the declaration of sovereignty in Canada.

Despite common settler perceptions about indigenous spirituality, indigenous communities are often deeply divided about these issues. They are reluctant to discuss questions of spirituality, atheism, and secularism, David Garneau argues, because they are afraid to “fracture [their] fragile solidarity” and “disturb settler-projected expectations”.<sup>167</sup> Garneau asserts that most people take spirituality and traditionalism as “iconic signs and essential qualities of indigeneity”,<sup>168</sup> so it can be terrifying to express lack of belief lest one be seen as expressing lack of identity as well. Yet Garneau notes that indigenous people have complicated and conflicting views about the value, legitimacy, and meaning of religious traditions and practices. He refers to Cree curator Richard W. Hill's recent criticism of pan-indigenous ceremonies and symbols such as dreamcatchers, four sacred colour designs, and the use of tipis and sweatlodges in places not historically associated with them. In a speech at a 2014 conference, Hill asked people to reconsider symbols and concepts that reinforce the notion of indigenous identity as static and bound to “blind imitation or mechanical ritual,”<sup>169</sup> and focus on reinvigorating traditions critically. Beliefs and practices should be analyzed and upheld because they have merit as sound ways of being, Hill argues. They should not “have their shadow forms be exoticized, protected and mummified as mere displays.”<sup>170</sup>

Hill and Garneau's arguments find support even amongst indigenous individuals who do identify themselves as spiritual. Anna Marie Sewell, former poet laureate of Edmonton, writes about

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167 Garneau, *supra* note 148 at 78.

168 *Ibid.*

169 Richard W. Hill, as cited in Garneau, *ibid.*

170 *Ibid* at 79.

her experience at a pipe ceremony. She was offered a skirt to enter the tipi where the ceremony was being held, but declined, and as a result remained outside with her daughter as her non-indigenous husband participated. Although she believes the skirt “can be good and meaningful” on an individual level, for her, the skirt amounts to little more than window-dressing – “a thing done for show”.<sup>171</sup>

Sewell explains to her daughter why she chooses not to follow the skirt protocol:

I was taught that God sees me always, sees me truly. I have a responsibility to present myself to others in ways that respect my personhood, and that respect theirs. To some people, wearing a certain garment has meaning. Those people should wear it.<sup>172</sup>

Anishinaabe-Métis professor Patricia McGuire describes the skirt protocol as a teaching she often deliberately “forgets”, and when asked where her skirt is, she sarcastically replies, “Oh, I forgot that the spirits can only recognize me with a skirt on ... I wonder if spirits wear skirts?”<sup>173</sup> McGuire, despite emphasizing the importance of spirituality, claims that any spiritual practice which relies on rigid rules of behaviour is “motionless like stagnant water.”<sup>174</sup> Both Sewell and McGuire take umbrage at the suggestion that their god(s) think less of them based on what they wear. Unlike the secular Garneau, Sewell is clearly a believer, but her description of the skirt as “a thing done for show” resonates with Garneau’s critique of certain traditions as “mere displays”. Poet and artist appear to agree that some behaviours, perhaps in particular pan-indigenous ones, are put on as performance rather than maintained because they are useful.

Pan-indigenous beliefs are indeed a controversial topic. A recent article on the news network Indian Country Today entitled, “New-Agers and Pan-Indians: What’s the Difference?”<sup>175</sup> struck a nerve among readership, and the ensuing debate in the comment section was fierce, complex, and thoughtful.

171 Anna Marie Sewell, “Skirt: the Issue: Part Two”, *Prairie Pomes*, blog post (26 June 2015) online: <https://prairiepomes.com/2015/06/26/skirt-the-issue-part-two/>. [Sewell]

172 *Ibid.*

173 Patricia D. McGuire, “Wiisaakodewikwe Anishinaabekwe Diabaajimotaw Nipigon Zaaga’igan: Lake Nipigon Ojibway Métis Stories about Women”, *Canadian Women Studies* 26:2-3 (2008) at 219.

174 *Ibid.*

175 Duane Champagne. “New-Agers and Pan-Indians: What’s the Difference?” *Indian Country Today Media Network* (20 Dec 2015) online: <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/12/20/new-agers-and-pan-indians-what-difference-162630>. [Champagne].

Duane Champagne's article reviews Dennis Kelley's book, *Tradition, Performance, and Religion in Native America: Ancestral Ways, Modern Selves*, which suggests that Pan-Indianism is "a form of personal spiritual engagement in ceremony, identity, and belief."<sup>176</sup> Pan-Indian beliefs, Kelley asserts, are most often held by persons in urban areas, who have limited or no connection to their ancestral group, and who do not have direct ties to or membership in a tribe or nation. They may have been told they have indigenous heritage but do not know what that heritage entails or from what particular tribe they are descended. Pursuing Pan-Indian activities and adopting Pan-Indian symbols is an attempt to connect with that aspect of their identity.

Champagne has a serious problem with Kelley's argument. He sees little difference between new-agers, Indian wannabes, and pan-Indians, arguing that they all pick and choose the beliefs that suit them with little real commitment, damaging the integrity of the ceremonies they adopt.<sup>177</sup> He obliquely implies that some Pan-Indians are not actually indigenous; by this, he appears to mean that they do not have any "blood". Champagne finds the practice of Pan-Indianism selfish, arguing that "returning to an Indian spiritual commitment means returning to and supporting the collective well-being of one's tribal nation." He describes Pan-Indianism as a "supermarket practice of spirituality",<sup>178</sup> and exhorts all Pan-Indians to learn more about the specific tribe from which they are allegedly descended, and take up the traditions and beliefs held by that group rather than mixing beliefs taken from all across North America. Some readers and commenters agree with Champagne, writing that people who have heard they are indigenous should "get some facts or give up"<sup>179</sup> rather than pursuing an identity they know nothing about. But others feel that Champagne is privileging a rural, reservation-based way of life, which is problematic for two reasons. First, many indigenous people do not and have never had access

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176 Dennis Kelley. *Tradition, Performance, and Religion in Native America: Ancestral Ways, Modern Selves*, Taylor & Francis (USA, 2015), as cited in Champagne, *ibid*.

177 Champagne, *supra* note 175.

178 *Ibid*.

179 "tvc15", online comment (22 Dec 2015), *ibid*.

to this way of life because they lost status or membership as a result of racist and sexist laws, such as the *Indian Act*<sup>180</sup> in Canada. For others, their tribe was never federally recognized and thus never allotted a land base, or their families had to leave their reservations due to lack of economic opportunities. These forces of colonialism displaced people from their homes and disconnected them from their cultures, and Champagne appears to suggest that it is simply too bad for those who have suffered this fate.

Second, the reader comments reveal a widespread belief that reservations themselves are deeply colonized, and are often not fertile places for cultivating or revitalizing an indigenous spirituality. One commenter writes, “returning to one’s tribal nation is returning to an assimilated tribe and Christianity,”<sup>181</sup> while another laments, “there are churches & missionaries galore on the Rez, sucking the cultural life blood from tribes”.<sup>182</sup> This commenter is particularly cynical about the formal tribal structure, insinuating that decisions about enrolment and membership are more related to gaming profits than they are to identity. One commenter, who describes himself as an Alaska Native, writes, “My tribe is brainwashed & do not understand a few of us who decided to think independently & not buy into the mass forced Christianity.”<sup>183</sup> This individual explains that they participate in ceremonies from other cultural traditions, such as pow-wows, sweats, and smudging, because they no longer have access to their own. Of course, these critiques of Champagne’s article are not themselves unproblematic; it is condescending to refer to those who have adopted Christian beliefs as “brainwashed”, just as it is to insinuate that urban, tribeless people cannot “really” be indigenous. Finally, a few readers see Pan-Indianism in a more positive light. One comments that inter-tribal pow-

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180 *Indian Act*, RSC 1985, c. I-5. The *Indian Act* removed Indian status from women who married non-status men until the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985. This meant that many women were no longer permitted to live on their reserves, and their children were similarly unable to obtain Indian status. Even after the *Act* was amended, many children of these women remained unable to return to their communities due to band membership laws which excluded them.

181 “sammy7”, online comment (21 Dec 2015), Champagne, *supra* note 175.

182 “alexjacobs”, online comment (26 Dec 2015), *ibid.*

183 “Asapi Waaghyi”, online comment (26 Dec 2015), *ibid.*

wows and intermarriage support peace and understanding between cultures. Another views Pan-Indianism as a strategy of survival. They write:

What may be called Pan-Indianism most likely helped tribal societies to develop and adapt to changing times, where would tribes be w/o Social Pow Wows and Inter-Tribals and the modern ways of teaching or preserving native languages?<sup>184</sup>

This comment echoes Tara Williamson's perspective on cultural survival and the need to recognize and honour adaptation as an example of resilience in the face of colonial oppression.<sup>185</sup> Williamson argues against a dogmatic interpretation of ceremonies and protocols, making the claim that the only reason they continue to exist at all is because they were adapted in response to colonial pressures, going underground or changing forms to avoid annihilation. Champagne's need to preserve ceremonies "within the context of the tradition of a specific tribal community"<sup>186</sup> perhaps fails to acknowledge the fluidity of culture and traditions, and the changing constitution and identity of tribal communities themselves.

Other indigenous people view spirituality altogether as an impediment to militant resistance and meaningful change. In "Idle No More? Speak for Yourself", Kwakwaka'wakw writer and anarchist organizer Gord Hill criticizes the invocation of indigenous spirituality by the Idle No More movement. He argues that INM organizers used "spiritual ceremonies as a club to pacify the protests by claiming that whenever a sacred pipe was present, people had to be peaceful."<sup>187</sup> The sacred protocol invoked at rallies and marches also encouraged women to wear skirts down to their ankles, and Hill claims that this protocol was especially inappropriate in Coast Salish territories, where neither the peace pipe nor the skirt-wearing tradition have historical roots. He writes:

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184 "alexjacobs", *ibid*.

185 Tara Williamson. "Of Dogma and Ceremony", *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society*, blog post (13 Aug 2013) online: <https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2013/08/16/of-dogma-and-ceremony/>. [Williamson]

186 Champagne, *supra* note 175.

187 Gord Hill, "Idle No More? Speak for Yourself", *Warrior Publications*, blog post (12 Dec 2012) online: <https://warriorpublications.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/idle-no-more-speak-for-yourself/>.

A public protest, an occupation, or a blockade, for example, are not ceremonies. They are actions taken to defend people and territory. Nor is a social movement a church in which religious codes can be imposed upon participants.<sup>188</sup>

For Hill, the spiritual has no place in movements of anti-colonial resistance: it simply serves to water them down. For others, there can be no resistance without spirituality. As Kim Anderson writes, spirituality is a “fountain of resistance”.<sup>189</sup>

The discussion above reveals that there are not only a variety of religious beliefs among indigenous peoples, but a variety of beliefs about those beliefs. In spite of this, indigenous spirituality is popularly conceived of as relatively uniform and closely associated with identity itself. We rarely hear from indigenous atheists or secularists, although they certainly exist. Who is excluded by an identity politics that relies on adherence to certain spiritual beliefs and traditions? While many indigenous people do have faith and share spiritual commonalities, the way that spirituality is so tightly interwoven with indigenous identity limits the space available for non-believers to lay claim to that identity. Furthermore, the assumption that all indigenous people are believers allows “spiritual” traditions such as the skirt protocol to be imposed unquestioningly, even when indigenous women may be uncomfortable with either the practice itself or the reasons behind it. As Lee Maracle asks, acknowledging the dark history of potlatch prohibitions and the violence of Christian residential schools, “...why would we want to continue to force anyone to do anything in the name of spirituality?”<sup>190</sup> How can we respect the myriad spiritualities of many indigenous individuals without making spiritual belief itself an essential element of indigenous identity?

### *Spirituality and public space*

An analysis of the relationship between the skirt protocol, spirituality, and indigenous identity gives way to tangential questions about indigenous spiritual practices in public spaces more generally.

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188 *Ibid.*

189 Alfred and Cornassel, *supra* note 160 at 608.

190 Lee Maracle, as cited in “The Shame of Skirt Shaming”, *supra* note 110.

In an article published in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, University of Winnipeg professor Joanne Boucher voices her opposition to the gendered nature of the skirt protocol, but also expresses concern about the fact that a “religious pipe ceremony” is being held on campus to begin with. Boucher writes:

This is an avowedly "sacred ceremony." Isn't religion to be kept out of public institutions? This seems to be an overt violation of the principle of the laws that have guided public education in Manitoba for 120 years.<sup>191</sup>

Although this issue is not discussed in great detail, it would appear that Boucher advocates for a strictly secular university campus. Erica Lee, author of the blog *Moontime Warrior* and then-student at the University of Saskatchewan, has a different perspective. Lee argues:

To call for the removal of Indigenous ceremonies from campus on the grounds that they are ‘religious’ does not acknowledge the nature of ceremony or the ongoing history of attempts by Canada to eliminate Indigenous cultures and people.<sup>192</sup>

It is indeed essential to acknowledge the ways in which indigenous religions practices have been prohibited, marginalized, and erased through colonialism, and how the Canadian state continues to perpetuate these harms today. But what does Lee mean when she says that Boucher “does not acknowledge the nature of ceremony”? Is she suggesting that events such as pipe ceremonies and smudges are not religious? If so, what differentiates them from other religious practices, which perhaps would be more clearly unacceptable in a university campus context? How does she support making this distinction?

Lee argues that indigenous ceremonies are appropriate and necessary on university campuses as they provide a place where indigenous students can escape and heal from experiences of “daily racism and under-representation”,<sup>193</sup> especially when such cultural resources can be hard to come by in urban environments, or for students who are far from home. However, Lee cautions against using indigenous

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191 Joanne Boucher. “Dress-code message at Uof W sexist”, *Winnipeg Free Press* (17 June 2015), online: <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/dress-code-message—at-u-of-w-sexist-307799831.html>.

192 Erica Lee, “Skirting the Issue: A Response and Call to Action”, *Moontime Warrior*, blog post (19 June 2015), online: <https://moontimewarrior.com/2015/06/19/skirting-the-issue/>.

193 *Ibid.*

ceremonies to replace meaningful systemic change at the curricular and policy levels. She notes that these practices and other symbols of indigenous cultures can easily become tokenized. They make the university look good but offer little real value for indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

Lee's comments are compelling, but it's not clear if she makes a sufficient argument in favour of holding indigenous religious ceremonies in public spaces such as university campuses. One possible response to her piece might ask whether there are any other religious and spiritual communities which have suffered historic discrimination at the hands of the Canadian state, and if so, whether these communities should also have their spiritual practices endorsed and supported by the institution. This is a problematic line of inquiry because it implies a need to compare and prioritize experiences of oppression. At what point do the Canadian state's "attempts to eliminate... people and cultures"<sup>194</sup> justify institutions making an exception from their principles of secularism to endorse and host those cultures' religious ceremonies? Is colonial oppression unique and if so, how and why? And should secularism even be the golden standard by which such things are measured?

Considering the perspectives put forth by Garneau, Boucher, Sewell, and Lee causes me to wonder if there is a middle ground between permitting any and all religious rituals to infiltrate the public sphere, and the practice of unyielding, inflexible secularism. Perhaps there exists a comfortable space between a no-exceptions, rigid separation of church and state attitude, which, by treating every religious practice the same way, fails to acknowledge and address the very real fact that they have historically been treated extremely differently, and the complete dissolution of the separation of public institutions from religion. Is there a way to respect religious diversity, acknowledge religious discrimination, and still avoid the harms perpetuated by the marriage of church and state? If secularism is a spectrum of separation, where should we draw the line?

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

William Connolly presents a theoretical framework for such a middle ground in “Confessing Identity/Belonging to Difference”.<sup>195</sup> A self-professed atheist, Connolly nevertheless recognizes many of the failures of secularism, and rather than trying to entrench the separation of religion from public and political activity, he acknowledges and accepts that individuals’ faiths are inevitably (and often inadvertently) carried with them into the public sphere. He writes,

Only a few secularists, mostly academics, still purport to leave their existential faiths at home when they enter the public realm... they do not yet acknowledge secular confidence in the sufficiency of public reason... to be a contestable public faith.<sup>196</sup>

Here, Connolly asserts that secularism is itself founded on beliefs not adequately supported by evidence; the hardline secularist’s “confidence in the sufficiency of public reason” is based on wishful thinking rather than proof. Recognizing this, Connolly instead proposes a society grounded in “agonistic respect”, which he defines as “a civic virtue that allows people to honour different final sources, to cultivate reciprocal respect across difference, and to negotiate larger assemblages to set general policies”.<sup>197</sup> Agonistic respect is a richer, fuller version of tolerance, encouraging individuals to actively engage with the innate contestability of their own faiths, and recognizing the possibility of adaptation or conversion.<sup>198</sup> Agonistic respect is not a faith-based ethics, but it is also not a *non-faith-based* ethics. It is both, and neither, because it allows for respect to flow from multiple sources, be they religious, nontheistic, or atheistic. It is possible that by promoting a culture of agonistic respect, indigenous communities could move beyond the extreme poles of “spirituality = identity” at one end and the erasure or marginalization of indigenous spiritualities at the other. This would allow for the ongoing negotiation of a more inclusive, dynamic identity politics.

### *Authenticity and syncretism*

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<sup>195</sup> “Confessing Identity/Belonging to Difference”, *supra* note 4.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid* at 143.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid* at 142.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid* at 143.

Beyond the question of whether or not a given practice is truly “traditional” and whether, if so, it should be continued, is another question about the devaluing of syncretic practices. It is imperative to acknowledge the ways in which western and Christian ideologies were violently imposed on indigenous peoples. But do we risk negating the agency of indigenous peoples by implying that they were and are incapable of deliberately choosing to adopt, incorporate, or blend their own cultural beliefs and practices with the beliefs or practices brought by colonialism? Traditions which were in place hundreds of years ago would likely have evolved and changed over time even if settlers had never come to what is now called Canada. In what way is the devaluing of the syncretic tied to an erroneous understanding of indigenous cultures as frozen in time, and a problematic view of cultural authenticity?

Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw’s collection of essays, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: the Politics of Religious Synthesis* helps to shed light on this question. The book focuses on religious syncretism, or the synthesis of different religious forms.<sup>199</sup> While this paper will mainly consider syncretism from a religious point of view, it is worth noting that their arguments are likely applicable to examples of non-religious cultural exchange and incorporation as well. Furthermore, the boundaries of “religion” and “culture” are often blurred: even identifying these concepts as two separate elements of identity is a presumption of western secular thought which is far from a given in other contexts. Cynthia Kasee writes that most indigenous languages had no pre-contact words for faith, belief, or religion, as these concepts were so pervasive that they “could not be separated from other indigenous codes of ‘right living’.”<sup>200</sup> Incidentally, when we talk about syncretic processes of indigenous and colonial religious beliefs and practices, we are also talking about a synthesis of culture, although this may more commonly be referred to in academic literature as “bricolage” or “creolization”.<sup>201</sup>

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199 Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw, “Introduction”, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: the Politics of Religious Synthesis*, Routledge (London, 1994) at 1. [Stewart and Shaw]

200 Kasee, *supra* note 84 at 84.

201 Stewart and Shaw, *supra* note 197 at 2; 15.

Stewart and Shaw note that the term *syncretism* has often been endowed with negative connotations. It implies that the product of syncretism is no longer truly authentic: “the infiltration of a supposedly ‘pure’ tradition by symbols and meanings belonging to other, incompatible traditions” has corrupted the original whole.<sup>202</sup> Syncretism is thus perceived as a harbinger of cultural decay. Yet these negative associations are shifting. Indeed, in postmodern anthropology, where notions about the purity, wholeness, or authenticity of cultures have been widely criticized, syncretism is seen as a natural and inevitable product of cultures meeting and interacting. Furthermore, Shaw and Stewart highlight the ways in which processes of syncretization can be understood as permitting cultural continuity, rather than spoiling or distorting it. They write:

In colonial contexts, syncretism on the part of colonial subjects could have particularly subversive consequences, for although colonial governments constructed hybrid institutions such as ‘native courts’ all over the world, they were often highly contemptuous and suspicious of their subjects’ use of Western cultural elements in syncretic appropriations... whose meanings escape colonial control.<sup>203</sup>

The notion that syncretic practices escape colonial control can be read in conversation with Williamson’s piece, “Of Dogma and Ceremony”. Williamson argues that just as her ancestors had to “bend the rules”<sup>204</sup> of their cultures in order to survive (both individually and collectively), so too must contemporary indigenous communities avoid strict adherence to a dogmatic view of tradition and bend the rules according to the context in which they find themselves. Williamson writes:

I believe we still know how to give offerings of asemaa because we learned to replace natural tobacco with cigarettes... I believe we still believe in Gichi-manidoo because we understood how much this spirit looked like GOD.<sup>205</sup>

Here, Williamson acknowledges the value of syncretism in preserving beliefs and practices. Because her ancestors learned to make do with what they had, ceremonies survived; albeit in slightly altered forms. Similarly, she is faced with dozens of decisions every day which her ancestors never had to

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid* at 1.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid* at 20-1.

<sup>204</sup> Williamson, *supra* note 185.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*.

make, and she must adapt their traditions so that they remain applicable and relevant to her own life. Williamson's piece demonstrates how syncretism can be a strategy of oppressed peoples' resistance, and is not merely a step towards their ultimate assimilation into the dominant culture. Eventually, religious synthesis might even provide a tool for healing: syncretic institutions which combine Catholic, Protestant, and indigenous beliefs such as the Indian Shaker Church and Native American Church provide spiritual sustenance and emotional value to many people, in spite of the dark history of Christian proselytizing in North America.<sup>206</sup> Failure to acknowledge this side of syncretism risks erasing the agency of indigenous peoples and sees them as passive victims of colonialism whose traditions were infiltrated and corrupted, rather than as active agents who used the tools they had at hand to survive, adapt, and evolve during an extremely oppressive historical period (and who continue to do so today). This contributes to the problematic settler conception of indigenous peoples as confined to the past, and bolsters an exclusive identity politics wherein indigenous individuals must struggle to fit into a narrowly defined narrative of cultural authenticity.

By adopting elements of the colonially imposed belief system, but changing the collectively accepted meanings of colonial practices, indigenous communities could enable their own belief systems to continue in spite of enormous pressure to assimilate. For example, the Yawing people of Papua New Guinea began practicing male ritual circumcision in the mid-twentieth century as a result of

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206 It is difficult to verify the number of members of the Indian Shaker Church due to a relaxed attitude towards record-keeping, but there are several active congregations in Washington, Oregon, and Southern British Columbia, including in Duncan and Squamish. Eugene Harry, a Squamish Nation elder and minister of the community's Shaker Church, credits the Church with helping him to overcome alcoholism, deal with emotional trauma, and heal from the abuse he experienced in residential school. See Wawmeesh Hamilton and Gen Cruz, "Unshaken faith: keeping the Shaker Church alive", *CBC Aboriginal* (14 Apr 2015) online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/unshaken-faith-keeping-the-shaker-church-alive-1.3030651>.

Nearly 300,000 people across Canada and the United States identify themselves as members of the Native American Church. Indigenous peoples in northern Mexico have for thousands of years engaged in the ritual and healing use of peyote, a cactus with hallucinogenic properties. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, this practice spread to the southern United States, where tribes combined the use of peyote with their own ceremonies, as well as with Protestant beliefs. For more information, see generally Christopher T. Vecsey, "Native American Church", *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*, ed Carlos E. Cortés (2013).

colonial influences.<sup>207</sup> Although accepting and adopting various aspects of Christianity, the Yawing simultaneously developed unique practices that allowed them to reconcile the new religion with their pre-existing system of beliefs. The circumcision ceremony grew to be associated both with confessing and redemption from sin, clear examples of Christian influence, and with the purification of male blood, which prepared men for hunting responsibilities, marriage, and child-rearing.<sup>208</sup>

In addition to a colonial religion being adopted by indigenous peoples but subjected to numerous alterations, there are also interesting historical examples of indigenous communities actively choosing the religion of the colonial power over the religion to which they previously belonged. In southeast India, members of “untouchable” castes (often referred to collectively as dalits) took up Catholicism as a way of challenging the caste system. In contrast to the restrictions on religious activities imposed by Hinduism – for example, the ban on untouchables entering temples<sup>209</sup> – all castes were permitted to enter the church and take communion. As Catholic influence increased in the region and the anti-caste position of the modern Indian state grew stronger, segregated seating for different castes inside churches was abolished and the awarding of festival “honours” only to high-caste individuals was terminated.<sup>210</sup> Conversion to Catholicism constituted a valid and meaningful form of social protest for dalits, even if the new faith belonged to an oppressive force.

These examples show that the interactions between indigenous and colonial religions are not always tidy illustrations of oppression and forced conversion. By suggesting this, I in no way intend to deny or minimize the harm perpetrated by colonial governments, missionaries, and religious

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207 Wolfgang Kempf, “Ritual, Power, and Colonial Domination”, Stewart and Shaw, *supra* note 199 at 109.

208 *Ibid* at 108.

209 Although it is unconstitutional to prohibit dalits from accessing places of worship, in reality, they are still prevented from doing so in many instances. The problem is particularly pronounced in the southeastern state of Tamil Nadu. From April to July 2016, *The Hindu* newspaper reported on six separate incidents where dalit temple entry and prayer was protested by upper-caste Hindus. In one incident, garlands offered by a group of dalits were torn down. In another, the upper caste organizers of an annual religious festival banned dalits from attending. See “Dalits and Temple Entry in Tamil Nadu”, *The Hindu* (1 Aug 2016), online: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/dalits-and-temple-entry-in-tamil-nadu/article8928953.ece>.

210 David Mosse, “The Politics of Religious Synthesis: Roman Catholicism and Hindu village society in Tamil Nadu, India”, Stewart and Shaw, *supra* note 199 at 95.

institutions on indigenous communities in Canada and elsewhere. I simply wish to show that where there is religious oppression, there is also physical resistance (such as indigenous families hiding their children to prevent them being taken to residential schools), symbolic subversion (the Yawing accepting Christian practices but replacing Christian meanings with their own), and strategic adoption (the dalits taking up Catholicism to escape the injustice of the caste system). By recognizing examples of resilience and agency in addition to examples of brutality, the “image of the passive proselyte is replaced with a view of converts as active creators and manipulators of symbolic and ritual systems which serve indigenous and social ends”.<sup>211</sup>

The way in which syncretism is perceived deeply impacts the way that traditions such as the skirt protocol are understood and valued. If we accept that there is no such thing as a “pure” tradition, then modifying or relaxing a given tradition becomes less threatening to the cultural identity and integrity of the group to which it belongs. A woman’s decision not to wear a skirt might then be viewed not as a symbol of disrespect for tradition or culture, but as an acceptable re-evaluation of that tradition’s applicability to certain individuals, or a recognition of changing social values. From a position of respect for and engagement with syncretism, change need not indicate disappearance or decay, but rather flexibility and survival. The shared and ongoing history of struggle, adaptation, and resilience through dynamic systems and practices can then become a more central part of an entity’s collective identity than its static adherence to fixed beliefs and traditions. Understanding syncretism as a process which occurs for a myriad of reasons and with a myriad of effects, rather than as a process of infiltration and corruption, allows us to envision a more inclusive basis for building, strengthening, or reinstating a collective identity than a mythical notion of cultural purity.

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211 *Ibid* at 85.

## Chapter 4

### Diversity and the Politics of Becoming

How does the skirt debate relate to broader questions about tolerance, religious and cultural diversity, and pluralism, both within indigenous communities and in the broader context of the Canadian state? William Connolly's notion of a "politics of becoming"<sup>212</sup> may help us to better understand the different factors and forces involved in the skirt debate. Reading the controversy through this lens provides intellectual resources for navigating dynamic and contested cultural identities in more flexible and inclusive ways.

The politics of becoming is a process which occurs when a culturally marked group finds itself in a position of marginalization within an "established institutional matrix", and struggles to "reconfigure itself by moving the cultural constellation of identity/difference then in place".<sup>213</sup> The politics of becoming is a response to the collectivity's suffering, when suffering itself is either unacknowledged by the dominant society, or when suffering is recognized but there is a failure to implement an appropriate response. In such cases, the entity "strives to modify the identity institutionally imposed upon it by redefining institutionally entrenched definitions".<sup>214</sup>

Indigenous communities in Canada can be understood as taking up a politics of becoming in their struggles for collective rights, autonomy, and sovereignty. These communities have had identities institutionally imposed on them for hundreds of years and in a variety of ways – from the legal identities imposed (and taken away) by the *Indian Act* and the advent of the band system, to the anthropological or ethnographical identities which confined indigenous communities to a romanticized, no longer relevant past. The institutional matrix which sees indigenous people as assimilated or culturally disappeared has caused untold suffering, and these constituencies now seek to reconfigure

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212 William Connolly, "Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming", *supra* note 3 at 47.

213 *Ibid* at 51.

214 *Ibid*.

and modify their identities in pursuit of justice. We can view the skirt protocol as part of this politics of becoming – by honouring and centering this “tradition”, indigenous communities contest the dominant narrative of assimilation, and redraw the boundaries of difference which constitute identity.

The politics of becoming is distinct from the politics of recognition. There is a tendency to view an entity which has achieved success in the politics of becoming as having reclaimed a pre-existing but occluded identity constituting the true “essence” or inherent condition of that group.<sup>215</sup> But this is *being*, not *becoming*. It is generally not clear at the outset what the new cultural identity of the group participating in the politics of becoming will be, nor is it ever possible to locate a moment of arrival at an “ultimate” identity. As Connolly writes, “No positive identity can be judged final in a world where identities are organized through the differences they regulate”.<sup>216</sup> Although suffering may provoke a collective drive to locate solidity, the politics of becoming is an ongoing process of construction and interpellation, rather than a process of discovery and recovery. However, just because identities are never final or essential and the politics of becoming is never fully completed, this does not mean that identities do not exist or do not matter. Connolly recognizes that even though identities are contingent, they are also entrenched.<sup>217</sup> “To attend to the politics of becoming,” Connolly states, “is to modify the cultural balance between being and becoming without attempting the impossible, self-defeating task of dissolving solid formations altogether”.<sup>218</sup>

The politics of becoming enables new possibilities for marginalized constituencies. For example, Connolly argues that groups such as women, African-Americans, and the LGBTQ2 community have participated in the politics of becoming with some success,<sup>219</sup> resulting in greater legal rights and cultural shifts in attitudes and understandings – even as these processes remain incomplete

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215 *Ibid* at 51-2.

216 *Ibid* at 58.

217 “Confessing Identity/Belonging to Difference”, *supra* note 4 at 132-35.

218 “The Politics of Becoming”, *supra* note 3 at 57.

219 *Ibid* at 59.

and ongoing. However, the politics of becoming can simultaneously engender “new modes of suffering”.<sup>220</sup> We can see this happening to women and LGBTQ2 individuals in indigenous communities. As these communities reject the identity that has been institutionally imposed upon them, and endeavor to construct new meanings for themselves, the identity which they create may have oppressive effects on some group members. In the struggle to reject an identity of victimization and assimilation, a cultural identity founded on certain notions of traditionalism may arise. In the process of “becoming” this new identity, those who do not conform to these notions are marginalized, silenced, or excluded.

Understanding the politics of becoming is important because it may help to prevent competing claims of universality which result in implacable barriers to conversation, tolerance, and respect both between distinct communities and between individuals within communities. Connolly recognizes the “powerful tendencies in most cultural groupings to naturalize what they are”.<sup>221</sup> This drive to fundamentality - or as Williamson might call it, *dogma* - results in cultural (and sometimes actual) wars. When various groups insist that they alone embody the *fundamental essence of a thing*, be it “Christianity”, “morality”, “the United States”; “feminism”; or “the left”, they set the stage for conflict: other groups, also possessed of an unshakeable faith in the fundamentality of their identity, will inevitably lay claim to the same place of privilege. Furthermore, the drive to fundamentality limits the space for important ideas and values to be contested, expanded, and improved. By insisting that there be a centre, one necessarily insists that everything else be relegated to the margins.

In spite of intellectual acknowledgment that cultures are fluid and evolving, the visceral sense that there is something certain, immobile, and inalienable at the centre of collective identities remains difficult to shake. This “naturalization” serves valuable purposes: it protects group membership and

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<sup>220</sup> *Ibid* at 58.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid* at 60.

strengthens collective bonds.<sup>222</sup> However, it also creates problems for those group members who do not fit into rigidly defined cultural categories. We can read the controversy over the skirt protocol as an example of this tension in the politics of becoming in indigenous communities. Through criticizing the skirt protocol, indigenous women resist the drive to naturalize the experience of indigeneity, to conflate it with certain fixed traditions and values, and to limit the multiplicity of identities that are allowed to contribute to the politics of becoming. The dialogue between the skirt protocol's supporters and its detractors allows us to witness the politics of becoming in action.

By recognizing a politics of becoming rather than a politics of being, we can reduce the rigidity of identities and allow for greater diversity, tolerance, and respect, both between and within cultural constituencies. Coming to terms with the “constitutive uncertainty of the centre”<sup>223</sup> need not defeat the social or political purposes of the politics of becoming. Rather, it simply reveals a need for what Connolly terms a “critical responsiveness which is irreducible to a fixed moral code or abstract conception of the person”.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid* at 69.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

The diversity of perspectives about the skirt protocol demonstrates the richness of engagement with issues of gender, culture, tradition, identity, and decolonization in indigenous communities, both at the level of academic scholarship and through more informal means, such as bloggers and the internet commentariat. Examining the controversy over the skirt protocol raises questions about the meaning of specific traditions and the relationship between tradition and identity more generally, as well as the processes through which these concepts are constructed. The skirt debate makes visible how colonialism impacts indigenous communities both overtly and covertly, not simply by prohibiting the practice of certain traditions but also by infiltrating them in subtle but significant ways. Discussions about the skirt protocol, therefore, invite us to engage with decolonizing practices through questioning the nature and effect of traditions, including acknowledging how ideas about traditions are often closely related to ideas about cultural authenticity. How can communities foster the practice of their traditions without imposing static or oppressive requirements of “authenticity” on their members? How do we acknowledge the violent impact of colonialism without devaluing survival strategies of cultural synthesis and spiritual syncretism?

Exploring the skirt debate can help us to determine who holds spiritual and political power in indigenous communities and analyze how it is exercised. How do those in power use the discourses of “tradition”, “spirituality”, and “culture” to construct or impose collective identities? Does the way in which these discourses are employed maintain the status quo or subvert it? Who benefits from these strategies and who is disenfranchised by them? In answering these questions, indigenous people can identify and challenge the spaces of oppression in their communities, promoting the development of more equitable social and political structures.

Debate about the skirt protocol also makes visible the need for a gendered analysis of questions pertaining to culture and identity. It illustrates some of the ways in which disagreements about

traditional practices, cultural values, and spiritual or religious beliefs are acted out on women's bodies, and how women's clothing is the site where these issues intersect in emotionally charged and sometimes polarizing ways. The skirt debate shows that conversations about indigenous identity are incomplete without also considering gender identity, expression, and roles.

Perhaps most importantly, the skirt debate provides an access point to broader conversations about how clothing connects to gender, sexuality, identity, culture, and religion in diverse kinds of communities. What we wear is imbued with meaning in many contexts; indigenous communities are by no means alone in facing internal controversies over women's clothing. Governments struggle with how to police the boundaries of the nation-state, as citizenries grow ever more ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse, and articles of clothing – highly visible markers of difference - become flashpoints for crises of collective identity. Criminal justice systems regulate how prisoners dress in order to perpetuate existing social hierarchies and enforce normative gender expression. Adolescent girls share experiences of being shamed by teachers, parents, and peers over their “distracting” dress, and seemingly neutral words like “appropriate” and “professional” can disguise sexism, racism, and classism in the workplace. Trans and two-spirit women fight for the ability to dress as their gender without risking their physical security. Women's clothing is often viewed as an incitement to and a justification for rape, and religious leaders from faiths such as Islam, Mormonism, and evangelical Christianity hotly debate what constitutes “modest” dress for their adherents. Some countries, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and France, impose legal limits on what their citizens wear, but even where this is not the case, women's choices about how to dress are influenced and constrained by a litany of invisible forces.

We have seen how clothing can serve valuable purposes as a marker (and maker) of collective identity, a source of cultural, religious, or ethnic pride, and a vehicle for achieving political recognition. For marginalized communities which have suffered the impacts of colonialism or displacement, dress

can be used to resist assimilation, represent traditional values, and envision alternative ways of being. But we have also seen how clothing can function as a tool of oppression. Rules about dress are employed to enforce the binary of normative masculinity and femininity, marginalizing LGBTQ2 people and harming women by perpetuating sexist stereotypes and contributing to rape culture. By policing what people wear, those in power succeed in reinforcing gender, race, and class-based hierarchies. Dress codes have been deployed to assimilate “undesirable” groups such as indigenous peoples and humiliate despised populations such as prisoners. Imposing rigid rules about clothing binds dress to identity, and risks failing to acknowledge the fluidity of culture and the diversity of individuals which comprise any given group.

This paper has drawn on examples from different communities across time and place in an attempt to bring together a wide variety of related concepts whose interactions are highly nuanced and complex. I hope that it has provided an engaging and thoughtful introduction to these issues, and encourages readers to consider the meaning and consequences of the rules about clothing which are present in their lives.

## LEGISLATION

*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c 11.

*Indian Act*, RSC 1985, c. I-5.

## JURISPRUDENCE

*Jespersen v Harrah's Operating Company Inc*, 392 F.3d 1076 (9th Cir. 2004).

*Ktunaxa Nation Council and Kathryn Teneese, on their own behalf and on behalf of all citizens of the Ktunaxa Nation v Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, et al.*, 2016 CanLII 13739 (SCC).

*Ktunaxa Nation v British Columbia (Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations)*, 2014 BCSC 568.

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## “Talking Skirts” Lesson Plan

### **Materials included:**

One sample Talking Skirt poster  
 Three sets of clothing cut-outs (10 per set)  
 Three sets of empty speech bubbles (10 per set)  
 Five Prompt Cards (optional)  
 Glossary of key terms  
 Skirt Protocol Backgrounder for students  
 List of additional resources and links to articles about clothing, identity, and gender

### **Materials required:**

Poster board or other sturdy paper (one per group)  
 Glue, thumbtacks, or other adhesive

### **Ages:**

Middle school to adult

### **Learning objectives:**

Understand and become comfortable using key terms  
 Critically analyze the relationship of clothing to gender, cultural identity, personal identity, religion, and colonialism  
 Identify the arguments in support of the skirt protocol and the arguments which critique it  
 Critically reflect on these arguments and relate them to personal experiences  
 Foster awareness of and respect for different cultural and religious beliefs, values, and traditions

### **Skills engaged:**

Critical thinking	Analysis	Reflection	Communication
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### **Key terms:**

Colonialism	Gender	Identity	Two-spirit	Tradition
Culture	Diversity	Assimilation	Patriarchy	

**Notes:**

This activity can and should be adapted for different groups based on age, level, knowledge, and other factors. For example, if working with a group of indigenous community members, the teacher or facilitator may wish to focus more heavily on the skirt protocol itself from the very beginning, whereas a group of middle school students might need to gain access to the issues through a more familiar angle, such as their school dress code. Certain terms and concepts may be more or less familiar to different groups of participants – humanities undergraduates, for example, will likely be comfortable with concepts such as colonialism and patriarchy while high school students may need more thorough explanations. The discussion questions posed throughout are suggestions only.

**Other Issues:**

For younger participants, this could also easily be converted into a longer and less theory-heavy activity by having participants draw, colour, and cut out the articles of clothing themselves. This might be a good way to ease in to the idea of clothing representing and creating identities, as participants can think about all the different types of clothing and accessories and what these mean, as well as why they want to include them. If short on time, using the pre-made cut outs included in the lesson plan makes more sense.

## **The Skirt Protocol: A Backgrounder**

### **Important terms**

*indigenous*: The term “indigenous” is used around the world to refer to peoples and cultures that existed in a particular territory prior to colonization. In Canada, indigenous peoples includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, as well as other individuals who self-identify as indigenous but may not fall into these other categories.

*protocol*: a rule or set of rules about something. To “observe cultural protocol” means to follow the rules and act in a culturally accepted way.

*smudging*: a practice performed in various indigenous communities in which plants such as sage, tobacco, sweetgrass, or cedar are burned and the smoke brushed over an individual to provide cleansing or healing properties to that person.

*sweat lodge*: a sweat lodge is a small, circular structure, often built from willow, with heated rocks in the middle. During a sweat, people sit in a circle inside the lodge and water is thrown on the rocks to create heat and steam. Sweats are often used for healing or purification purposes.

*pipe ceremony*: pipe ceremonies involve the use of sacred pipes, which have different names and purposes in different indigenous cultures. Sometimes, pipe ceremonies are used for prayer, to invite healing and health, or to bless important decisions.

*colonialism*: colonialism refers to the establishment of a colony in one territory by political entity from another territory. This means that the colonizer claims political power over the colonized area and peoples. Once a colony is established, it is often “settled” by immigrants and economically exploited. Colonialism can also refer to the power relations between the colonizer and the indigenous people who inhabited the before and during the establishment of the colony. Generally, colonialism relies on oppressing indigenous people and assimilating them into the colony.

*decolonization*: decolonization refers to the process of undoing colonialism. It can include actions such as learning and teaching indigenous languages, implementing self-governance of nations or communities, and designing programs, services, and education models from indigenous perspectives. It can also include the equally important but more abstract process of working to understand the impacts of colonialism on indigenous cultures and critically evaluating their beliefs, traditions, and practices.

In many indigenous communities in Canada, women are required or encouraged to dress “traditionally” while attending certain cultural and spiritual ceremonies. Dressing traditionally is usually construed as wearing an ankle-length skirt. These ceremonies may include smudging, pipe ceremonies, and sweat lodges. Some women who have failed to wear a skirt on such occasions have been excluded from the ceremonies and even publicly shamed by the ceremony’s leader or facilitator.

Those who support the skirt protocol argue that it is traditional, and indigenous cultural traditions should be respected, honoured, and preserved. This is especially important in the context of colonialism. Many aspects of indigenous cultures have been disrupted and damaged as a result of Canada’s colonial history, and indigenous people were often unable to pass down their knowledge to younger generations. For example, indigenous peoples were driven from their traditional territories, governments outlawed religious and cultural practices such as the potlatch, residential schools prohibited children from speaking their native languages, and many indigenous children were placed in foster care or adopted into white homes where they had no access to their cultures. As a result, those who seek to strengthen and revitalize indigenous communities now stress the need to respect and practice cultural traditions, in the hopes of undoing some of the damage perpetrated by colonialism.

Others argue, however, that the skirt protocol is not actually traditional. Rather, skirts were brought to what is now Canada by European colonizers and missionaries, who had rigid ideas about how women should dress. Prior to colonization, these critics claim, many indigenous communities did not even have separate styles of clothing for the genders. As Christians, the Europeans also held strong beliefs about the importance of modesty and sexual purity for women. These beliefs have infiltrated indigenous communities and are now being mistaken for “traditions”. The critics argue that an important part of decolonization is closely examining traditions and beliefs to understand how they may be influenced by colonialism, and ensuring that they are not sexist or otherwise oppressive before reinstating them.

Some supporters of the skirt protocol claim that it is based on indigenous spiritual beliefs which have nothing to do with Christian ideas about modesty and sexual purity. Instead, the skirt forms a circle - often considered a sacred shape - which touches the ground and allows the life-giving power and feminine energy of women to flow, better connecting them to the earth and the creator. Women who choose to wear the skirt for these reasons find it empowering rather than sexist because it enhances their spirituality. Furthermore, they find that it is important to preserve these indigenous spiritual beliefs.

Yet others respond by arguing that while the skirt protocol may not be directly tied to colonial ideas about purity, the spiritual beliefs it is allegedly based on are limiting in other ways. They equate women with their ability to be mothers and idealize their role as caregivers and nurturers. They argue that essentializing what it means to be a woman in this way can be just as problematic as requiring women to be chaste and modest. It excludes people who don't possess these fundamental aspects of female identity, and it confines women to certain roles.

Clearly, there is much debate over the meaning, value, and fairness of the skirt protocol. The controversy illustrates some of the connections between clothing, gender, tradition, culture, religion, and identity, and reveals how complex these interactions can be.

## Activity

Total length: 2.5 hours

### 1. Introduction and Warm-up (10 minutes)

Introduce the topic and pose a few general, broad questions which can be briefly discussed as a group.

“How did you decide what to wear today?”

“What determines how you choose to dress?”

“Are there rules or pressures in your life about what you can and cannot wear? Where do these rules come from?” (i.e. parents, school, religion, media, employer)

“Is clothing important to you? Why or why not?”

“What kinds of things do you tend to guess or assume about another person from looking at their clothing?” (i.e. age, gender, sexuality, cultural background, place of origin (from here/not from here), occupation, socioeconomic status, interests, religion)

Teachers/facilitators may also wish to write some key terms on the board at this time, such as:

patriarchy

gender roles

stereotype

sexuality

spirituality/religion

social construction

essentialism

gender identity

class

colonialism

nationalism

decolonization

assimilation

\*\*Depending on the group, some of these terms may not come up throughout the course of the activity. Conversely, other concepts which I have not anticipated may arise. This non-exhaustive list is just a suggestion.

### 2. Providing Context (10 minutes)

Divide participants into groups of around three to five individuals. Hand out the Skirt Protocol Backgrounder to participants and allow a few moments for reading. Afterwards, ask participants to write down any questions they have or terms they are uncertain about as a group.

If participants have questions, briefly respond to these. For example, this may be a good time to provide a definition of an unknown word. Although the Glossary is mostly designed as a teacher’s aid, it could be a useful resource for older or more knowledgeable groups as well. For younger participants, teachers/facilitators may wish to create a simplified glossary to put up on the wall for ease of reference.

### 3. Questions and Discussion (15 minutes)

Pose questions to the group. This time, they should be more detailed, less personal, and help participants to connect to key terms. For example:

“How does clothing relate to cultural identity?”

“Can you think of some examples of how religious or cultural beliefs might influence the ways that people dress?”

“Can you think of other examples of public debate about clothing?” (i.e. school dress codes, the niqab issue, dress as it pertains to victim blaming, high heels in restaurants)

“Do these concerns about appropriate clothing affect men and women differently? If so, how?”

“What do these debates reveal about popular beliefs and stereotypes (about gender, race, culture, religion, etc.)?”

“What role does class play in impacting how people dress?”

“What do you think is the role of colonialism in debate about the skirt protocol?”

“How do you think queer, trans, and two-spirit individuals might be impacted by discourses around the skirt protocol?”

The purpose of this group discussion is to ensure that participants are connecting their own experiences and perceptions to more abstract concepts like patriarchy, sexism, colonialism, identity, and gender, and beginning to critically analyze the ways in which power structures are implicated in influencing people’s decisions about and opinions about clothing.

#### 4. Illustrating Examples (5 minutes)

Show the groups the sample Talking Skirts poster. The poster is an arrangement of articles of clothing, each of which possesses its own “speech bubble”. The speech bubbles each contain different opinions, concerns, or arguments about the skirt protocol. The poster is arranged so that the articles of clothing are in conversation with one another. It does not have to be read from left to right, as the poster doesn’t attempt to draw a single “correct” conclusion about the skirt protocol. It simply seeks to identify, condense, and present important aspects of the debate about the skirt protocol in an accessible way.

Explain that participants will be arranging their own posters about the relationships between clothing, gender, identity, culture, tradition, and religion.

#### 5. Making Clothing Speak (40 minutes)

Provide each group with a piece of poster board (or, ideally, a bulletin board, although this may not be possible due to resource constraints), one set of clothing cut-outs, and one set of speech bubbles.

\*\*At this point, the teacher/facilitator may wish to use the optional Prompt Cards. These cards can be used to focus discussion on different themes. The Prompt Cards are as follows:

Gender and Sexuality

Colonialism and Assimilation

Nationalism and Identity

Culture and Tradition

Spirituality and Religion

\*\*Another option is to provide each group with some pre-made speech bubbles and some blank ones. This might be helpful for younger groups or groups with less theoretical context. The pre-made bubbles can guide their discussion and construction of the poster without totally confining or limiting their ideas.

Allow participants time to come up with text for their speech bubbles and arrange their cut-outs and bubbles in a way that makes sense to them. Remind them that the purpose is to illustrate the complexity and interrelated nature of the issues and reveal how different groups of people are differently affected by them, not to determine “good” or “bad” practices.

Using bulletin boards and tacks is great because it means speech bubbles and clothing can be rearranged and re-used. If not possible, groups can tape, glue, or tack their items to a poster board.

#### 6. De-briefing, Reflecting, and Moving Forward (30 minutes)

Place each completed poster or bulletin board where the entire group can see it, and give participants a couple minutes to look at their colleagues' work. Reconvene as a unit and ask participants to reflect on the following questions (which can be modified according to the needs and abilities of the group). This reflection can be done out loud, as a group, or in writing. Out loud and collectively may be more conducive to discussion and learning from one another, but may be inappropriate if participants are particularly shy or anxious, or if the teacher/facilitator noticed that conversations throughout the activity became heated or disrespectful. In such circumstances, it may be better to reflect quietly and individually, and share those reflections either in smaller groups or on another occasion.

#### *Reflection Questions*

“Did your group’s poster differ significantly from those of your colleagues? If so, how, and why do you think this might be?”

“Was it difficult within your group to agree on text for the speech bubbles? How did your group decide which issues to focus on? Did you feel that anything was excluded or neglected?”

“Are there any purposes, meanings, or uses of clothing that this activity made visible for you that you hadn’t considered or noticed before?”

“Why do you think women’s clothing and dressed bodies are at the center of so many debates about identity, culture, and religion?”

“Does the debate over the skirt protocol in indigenous communities differ from other debates about clothing? If so, how?”

Participants can choose to respond to two or more of these questions, depending on how much time is available at the end of the activity.

Finally, ask participants to brainstorm one concrete thing that they can do to continue their learning or carry forward these conversations, and have them list some brief steps they can take to accomplish it.

For example:

“I don’t feel like I fully understand the meaning(s) of the term “two-spirit”. Over the next week, I will ask my networks alook for and read at least one article about two-spirit identities.”

“There is a different dress code for men and women at my workplace. I’ve always felt uncomfortable with it but I wasn’t sure why. I would like draw on the ideas we’ve explored today to talk about this dress code with some of my co-workers. I will make time to meet with my closest co-workers over the next two weeks. If we all feel similarly, maybe we will bring the issue up with our boss.”

## Creating Conversations: Multimedia Resources and Group Activities

### Introduction

The following plans provide links to various resources which explore, consider or relate to the topic of indigenous identity. These include paintings, performance art, poetry, and news articles. The activities are designed to take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the level and interest of the participating group or the teacher/facilitator's goals. Each activity provides a link, a short handout for students with a list of suggested discussion questions, and a brief background for teachers.

Please note that the handouts and discussion questions are suggestions only. In some cases, they may be too advanced or too simplistic for certain groups of participants, and teachers/facilitators are encouraged to adjust them or create their own.

#### 1. Knock-off Native

Watch the following clip: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_zFOsd\\_pqA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_zFOsd_pqA)

Winona Linn is a Meskwaki slam poet from Kingston, Ontario. In this clip, she performs her poem, "Knock Off Native" at the Vancouver Youth Slam Poetry Competition.

#### 2. This is How We Swim in Canada

Have participants read the following article:

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2016/07/13/how-we-swim-in-canada.html>

This article discusses a human rights complaint filed by an Ontario woman and Muslim mother of two, who was kicked out of a public pool because her children were swimming in t-shirts and shorts.

#### 3. Si je t'aime prende garde a toi

Have participants view Kent Monkman's painting:

<http://www.mason-studio.com/journal/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/3-Kent-Monkman-Si-je-taime-prends-garde-%C3%A0-toi1.jpg>

#### 4. Vigil

Have participants watch clips of this performance art piece:

<http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html>

#### 5. AbOriginal/Warrior

Have participants watch the music video and listen to the songs "AbOriginal" and "Warrior":

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5\\_1fmbKCMmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_1fmbKCMmY)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3JGzelnAwI>

## Knock-off Native: Background for Teachers

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_zFOsd\\_pqA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_zFOsd_pqA)

*Knock-off Native* is a poem by Winona Linn. This version of the poem was performed at the Vancouver Youth Poetry Slam in 2013. The poem deals with issues of indigenous authenticity, stereotypes, identity, and belonging. Linn, who has a Meskwaki father and white mother, writes about being called a “knock-off Pocahontas”, because she doesn’t fit the image of the dark-haired, dark-skinned indigenous person of the popular imagination. In addition to critiquing this stereotype and proclaiming her indigenous identity, Linn also raises points about human rights on reserves, such as lack of access to clean water, and references colonial events such as the removal of the Meskwaki people from their traditional lands.

Poems of political protest and social commentary, as well as identity-themed works like *Knock-off Native*, are extremely common in the slam world. Slam scholar Susan B. Anthony Somers-Willett writes:

Because most slam poems engage a first-person, narrative mode which encourages a live audience to perceive the performance as a confessional moment, one of the most defining characteristics of slam poetry is a poet’s performance of identity and identity politics...

... the authenticity that slam audiences reward is at least in part contingent upon the performance of identity that takes place on slam stages... audience members are evaluating not only the writing and performance of a poem, but also the scripting and performance of identity.<sup>225</sup>

The poet’s performance of identity is evaluated based on what Maria Damon calls “realness”.<sup>226</sup>

Somers-Willett examines this cult of authenticity surrounding poetry slams; although performances are ostensibly judged on text and performance, underlying these official criteria are more vague notions of authenticity and sincerity. For audiences, the poet and the poem’s speaker are often conflated; the poem is assumed to be a true confession based on personal experiences.

Somers-Willett analyzes trends among slam participants, finalists, and winners, and suggests that the “authenticity” slam audiences revere has come to be strongly associated with marginalized identities.<sup>227</sup> For example, women poets and poets of colour have often been excluded from academic writing communities and tokenized by the traditional literary canon, but they have been very vocal,

<sup>225</sup> Somers-Willett, Susan B.A. “Slam Poetry and the Cultural Politics of Performing Identity”, *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 38:1 (Spring, 2005), pp 51-73 at p 52. [Somers-Willett]

<sup>226</sup> Maria Damon, as cited in Somers-Willett, *ibid* at p 53.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid* at pp 53-4.

visible, and successful in the spoken word scene. The skilful oration and performance of a marginalized identity will often garner louder applause and a higher score than the performance of a non-marginalized one. This is not to suggest that any member of a minority group can get up on stage, talk about who they are and win a slam – slam champions are extremely talented writers and performers, and being formally recognized for their ability to challenge dominant narratives, draw attention to systems of social privilege, and engage audiences in political dialogue is undoubtedly a very good thing. Yet the conflation of “marginalized” with “authentic” is problematic, and implies that the predominantly white, middle-class slam audiences may be engaged not only in an act of cultural critique or solidarity but also in an act of exoticizing the racialized Other. It is interesting that Linn critiques notions of indigenous authenticity connected to blood and physical appearance, and yet the medium in which she succeeds in doing so is itself fixated on a certain kind of authenticity.

Linn’s poem also speaks to ideas about gender and indigeneity. Linn criticizes settler society’s fascination with Pocahontas, challenging the image of the Indian princess and lamenting the simultaneous lack of recognition of important indigenous historical figures and role models.

## Knock-Off Native: Handout for students

### 1. Author Bio

Winona Linn is a Meskwaki poet from Kingston, Ontario, who grew up both in Canada and the United States. Her mother was white and her father was Meskwaki. She is the founder of Slam Kingston! And the author of two books of poetry.

### 2. Themes and words to keep in mind

identity, colour, and racialization  
stereotypes and images of the indigenous woman  
property, ownership, moving, relocating

### 3. Questions

- a) What do you think Linn means when she compares the colour of her hair to the colour of her blood?
- b) Linn's poem considers the importance of place, home, and belonging. She says, "No matter how many times you've relocated, you have no idea what it is like to move". Can this line be read in conversation with some of the statements about place and home in *Vigil*, or in "AbOriginal"? How?
- c) Although the community of slam poets is highly diverse, slam audiences remain predominantly white and middle-class. How might this impact the relationship between performer and listener, participant and judge?
- d) How does Linn acknowledge or challenge stereotypical ideas about feminine indigeneity/indigenous femininity? For example, at one point she refers to herself as a "Meskwaki princess". What do you make of this phrase?
- e) Linn's poem criticizes narrow definitions of indigeneity premised on physical appearance, like skin and hair colour. But at the same time, she draws on other common notions about indigeneity to support her claim to this identity. What are some of these notions? And what is the effect of calling on them?
- f) Slam scholar Susan B. Anthony Willers-Somett has written:

Poets in the film *Slamnation* describe slam poetry as "a representative democracy," a "level playing field" in which equal access is granted to those denied more traditional poetic recognition such as publication and participation in academic writing communities.<sup>228</sup>

Do you think these are accurate descriptions? Why or why not?

- g) What is the significance of choosing to speak and perform a poem about indigenous identity, rather than writing and publishing?

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<sup>228</sup> Susan B.A. Somers-Willett. "Authenticating Voices: Performance, Black Identity, and Slam Poetry", PhD dissertation, University of Texas (Austin, 2003) at p 89.

### **“How We Swim in Canada”: Background for teachers**

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2016/07/13/how-we-swim-in-canada.html>

This recent news item tells the story of a Muslim woman who was forced to leave a condo swimming pool in Ontario along with her children due to the way her children were dressed. The kids, a boy and girl, were both wearing shorts and t-shirts made of swimsuit material. Condo management told them to leave because “that’s not how we swim in Canada”. Interestingly, management specifically stated that the girl should be wearing a bikini – apparently, she was overdressed, while the boy’s clothing was less of an issue.

This incident provides an example of how racism and sexism sometimes disguise themselves as secularism, an ostensibly neutral and objective public policy designed to keep religion and governance separate. Just as religious dress codes – such as those in place in Iran and Saudi Arabia which force women to wear the hijab or face state-sanctioned punishment – primarily target women, so too do secular or a-religious expectations about dress. Why is it appropriate or no cause for concern when a ten year old boy covers his upper legs and torso to swim, but it is a symbol of foreignness, fundamentalism, or lack of respect for Canadian values when a ten year old girl does it? In both the religious and secular examples, individuals’ clothing is unequally policed based upon their gender.

In Canada and France, Muslim veiling practices have lately been the subject of heated debate. The Quebecois and French governments promote the idea that secularism protects women from oppressive religions seeking to limit their rights. In decrying veiling, however, these governments have simultaneously promoted a narrow image of the ideal secular female body, one which is “free” to express femininity and sexuality. Quebec and France have not considered the ways in which non-religious dress codes – such as those imposed in public high schools or by employers – also have disproportionate effects on women and girls, and have shown little interest in protecting gender equality by policing the use of gendered articles of dress besides the niqab, such as the high heels required for many female workers in the restaurant industry. One can therefore be skeptical of the claim that banning the niqab is solely about protecting Muslim women from gender inequality.

In opposition to the niqab’s perceived oppressiveness, the mini-skirt has been taken up in France as a secular symbol of gender equality and “liberation”. Short skirts allow women to express their femininity, while niqabs prevent them from doing so; wearing a skirt is an act of resistance, and

wearing a veil is an act of submission.<sup>229</sup> What this presumes is that every woman wants to express her femininity in a particular way – through wearing short skirts and makeup. But this secular naturalization of femininity as expressive, uncovered, and sexy is just as problematic as the religious naturalization of femininity as modest, chaste, and covered-up. Both exclude those who choose to act otherwise, deeming them deviant, oppressed, or otherwise “bad” women.

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229 Claire Hancock, “The Republic is lived with an uncovered face (and a skirt): (un)dressing French citizens”, *Gender, Place & Culture* 22:7, pp 1023-1040 at p 1033. [Hancock]

## **“This is How We Swim in Canada”: handout for students**

### 1. Author Bio

Faisal Kutty is counsel to KSM Law, an associate professor at Valparaiso University Law School in Indiana and an adjunct professor at Osgoode Hall Law School.

### 2. Themes and words to keep in mind

secularism	“Canadian values”	gender
xenophobia	racism	choice
freedom of religion	fundamentalism	

### 3. Questions

a) Why do you think the condo manager had more of a problem with the girl’s attire than with that of her brother?

b) Why do you think the amount of skin or hair we show is such an important and powerful symbol?

c) One type of gendered dress requirement that isn’t often considered in these discussions about clothing, gender, and culture is that which is present in women’s sports. In Vancouver, field hockey leagues still require women to wear skirts, in spite of multiple requests by teams to change this. Wearing shorts is also the most severely punished uniform infraction, and players who do so are not permitted to play for two games. What do you think might be some of the rationales for the field hockey dress code? Do you think it should be changed?

d) What do you think Kutty means when she talks about “Canadian values”?

e) Kutty writes,

Meanwhile, in France around the same time, a teenage Catholic girl who converted to Islam, K. De Sousa, was banned from a Paris school because her skirt was too long. It was an “ostentatious religious symbol” — prohibited in state schools since 2004. Long skirts worn as a fashion statement are fine, but if worn out of religious conviction then secularism would be threatened.

Do you see any problems with the actions of the Paris school? How did they or could they determine the student’s reasons for dressing a certain way?

f) This article demonstrates ways in which controlling clothing can be sexist or xenophobic. But such rules about clothing are not always explicitly gendered or connected to religion. For example, one high school in New Brunswick prohibits pants with frayed bottoms, and many other schools do not permit hats. Why are these items policed?

Now, imagine that the children in the news story were wearing regular shorts and shirts, not specially-designed items made from swimsuit material. What other kinds of discrimination might be present in the decision to remove the woman and children from the pool?

### ***Si je t'aime prende garde a toi: Background for Teachers***

<http://www.mason-studio.com/journal/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/3-Kent-Monkman-Si-je-taime-prends-garde-%C3%A0-toi1.jpg>

Kent Monkman is an artist of Cree and Irish ancestry who was born in Ontario and lives and works in Toronto. He works with various media, including painting, drawing, film, art installation, and performance art. He has an alter ego whom he portrays in various pieces, named Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle. Miss Chief is a two-spirit woman whose name is a play on “Cher” (an important gay icon) and “Egotistical”. She can often be seen wearing floor length headdresses and stiletto heels or thigh-high leather boots. Although Miss Chief might be described as a “drag queen”, Monkman has resisted this terminology, instead preferring to characterize Miss Chief as two-spirit, perhaps implying greater fluidity and less binarism. Miss Chief is not “trying on” the opposite gender, but simply being the gender that she is at that moment. Through this character, as well as through other works, Monkman plays with ideas about gender, sexuality, eroticism, colonialism, and indigenous identity.

Monkman’s art is clearly in conversation with colonial art. For example, in his early film piece, “Shooting Geronimo”, two indigenous men agree to play the roles of Indians in a cheesy western. The director must teach them to be “more Indian”, as they wear modern clothing and don’t act “fierce”<sup>230</sup> enough. The director’s character is named Frederick Curtis, a reference to the photography of Edward Curtis, who notoriously provided traditional items of clothing to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Indians he photographed, who dressed too modern for his liking, in order to capture the so-called vanishing race. June Scudeler writes,

Shooting Geronimo is typical of the way in which Monkman’s paintings, installations, and performance pieces actively change colonial history, showing that history, like a constructed backdrop, is more fluid than is usually imagined.<sup>231</sup>

Monkman’s paintings are also reminiscent of works by members of the famous Hudson River School, who immortalized grand, idyllic landscapes of the United States as either unoccupied spaces or sparsely populated by noble savages. These painters helped to perpetuate the myth of *terra nullius* by either failing to include the societies thriving on the land, or by portraying them as “either brutal animalistic warriors, or sad victims of Darwinian destiny”<sup>232</sup> who were doomed to disappear.

<sup>230</sup> Scudeler, June. “ ‘Indians on Top’: Kent Monkman’s Sovereign Erotics”, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 39:4, (2015), pp 19-30 at p 24.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid* at p 25.

<sup>232</sup> Kerry Swanson. “The Noble Savage Was a Drag Queen: Hybridity and Transformation in Kent Monkman's Performance and Visual Art Interventions”, *Sexualities and Politics in the Americas* 2:2, Hemospheric Institute of Performance and Politics (2005), at p 1.

Monkman's paintings also depict romantic landscapes, such as steep cliffs, flowing rivers, and snow-capped mountains. But Monkman's work contains other elements which trouble and undermine the narrative of the colonial painters. Some of these explicitly flip the colonial gaze: in "History is Painted by the Victors", Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle stands naked but for thigh high red boots at an easel, overlooking a lake on whose shores dozens of nude white men recline, frolic, and pose. Here, Monkman raises questions about the objectivity of history and the agency of indigenous peoples, depicting them as active viewers and creators rather than as objects or artefacts. In "Montcalm's Haircut", Miss Chief, clad only in hot pink platform sandals, trims the locks of a sleeping, disrobed General Montcalm. By inserting contemporary features into what otherwise might be considered "period" pieces (pieces set in the past), Monkman plays with the notion of time. Miss Chief wears modern pink patent heels, which obviously no man (or woman) would have worn during the Seven Years War. Her clothing positions her as a time-traveler, and her contemporary aesthetic challenges stereotypical visions of indigenous cultures as relegated to the past.

This painting, along with much of Monkman's work, includes homoerotic imagery which confounds the expected expression of gender and which uses sexuality as a tool to explore and subvert instances of colonial power and domination. In his performance piece, *Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle's Travelling Gallery and European Male Emporium*, a fabulously dressed Miss Chief entices two young white men, dressed in loincloths, to accompany her, where she gives them whisky, makes them change into European clothing, has them pose for her, and paints them. She uses seduction rather than force to "capture" the men. Additionally, the beauty and sexual agency of Miss Chief challenges narratives of indigenous women as either virtuous princesses or sexually available drudges, more likely to be the victims of others' sexual desires than the active agents of their own. Yet Miss Chief's willingness to exploit her power over the two men through alcohol and transform them into objects for visual consumption means that the performance, although humorous, is also troubling. The "European Male Emporium" alludes to historical incidents of indigenous peoples being exhibited across Europe during the colonial era, and the use of whiskey during the performance is a nod to both the immense harm caused by alcohol abuse in indigenous communities as well as damaging stereotypes about "drunken Indians" which continue to haunt indigenous-settler relations today.

This performance is also one where Miss Chief most clearly takes on the role of the trickster, an important, mischevious rebel figure in many indigenous cultures who consistently challenges authority. As Kerry Swanson writes:

By mimicking a colonial structure in the guise of trickster, Share is making it very clear that she is undertaking a process of dismantling, of (re)telling the false stories we have been told and (re)imagining our version of the world.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid* at p 9.

## ***Si je t'aime prend garde a toi: Handout for students***

### 1. Author Bio

Kent Monkman is an artist of Cree and Irish ancestry who was born in Ontario and lives and works in Toronto. He works with various media, including painting, drawing, film, art installation, and performance art. He has an alter ego whom he portrays in various pieces, named Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle. Through this character, as well as through other works, Monkman plays with ideas about gender, sexuality, eroticism, colonialism, and indigenous identity.

### 2. Themes and key terms to keep in mind

gender	sexuality
history	representation

### 3. Questions

- a) Do you think that *Si je t'aime prende garde a toi* bolsters, undermines, or disrupts narratives of cultural authenticity? How does the painting do this?
- b) How does the painting bring together images and symbols from different cultures and contexts? What do you think this means?
- c) The title, roughly translated, means “If I love you, be on your guard”. It is a line from *Habanera*,<sup>234</sup> a very well-known aria from Georges Bizet’s opera, *Carmen*. What do you think is the significance of the title? Why might Monkman have chosen to invoke a 19<sup>th</sup> century French opera in his painting?
- d) If you had to summarize the “story” of this painting in one sentence, what would it be? What’s going on? What do you think might influence your perceptions and interpretation?
- e) A blog post from *Mason Journal* describes *Si je t'aime prends garde à toi* as demonstrating the “egotistical perspective” of European colonial artists, because in it we see how “a European sculptor’s kiss brings... his marble sculpture of an Aboriginal creation to life.”<sup>235</sup>  
Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? What does the author mean when they say that European colonial artists were “egotistical”?
- f) Monkman is the child of a Cree father and Irish mother. Do you think this work reflects his identity and experiences as a person of mixed racial and cultural identity? If so, how?
- g) Gender, sexuality, and history often intersect in Monkman’s work. Are these themes visible in *Si je t'aime prends garde à toi*? What statements does the painting make about these issues?
- h) How is clothing used in the painting? Why might it be important?

<sup>234</sup> Lyrics, with English translation, available here: <http://classicalmusic.about.com/od/opera/qt/habaneralyrics.htm>.

<sup>235</sup> “Kent Monkman: Sexuality of Miss Chief”, *Mason Journal*, blog post (26 Mar 2012), online: <http://www.mason-studio.com/journal/2012/03/kent-monkman-sexuality-of-miss-chief/>.

### ***Vigil* – Background for teachers**

Rebecca Belmore is an interdisciplinary Anishnaabe artist who grew up in northern Ontario. Her work includes sculpture, film, installation, and performance art, and often evokes questions about culture, place, memory, violence, and trauma. Although not all her work is overtly political, she is perhaps best known for 1991's *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, a massive wooden megaphone installation which toured from Parliament Hill to various First Nations' territories, giving people voice to converse with the land. Belmore created this work in response to the Oka crisis, attempting to open a dialogue between the Canadian government and indigenous peoples. Belmore also gained media attention in 2010 when her piece *Worth (Statement of Defence)* was installed outside the Vancouver Art Gallery in reference to a lawsuit she was then embroiled in with ex-gallery owner Pari Nadimi.<sup>236</sup> Belmore created a huge sign reading "I AM WORTH MORE THAN ONE MILLION DOLLARS TO MY PEOPLE". At the end of the day, she wrapped up her work, presented it to the chief curator of the VAG, and yelled, "I quit!" Clearly, Belmore's work ranges from the intensely personal to the deeply political, and often blurs the boundaries of these categories.

Belmore has exhibited various works for and about indigenous women. One of these is *Vigil*, a 2002 performance art piece which formed part of her Vancouver exhibition, *The Named and the Unnamed*. This exhibition was designed to recognize and honour more than 70 women – many of whom were indigenous – who had disappeared from the downtown eastside of Vancouver over the previous 25 years. Belmore performed *Vigil* on the corner of Gore and East Hastings, in the heart of the DTES.

*Vigil* engenders questions about the meaning of place, from the significance of the specific street corner on which the performance occurs to broader questions about urban vs rural spaces, and the colonial displacement of indigenous peoples. She scrubs the performance space with soap and water before beginning, drawing attention to that specific patch of dirty pavement. And by locating her performance in the place where the disappearances occurred, she causes the viewer to think about the importance of place, and perhaps question why the women she commemorates found themselves in that place to begin with. This in turn makes visible the legacy of colonization, with indigenous people pushed off their traditional territories, relegated to small reserves, and ultimately,

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<sup>236</sup> Marsha Lederman, "The story behind Rebecca Belmore's 'I quit' performance", *The Globe and Mail*, (22 Sept 2010) online: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/the-story-behind-rebecca-belmores-i-quit-performance/article4326740/>.

often forced to migrate to cities, where they face distinct dangers and lack family and community support.

*Vigil* also explores questions of gendered and sexual violence. Belmore uses her own body to illustrate pain, ripping a rose for each missing woman through her closed mouth, thorns and all. She demonstrates what it is like to be physically trapped, nailing herself to a telephone pole. For this segment of the performance, she is clothed in a stereotypically feminine, perhaps even sexualized way: she wears a long, flowing red dress. Other aspects of the performance recall gender, as well, from the cleaning of the performance space to the use of flowers. Finally, at the end of the performance, Belmore removes her dress and gets into the passenger side of an old pick-up truck parked across the street. This stereotypically masculine object is blaring a telling song: “It’s a Man’s Man’s World”, by James Brown. Belmore’s decision to get into a man’s car is a chilling way to end the piece, echoing the way in which many of the missing and murdered indigenous women Belmore names disappeared.

For further information about Belmore and her work, see Jolene Rickard’s curatorial essay, “Rebecca Belmore: Performing Power”, available on Belmore’s website:

<http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/performing-power.html>.

## ***Vigil* - handout for students**

### 1. Author Bio

Rebecca Belmore is an Anishnaabe inter-disciplinary artist who works most frequently with performance art and art installation. She was raised in northern Ontario but has also lived in Winnipeg and Vancouver. She has performed in Canada and internationally since 1986 and was the first indigenous woman to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale. Belmore's work is often political and touches on issues related to colonialism and indigenous identity.

### 2. Themes

sexual violence  
power  
gender

naming  
place/dislocation

### 3. Questions

a) *Vigil* was performed at the corner of Hastings and Gore, in Vancouver. Consider the significance of the specific location in *Vigil*. Is location always important? What might it add to the performance, or how might it trouble it?

b) Guillermo Gomez-Peña is a Mexican-American performance artist whose work, like Belmore's, often concerns itself with questions of colonialism and identity. Gomez-Peña wrote an essay about the nature and purpose of performance art, and said:

The objective is not to "like" or even "understand" performance art; but to create a sediment in the audience's psyche.<sup>237</sup>

Based on your experience of observing Belmore's *Vigil*, do you think she would agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not? If so much of performance art does create social and political commentary (even if it does so in unconventional, non-narrative ways), why does Peña think that such art need not be "understood"?

c) What do you think is the significance of the red dress? Why does Belmore choose to clothe herself this way for her performance?

d) Belmore tears the leaves and petals from a rose with her teeth each time she calls out a name. What does this act – and the aggressive way in which it is undertaken - mean to you?

e) On that same note, what do you think is the significance of naming in the piece more generally?

f) How does *Vigil* speak to questions of gender and colonialism?

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<sup>237</sup> Guillermo Gomez-Peña. "In Defense of Performance", *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy*, Routledge (New York, 2005), pp 19-39, also available online: [http://www.pochanostra.com/antes/jazz\\_pocha2/mainpages/in\\_defense.htm](http://www.pochanostra.com/antes/jazz_pocha2/mainpages/in_defense.htm).

## AbOriginal / Warrior: Background for teachers

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5\\_1fmbKCMmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_1fmbKCMmY)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3JGzelnAwI>

Hip hop and rap music have been gaining popularity among indigenous peoples for more than two decades. Indeed, indigenous hip-hop is a global phenomenon, with artists hailing across Canada, the United States, Finland, Australia, and New Zealand. One of the earliest artists to acknowledge and rap about his experiences as an indigenous person (and also one of the best-known Native American hip-hop artists) is Gary “Litefoot” Davis, a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, whose first EP was released in 1992. Since Litefoot, there have been many other indigenous rap and hip-hop artists, some of whom have achieved success both within and beyond indigenous audiences.

Frank Waln and Nataanii Means are both Native American hip-hop artists; Waln is Sicangu Lakota and Means, the son of late AIM activist Russell Means, is Oglala Lakota, Navajo, and Omaha. Their music often speaks to the political, economic, and social issues affecting indigenous peoples, and recognizes the history and impacts of colonialism. “AbOriginal” and “Warrior” are examples of indigenous hip-hop not only in the sense that their creators are indigenous, but also because they explicitly discuss indigenous issues, such as growing up on a reservation, substance abuse, racism, dislocation, and cultural appropriation.

In a 2012 article, ethnomusicologist T. Christopher Aplin laments the fact that aspects of indigenous cultures which are considered “non-traditional” have often been neglected as areas of academic study. For example, in spite of indigenous Americans’ 500 year relationship with Christianity, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists have failed to recognize the potential significance of indigenous hymns. Indigenous hip-hop has received similar treatment. Aplin notes that “silences about contemporary traditions... often speak loudly of attitudes that implicitly freeze cultures in the past and refuse to let them grow and change”.<sup>238</sup>

Aplin also examines some of the reasons why hip-hop is often viewed by settler society as incongruous with indigenous culture. He writes:

...hip-hop is of the urban ghetto, not the rural rez. Even with globalization and the internet, Indians are sometimes presumed to be too pre-modern, or at least too rural, for spitting, scratching, breaking, and tagging. The unexpectedness of Native hip-hop presumes the isolation

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<sup>238</sup> Beverly Diamond, as cited by T. Christopher Aplin, “Expectation, Christianity, and Ownership in Indigenous Hip-Hop: Religion in Rhyme with Emcee One, RedCloud, and Quese, Imc”, *MusiCULTURES: Journal of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music*, 39:1 (2012) at 45.

or unchanging timelessness of Native communities, thus depriving them of a sense of Indigenous modernity.<sup>239</sup>

This pastoral imagining is intimately connected to “attitudes that implicitly freeze cultures in the past.” In reality, however, not only do many indigenous people live in cities, but rural reservation populations and ghettoized urban populations often face similar social problems, such as family violence, poverty, high teenage pregnancy rates, and addictions.

Indigenous hip-hop is fascinating from a cultural perspective. Why has this genre been taken up by indigenous musicians with such frequency, and why has it found popularity among indigenous audiences? How does indigenous hip-hop differ from more mainstream examples of the genre? It is also an interesting phenomenon when viewed through a gendered lens. Who are the women of indigenous hip-hop, and what are they like? What kinds of ideas about masculinity and femininity are expressed through the music specifically and the genre generally?

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<sup>239</sup> *Ibid* at 43.

## “AbOriginal” / “Warrior”: handout for students

### 1. Author Bio

Frank Waln is Sicangu Lakota from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. He is an award-winning hip hop artist, producer, and performer. He has one EP, *Born Ready*, and numerous has released several singles, of which “AbOriginal” is one. Waln is also an anti-pipeline activist who has written for the *Guardian* and *Decolonization* blog.

Nataanii Means is Oglala Lakota, Omaha, and Navajo, and grew up on the Navajo reservation in Chinle, Arizona. He is the son of late activist Russell Means, who was a prominent member of the American Indian Movement (AIM). He studied film at the Institute for American Indian Arts and released his first EP, *2 Worlds*, in 2013. Much of his music deals with social issues facing indigenous people in the United States.

### 2. Themes

masculinity and culture  
clothing and identity

### 3. Questions

a) An article in Indian Country Today about hip-hop and rap by indigenous artists stated:

“Lest you think every Native hip hop tune has to be all ... *Native-y*, we're including a favorite jam here from Plex (aka Doug Bedard, Cree) that has nothing to do with race, culture or creed. This is just a simple song about getting dumped by a girl...”<sup>240</sup>

What do you think the journalist meant by “*Native-y*”? Do indigenous artists and musicians feel pressure to write, create, or perform about certain topics or act in certain ways? To what extent do you think songs like “AbOriginal” conform to these ideas, and in what ways might they undermine them?

b) Much of hip-hop music is dominated by men, and hip-hop by indigenous artists is no exception. Why do you think hip-hop and rap have been taken up by indigenous men?

c) How do the music videos for “AbOriginal” and “Warrior” construct or represent indigenous identity? What symbols do they utilize?

d) We have looked at examples of art created by indigenous artists in the form of hip-hop and slam poetry. Do you see any similarities between these two mediums? Any differences?

e) What do you think Frank Waln means when he says, “Play cultural red rover and I broke the line”?

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240 “12 Tracks of Native Hip-Hop that Crush Emerson Windy’s ‘Peace Pipe’”, *Indian Country Today Media Network* (16 May 2014), online: <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/05/16/12-tracks-native-hip-hop-crush-emerson-windys-peace-pipe-154904?page=0%2C2>.

f) The beginning of “Warrior” is a clip from an interview of Russell Means, Nataanii’s father. How does the clip inform your interpretation of the song?

g) What ideas about masculinity do you see being invoked in “AbOriginal” and “Warrior?” What appears to be the relationship between masculinity and culture?

h) How does the genre of hip-hop itself undermine or confirm stereotypical beliefs about indigenous identity?

i) We’ve been thinking about the relationship between clothing, culture, gender, and identity. Do you see any examples of Waln and Means using clothing to express meaning in these music videos? How do they do this?

**“AbOriginal” by Frank Waln**

Pickup

Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
 If your skin is brown then you’re down for the old pain  
 Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
 If your skin is brown then you’re down for the old pain

Verse 1

Young boy I’m leaving home (all alone)  
 On the rez I grew up unknown (with my stone)  
 The world said I couldn’t be king (they disown)  
 But in the city I can see a throne  
 Feeling like/ the king of the dammed in a kingdom of sand  
 Building castles as my freedom expand  
 Just to watch them fall down as the tides roll in  
 I’ve never seen a storm come with idle wind  
 And so I’m Idle No More rap the plight of the poor  
 Cuz educated warriors are vital to war  
 And we battling oppression/ got me stressing  
 Wondering if I’ll ever learn my lesson  
 Cuz I can’t let me people go (oh no)  
 And I can’t let my weakness show (You’ll never know)  
 Even when I’m hopeless and I pitiful  
 I keep going knowing that I’m AB Original

Chorus A

I got this AB Original soul/ I got this AB Original flow  
 I got this pain that I can’t shake/ ties to my people I can’t break  
 Got this history in my blood/ got my tribe that shows me love  
 So when I rise/ you rise/ come on let’s rise like

Verse 2

It’s been months since I’ve seen a Native/ It’s messing with my creative/Approach/ It’s got me jaded/  
 isolated  
 No one understands me like my people/ these white kids don’t know my struggle  
 I ain’t equal in their eyes and their intolerance brings me troubles/ I’m not/  
 Their noble savage/ doing damage/ to their perception of who I am  
 Self-destruct when I self-construct my own plan/ of my identity/ from their affinity  
 To raping culture/ they rape the land/ shame an NDN just to save the man  
 But this NDN never dies/ dies dies dies/ RISE

## Chorus A

I got this AB Original soul/ I got this AB Original flow  
 I got this pain that I can't shake/ ties to my people I can't break  
 Got this history in my blood/ got my tribe that shows me love  
 So when I rise/ you rise/ come on let's rise like

## Transition bridge

I got those reservation blues  
 Reservation blues  
 I got those reservation blues  
 Reservation blues  
 I got those reservation blues  
 Reservation blues

## Pickup

Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
 If your skin is brown then you're down for the old pain  
 Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
 If your skin is brown then you're down for the old pain

## Verse 3

It's 2013 and our chiefs are all shot/ digital blankets give spiritual smallpox  
 Certain revelations arise and my path becomes as clear as reservation skies/and I/  
 Could use a little hope sometimes cuz I was dead broke when I wrote this rhyme  
 So faith in myself is what I supposed to find  
 Play cultural red rover and I broke the line  
 I blew right past it/ raps spew like acid  
 Mind of an activist Lakota Sioux assassin  
 Who mastered Hip Hop to fight his battles  
 Saddle up this beat and let my rhymes unravel (yeah)  
 (Hoka) Call your cavalry because I leave stereotypes as casualties (yeah)  
 (Hoka) Better call your cavalry because I leave all your doubts as casualties

## Bridge

I don't see no reservations now/ I'm trying to get up out of here  
 I don't need somebody to tell me how/ I'm supposed to live my life in fear

## Chorus B

These borders can't hold me back (Heca) Can't hold me back  
 These borders can't hold me back (Heca) can't hold me back

## Pickup 2

If you a red man/ you a dead man  
“Better off on the rez” what they said man  
“You a mascot/ Just a ghost now  
Just a thing that I wear up on my clothes now”

## Pickup

Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
If your skin is brown then you’re down for the old pain  
Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
If your skin is brown then you’re down for the old pain

Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
If your skin is brown then you’re down for the old pain  
Look at all around look around at the whole thing  
If your skin is brown then you’re down for the old pain

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**Why Does Clothing Matter? Short Video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJiceA7HQPg&feature=youtu.be>

## Why Does Clothing Matter? Prezi Presentation

[http://prezi.com/esyebapo7wtu/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy&rc=ex0share](http://prezi.com/esyebapo7wtu/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share)

### NOTES FOR PREZI USE: FRAME-BY-FRAME GUIDE

*Because this presentation does not include large amounts of text, this document provides some guidance on how to use it and what to talk about with each frame (a “frame” is equivalent to a slide). It is not a script; everything is a suggestion. Please feel free to adjust as needed by adding more information in your verbal presentation, changing the questions that go along with the frames, or providing different examples. The presentation could take as little as 25 minutes or as long as an hour and a half for more engaged groups. This Prezi is best used as a tool for facilitating group discussion and demonstrating the interconnectedness of ideas, but it could also be used to provide visual clues accompanying a lecture-style presentation. Giving the presentation to individuals with no further context, as one might a slideshow for a class lecture, is probably not very effective, because text has been kept to a minimum. Presenters who have read the background paper will likely find that it offers helpful context for each talking point, as the content of this Prezi is based on the research conducted for that paper.*

#### **Frame 1 – Main Frame**

Introduce self and topic.

#### **Frame 2 – Why Does Clothing Matter?**

The goal of this frame is to get viewers thinking about all the various meanings articles of clothing and styles of dress can represent, beyond being merely practical. It is also to illuminate how what a person wears might mean something totally different to the viewer than it does to the wearer. Elaborate on the questions posed in this frame by providing some examples. You might ask the following question:

What do you think of when you see a person dressed all in black? What cultural meanings could that have?

What are some of the things you think about when you choose your clothes in the morning, other than the weather or the temperature?

#### **Frame 3 – Clothing and Culture**

Clothing and culture are deeply connected. Clothing signifies that we fit in with or belong to a certain cultural group, and visually differentiates us from other cultural groups.

The goal of this frame is to demonstrate how clothing is used to construct identity, and not simply to represent it. The example of Mapuche women in Argentina is useful: these women dress “traditionally”, in long wool dresses with woven belts and silver jewellery, when they participate in marches, rallies, interviews, or other political actions. In their day to day lives, however, they are more likely to wear jeans. This shows that they understand the political value of using clothing to construct their Mapuche identity as something different from the dominant Argentinian culture.

#### **Frame 4 - Clothes as Cultural Boundaries**

The goal of this frame is for viewers to brainstorm examples of clothing which mark or enforce cultural boundaries. These could be the kind of cultural boundaries which are related to a specific ethnic, geographical, or racialized group (African-American culture; Icelandic culture) but could also be related to less-obvious cultural groups (ie “millennial culture” or “goth culture”). You might ask the following questions:

Can you think of some other examples of clothing which marks the boundaries between different cultures?

How important is it that the members of a certain cultural group dress in a similar way? Why is it important?

What happens when the boundaries between cultures are transgressed?

#### **Frame 5 – Traditions and Culture**

The goal of this frame is to briefly introduce the idea that traditions and culture are closely related. You might ask the following questions:

Are traditions an important aspect of life in your family / your community?

What makes something “traditional”? Do you think all traditions are equally valuable? Why or why not?

#### **Frame 6 – The Skirt Protocol**

The goal of this frame is to introduce the debate over the skirt protocol and begin considering it in light of what we’ve discussed so far. You might ask the following questions:

Does anyone know what “the skirt protocol” is?

*(If yes, take answers and allow discussion from there; if no, explain the debate occurring in many indigenous communities about whether women must dress “traditionally” in long skirts to participate in ceremonies).*

The skirt protocol is often justified on the basis that it is an indigenous tradition. What do you think about this rationale?

*(If no one brings it up, you may wish to note that some critics of the skirt protocol question whether the protocol is in fact traditional, arguing that it is based on European/Christian ideas about female sexual modesty and purity).*

What do you know about how communities decide which traditions to hold on to and enforce, and which to let go? How do you think these issues should be determined?

Tell viewers that we will come back to the skirt protocol throughout this presentation, and ask that they please keep it in mind as we continue.

### **Frame 7 – Two-Spirit Identity**

Briefly introduce the criticism that the skirt protocol marginalizes two-spirit, trans, and non-binary people. You might wish to mention that some people have been excluded from ceremonies if their clothing doesn't match their perceived gender – even if it matches their gender with which they identify. It can be an embarrassing, shameful, and hurtful experience to be interrogated about whether you are a man or a woman. You might also want to ask the following question:

What stereotypes about gender does the skirt protocol implicate or rely on? What assumptions do those who enforce the skirt protocol make about gender and sexuality?

### **Frame 8 – Clothing and Religion**

Clothing worn for religious reasons is perhaps some of the most instantly recognizable clothing there is. Some items are specific and symbolize the wearer's religion, while other more generic articles of clothing can be worn for religious reasons. You might ask the following questions:

Can you think of some examples of articles of clothing with religious significance?

Why do you think that religions often impose rules about how people dress?

### **Frame 9 – The Niqab Debate**

The goal of this frame is to give a brief overview of the controversy around certain religious articles of clothing such as the niqab.

France banned the wearing of religious face-covering veils in public several years ago. Recently, the southern French city of Cannes also banned the “burkini”, a special swimming costume that some Muslim women use, which consists of leggings, a long-sleeved tunic, and a head scarf all made from swimsuit material. Women can now be fined for covering up in this way. Quebec proposed a similar law banning face-veils a few years ago, although it was eventually scrapped. The reasons cited for the bans included arguments that such clothing was oppressive to women and did not comply with the secular values of France and Quebec. You might ask the following questions of viewers:

Why do you think the face-veil has incited such controversy?

What do you think about the recent ban on the “burkini”?

### **Frame 10 – Skirts and Spirituality**

Because issues relating to terrorism, immigration, and Islamophobia get so much play in the media, it is easy to think of religious dress codes as applying to other people, in other parts of the world. But Islam is certainly not the only religion which concerns itself with what its followers wear, and the relationship

between clothing and religious identity is also played out much closer to home. You might ask the following question:

One of the justifications for the skirt protocol is that it has spiritual value: the skirt represents a sacred circle which touches the earth, and helps women to connect to their spirituality and feminine power. Some claim that the Creator or spirits can only see women when they are dressed in this way. What do you think about this rationale?

### **Frame 11 – Clothing and Colonialism**

The goal of this frame is to examine the relationship between clothing and colonialism.

### **Frame 12 – Dressing to Assimilate**

The goal of this frame is to briefly consider how clothing has been used as a tool of colonizers to promote assimilation and damage indigenous cultures. For example, children who were taken to residential schools had their clothing from home – such as moccasins or beaded jackets – confiscated or thrown away, and were made to dress in school uniforms. In Africa, traditional clothing which didn't cover all the parts of the body that Europeans were accustomed to covering was seen as immoral, savage, and primitive, justifying colonial rule and the “civilizing” mission.

Can you think of other way in which clothing is connected to assimilation?

### **Frame 13 – Dressing to Decolonize**

The goal of this frame is to show how clothing has also been used to resist oppression and assimilation. It is also to highlight the fact that the debate over the skirt protocol is not taking place in a vacuum – it is occurring in the context of centuries of colonialism and decolonizing movements which place a lot of emphasis on cultural resurgence or revitalization. For example, indigenous women in the Peruvian Andes wear heavy layered skirts covered with embroidery, and say that dressing traditionally gives them a sense of pride in their ethnic identity. Similarly, passing on indigenous skills related to producing clothing such as beading, tanning hides, and sewing can strengthen community and family bonds. You might ask the following question:

One justification for the skirt protocol is that it is an indigenous tradition. What do you think of this rationale?

### **Frame 14 – Decolonization and Tradition**

The goal of this frame is to consider what role traditions might play in decolonizing movements, and what some of the consequences of these connections are. For example, you might ask:

How important do you think traditions are to the decolonizing struggle? Why do you think they are important, or why not?

Do you think wearing traditional clothing is an important part of decolonization? Why or why not?

### **Frame 15 – Clothing and Nationalism**

The goal of this frame is to introduce the relationship between clothing and nationalism. Clothing has been used to judge who presents a “good” or “bad” example of citizenship, and national projects which police how people dress or encourage certain styles are often part of the drive to establish or strengthen a national identity.

### **Frame 16 – Envisioning the Citizen**

What does a model citizen look like? Although “citizen” appears to be a neutral word, free from connotations of race, gender, and age, in reality, there is often a lot of tension and disagreement about how citizenship should be visually expressed or represented. For example, in France, women who wear the burka are constructed as being antithetical to the ideals of French citizenship, which is strongly premised on secularism. The French national symbol of “Marianne”, whose bust appears on French coins and other items, is depicted as a young, white woman, dressed in France’s national colours, and often portrayed wearing low-cut blouses or with her breasts revealed. She represents the “liberated” French citizen, while Muslim immigrants who cover their bodies and faces represent the oppressed outsider.

What kind of person do you think of when you hear the words “Canadian citizen”? How are they dressed?

Why do you think you might imagine this, and do you think it is an accurate representation of Canada as a nation?

### **Frame 17 – Constructing Shared Identities**

Nation-states are political entities which are often made up of various ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. It can be hard to govern such diverse populations, so sometimes, nations try to develop shared identities with which everyone can relate. Clothing has been used to construct such identities. In post-independence Tanzania, mini-skirts were banned for being too “Western”, and politicians encouraged people to dress in “Tanzanian” ways. In Mexico in the 1930s, political elites incorporated elements of indigenous clothing into their dress, contributing to a national identity which “mixed” indigenous and colonial cultures. This blending created an image of “Mexicanness” with which many people could identify at least in some way, which was important given the political turmoil of the time. You might ask the following question:

Indigenous communities also use the rhetoric of nationhood; for example, by calling for sovereignty and a nation-to-nation relationship with the Canadian government. Do you think that the pressure on women to wear skirts in ceremonies is related to the desire for indigenous communities to be treated as nations? Why or why not?

### **Frame 18 – Clothing and Gender**

The goal of this frame is to identify a common thread woven through many of the examples discussed so far: almost all of them are focused on women’s clothing.

### **Frame 19 – Women as Cultural Reproducers**

Women are responsible for biologically reproducing community members and citizens. However, throughout much of human history and in many diverse societies around the world, they have also been responsible for raising and educating children. As a result, women act as a crucial link between one generation and the next, teaching their children skills and knowledge, and more importantly, passing on cultural and religious values. Women don't just give birth to new members of the collective, they also reproduce the culture of the collective.

Because women often play this fundamental role, anything they do which is perceived as undermining or interrupting dominant cultural values is extremely threatening. This might include dressing or not dressing a certain way. You might ask the following question:

Can you think of some other examples where girls' and women's clothing is policed in more strict or different ways to that of boys' and men?

### **Frame 20 – Examples**

The goal of this frame is to identify and discuss some examples of how codes and rules about clothing are unequally applied to women. If the viewers have already listed some of the examples in the presentation, take a moment to discuss them further. If not, this frame provides an opportunity to talk about a few instances of gendered dress codes. If viewers are comfortable sharing personal anecdotes, you might want to allow them to do so to encourage further conversation.

### **Frame 21 – Conclusions**

The goal of this frame is to briefly summarize what has been discussed throughout the presentation.

### **Frame 22 – Questions and Comments**

Allow time for questions and discussion. Depending on the group, you may want to facilitate/encourage questions about a specific aspect of the presentation. For example, for a women's group from an indigenous community that wants to take some of these tools home with them, it might be good to focus the questions on the skirt protocol, the tension between decolonization and traditionalism, and the impacts of colonialism on gender roles. For a group of high school students, you might want to focus more on how gender and rules about clothing are related, and impact their lives in gendered ways. You can always navigate back to a specific slide by exiting out of presentation mode and returning to edit mode, which allows you to select and zoom to specific frames.

### **Frame 23 – Video (optional)**

I have included the short YouTube video in case you find it useful to include in this presentation. The presentation and the video have a fair amount of crossover material so it may be unnecessary to show, but if you wanted to provide a brief introduction to the topic in advance of spending more time on each point, you may wish to show it at the beginning.

### **Frame 24 - Main Frame**

**END**

## Teaching Resources

This document provides a brief summary of a few teaching resources for learning about indigenous peoples, the history of colonialism, and contemporary issues in the classroom. They include books, multimedia resources such as films and online games, teaching guides and lesson plans, and other resources such as thematic bookstores, bibliographies, and information sheets. Some of the resources are more focused on providing indigenous content, while others focus more on integrating indigenous worldviews and pedagogies in a more holistic way. Topics and themes of these resources vary widely.

The resources available for younger children rarely address colonialism or racism directly. Instead, they introduce the idea of cultural diversity; explore different lifestyles, traditions, and beliefs; provide information about plants, animals, and landscapes in different regions of Canada; and introduce indigenous learning tools such as talking circles and stories. This knowledge is important, but some of these primary resources can be problematic because they tend to position indigenous cultures as existing in the past. They focus more heavily on “traditional” ways of life than they do on contemporary communities. Additionally, while they allow students to identify differences between cultural communities, they do not address how communities and people in Canada are privileged or disadvantaged in relation to one another.

As students get older, the resources available begin to introduce more difficult topics, such as the legacy of residential schools and the concept of assimilation. Intermediate and secondary students begin to challenge stereotypes and think critically about the representation of indigenous peoples in the media. There are a few resources available which encourage students to learn about treaties and explore the founding of Canada from an indigenous rather than settler perspective. Secondary students are introduced to emotionally sensitive topics such as intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, and suicide. Resources begin to focus more consciously and critically on questions of identity and reconciliation.

Even for older students, however, there appear to be few resources available which deal with the gendered impacts of colonialism or its effects on LGBTQ2 communities. Similarly, there is little discussion of religion and spirituality beyond basic mention of missionaries and church-run residential schools. Also lacking are tools for teaching about the *Indian Act*, displacement, and the reserve system in age-appropriate ways. And while many resources do the excellent work of examining colonialism’s deeply negative impacts on indigenous peoples, few tackle the corresponding task of acknowledging settler privilege and addressing the ways in which colonialism continues to manifest itself today.

Please be aware that I have not read every book and resource or watched every film which is listed here. Those books which I have not read myself I have included based on reviews which I have read of them, or because they were suggested to me by a teacher or a librarian (full disclosure: my mom and my best friend, respectively) who has used them in the classroom. I have briefly reviewed other materials such as teaching guides and websites but have not analyzed through them in great detail. I am not a teacher, and the grade level with which each resource is associated is a suggestion only. It is assumed that educators will use their judgment to determine if a given resource will be appropriate or effective for their students.

I hope that as this project continues people can edit and add to this list.

### Primary (K-3)

Books	Teaching Guides	Other Resources
<p><i>Guess Who My Favourite Person Is</i> Byrd Baylor</p> <p>A young man and a little girl play a game of describing their favourite things to one another.</p>	<p><i>Project of Heart: Education for Reconciliation and Social Justice (K-2)</i></p> <p>Focused on Shannen’s Dream and Jordan’s Principle. Good for kids because activities are highly focused on children’s rights and education. Includes some activity sheets and brief lesson ideas.</p>	<p><i>Canadian Aboriginal Books for Schools</i></p> <p>List of books published yearly, selected and annotated by teacher librarians. Categorized by grade level/age. Free and downloadable. <a href="http://books.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AbCat_2015_Final_forWeb.pdf">http://books.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AbCat_2015_Final_forWeb.pdf</a></p>
<p><i>Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest</i> Gerald McDermott</p> <p>Raven wants to bring light to the world, but first he must discover where Sky Chief hides it.</p>	<p><i>Aboriginal Education Strategy: Practical Teaching Strategies for the Elementary Classroom</i></p> <p>This site provides links to PDFs of fully formed lesson plans on various topics relating to indigenous history, cultures, colonialism, and other issues. Gr 1-8. <a href="http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/elementary/Strategies.html">http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/elementary/Strategies.html</a></p>	<p><i>KidsBooks: First Nations Books</i></p> <p>Online bookstore with a section dedicated to books by indigenous authors or about indigenous histories and topics. Categorized by region and type( i.e Métis, Inuit, graphic novel). <a href="http://www.kidsbooks.ca/KidsbooksRecommendations/FirstNationsBooks/Department.aspx?DeptID=3700&amp;&amp;">http://www.kidsbooks.ca/KidsbooksRecommendations/FirstNationsBooks/Department.aspx?DeptID=3700&amp;&amp;</a></p>
<p><i>Salmon Boy</i> Donna Joe</p> <p>Tells a story from the Sechelt First Nation of how salmon came to fill the community’s rivers and sea.</p>	<p><i>WITS For Schools: Aboriginal Lesson Plans</i></p> <p>This website has a list of various children books with indigenous content and accompanying lesson plans, handouts, and activities for each. All are suitable for primary age students. <a href="http://www.witsprogram.ca/schools/lesson-plans/aboriginal.php">http://www.witsprogram.ca/schools/lesson-plans/aboriginal.php</a></p>	<p><i>Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to the Teacher’s Toolkit</i></p> <p>Produced by Min of Ed in Ontario, the Guide sets out curriculum objectives accompanied by ideas for activities in the classroom, categorized by grade. <a href="http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/Guide_Toolkit2009.pdf">http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/Guide_Toolkit2009.pdf</a></p>
<p><i>Uumajut - Learn About Arctic Wildlife</i> Simon Awa</p> <p>Written in both English and Inuktitut, this book includes scientific and Inuit knowledge about the animals of the Arctic circle.</p>	<p><i>The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada, Ages 4-7</i></p> <p>Produced by INAC, teaching guide includes background info and unit and lesson plans on topics such as storytelling and National Aboriginal Day. Integrates some indigenous pedagogy into the activities. <a href="https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lrs_clsrs_learningcircle_lc47_131_6538044949_eng.pdf">https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lrs_clsrs_learningcircle_lc47_131_6538044949_eng.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>Where are the Children? Reading List</i></p> <p><i>Where are the Children?</i> is a travelling exhibition documenting the legacy of residential schools. This reading list includes books for children ages 4-8 that deal with residential schools. It is rare to find resources on this topic for young children. There are also books for older youth and adults. <a href="http://wherearethethechildren.ca/en/resources/">http://wherearethethechildren.ca/en/resources/</a></p>
<p><i>And Still the Turtle Watched</i> Sheila McGill-Callaghan</p> <p>Story of the colonization and urbanization of New York City. Deals with environmental stewardship</p>	<p><i>Aboriginal Histories and Realities in Canada: Grades 1-8 Teacher’s Resource</i></p> <p>Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario produces this guide which has background info for teachers, suggested activities for</p>	<p><i>Authentic First Peoples Resources K-7</i></p> <p>Guide developed by First Nations Education Steering Committee to help elementary school teachers find and choose appropriate resources for</p>

Books	Teaching Guides	Other Resources
issues.	different grades, and tips for discussing sensitive and emotional topics in the elementary classroom. <a href="http://etfovoice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ETFO_SUM_15_C_URR_rev.pdf">http://etfovoice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ETFO_SUM_15_C_URR_rev.pdf</a>	learning about First Peoples in the classroom. <a href="http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/PUB-LFP-K-7-Authentic-Resources-for-Web.pdf">http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/PUB-LFP-K-7-Authentic-Resources-for-Web.pdf</a>
<p><i>I is for Inuksuk</i> Mary Wallace</p> <p>Written as an acrostic poem in which every letter of “Inuksuk” stands for an Inuktitut word. Beautiful illustrations all about the Arctic and Inuit life. Great way to introduce indigenous languages.</p>	<p><i>Canadian Museum of History: Gateway to Aboriginal Heritage</i></p> <p>This website has basic online games for kids and a couple lesson plans related to the content of the museum. Focus on historical objects and their corresponding regions. Most games require basic literacy. <a href="http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/tresors/ethno/ety0000e.shtml">http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/tresors/ethno/ety0000e.shtml</a></p>	<p><i>Resource List for Indigenous Education Activities</i></p> <p>Bibliography compiled by teacher-librarian Doni Gratton which separates books by grade level from K-7..Available to download here: <a href="https://teachbcdb.bctf.ca/permalink/resource691">https://teachbcdb.bctf.ca/permalink/resource691</a></p>
<p><i>Rough Faced Girl</i> Rafe Martin</p> <p>A beautifully illustrated Algonquian/Mikm’aq story about a girl who is treated poorly by her older sisters, but whose good heart sees her through. Because of its similarity to the Cinderella story, provides an opportunity to practice comparing/contrasting skills.</p>	<p><i>In Our Own Words: Bringing Authentic First People’s Content to the K-3 Classroom</i></p> <p>Produced by First Nations Education Steering Committee, this document provides 8 units with detailed but flexible lesson plans. Also includes tips for how to integrate indigenous content and perspectives in culturally appropriate ways (i.e. where to find local resources, terminology and pronunciation, and how to address the meaning of “truth” in stories). <a href="http://www.fnesc.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/PUB-LFP-K-3-In-our-Own-Words-for-Web.pdf">http://www.fnesc.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/PUB-LFP-K-3-In-our-Own-Words-for-Web.pdf</a></p>	
<p><i>A Salmon for Simon</i> Betty Waterton</p> <p>A young boy has dreamed of catching a salmon all summer. When an eagle drops one in a tide pool, he is torn between keeping it and setting it free. <i>Note:</i> this book doesn’t explicitly talk about First Nations although the characters are indigenous.</p>		
<p><i>1 2 3 4 First Nations Explore</i> Kim Soo Goodtrack</p> <p>A picture book which introduces facts about indigenous peoples all over Canada while helping children learn to count.</p>		

<b>Books</b>	<b>Teaching Guides</b>	<b>Other Resources</b>
<p><i>The Meaning of Respect</i> David Bouchard</p> <p>A young Cree boy is sent home from school to learn the meaning of respect from his grandfather.</p>		
<p><i>The Secret of Your Name</i> David Bouchard</p> <p>Explores what it means to be Métis and the process of learning about one's indigenous identity. In English and Michif. Includes CD with Red River Jig played by Métis fiddler John Arcand.</p>		

## Intermediate (4-6)

Books*	Multimedia	Teaching Guides	Other Resources
<p><i>Missing Nimama</i> Melanie Florence and Francois Thisdale</p> <p>Beautiful picture book which tells the story of a girl growing up without her mother. Opportunity to talk about missing and murdered indigenous women and introduce themes of gender-based and colonial violence</p>	<p><i>The Path of the Elders</i></p> <p>Excellent online computer game. Learn about indigenous peoples of Treaty 9, relationships with European traders, impacts of colonialism, and the meaning of the treaty. Includes a comprehensive teacher's guide for each of grades 4-10. All materials (ie essays, videos) available on the site. Guide includes lesson plans. <a href="http://www.pathoftheelders.com/game">http://www.pathoftheelders.com/game</a> for each of grades 4-10. All materials (ie essays, videos) available on the site. Guide includes lesson plans. <a href="http://www.pathoftheelders.com/game">http://www.pathoftheelders.com/game</a></p>	<p><i>Through Mala's Eyes: Life in an Inuit Community</i></p> <p>Resource consists of 12 stories and accompanying unit plans relating to life in the Arctic for a young Inuit boy. Focused on culture, traditions, and lifestyle, rather than colonialism and its impacts. <a href="https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lr_ks_rrds_mala_1302786861588_eng.pdf">https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lr_ks_rrds_mala_1302786861588_eng.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>Project of Heart: BCTF Guide</i></p> <p>This excellent 20-page ebook has lots of great information for teachers about residential schools, the history of denial in Canada, Project of Heart itself, and reconciliation. It includes links throughout to teaching tools, including documentaries, short films, survivor testimony, newspaper articles, primary documents such as the Hansard text of the 2008 apology and letters from residential school students, sample art projects in support of healing and reconciliation, and study guides for plays and books. Useful for older grades as well. <a href="https://issuu.com/teachernews/ag/docs/poh_ebook_for_issuu/2?ff=true&amp;e=6001376/14927855">https://issuu.com/teachernews/ag/docs/poh_ebook_for_issuu/2?ff=true&amp;e=6001376/14927855</a></p>
<p><i>My Name is Seepetza</i> Shirley Sterling</p> <p>Autobiographical novel in diary format told by a sixth-grade girl attending residential school.</p>	<p><i>Little Thunder</i> Nance Ackerman</p> <p>Beautifully animated short based on a Mikm'aq story called The Stone Canoe. No narration/text. <a href="https://www.nfb.ca/film/vistas_little_thunder/">https://www.nfb.ca/film/vistas_little_thunder/</a></p>	<p><i>Project of Heart: 3-7</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>INAC Information Sheets</i></p> <p>Links to information sheets on a variety of topics for children ages 8-11. <a href="https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1303131164220/1303131360455">https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1303131164220/1303131360455</a></p>
<p><i>Together with the Children: The Elder Project</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>How People Got Fire</i></p> <p>Introspective 14 minute animated short about a girl in Tagish First Nation whose grandmother is slowly telling her the story of how humans got fire. <a href="https://www.nfb.ca/film/how_people_got_fire/">https://www.nfb.ca/film/how_people_got_fire/</a></p>	<p><i>Aboriginal Education Strategy: Practical Teaching Strategies for the Elementary Classroom</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>Authentic First Peoples Resources K-7</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
<p><i>Little Voice</i> Ruby Slipperjack</p>			<p><i>KidsBooks: First Nations Books</i></p> <p>See above.</p>

<p>A young Ojibway girl spends a summer with her grandmother in northern Ontario, learning to find her voice in the aftermath of her father's death.</p>			
<p><i>Peace Dancer</i> Roy Henry Vickers</p> <p>Beautifully illustrated Tsimshian story of a group of children whose mistreatment of a crow causes a great flood, and the dance and ceremony that developed to commemorate the people's survival and the lesson of respect they learned.</p>			<p><i>Where are the Children? Reading List</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
<p><i>Louis Riel: A Comic Strip Biography</i> Chester Brown</p> <p>Beautiful graphic novel telling the story of Louis Riel and the Red River Rebellion.</p>			<p><i>Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to the Teacher's Toolkit</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
			<p><i>Resource List for Indigenous Education Activities</i></p> <p>See above.</p>

### Early Secondary (7-9)

Books	Multimedia	Teaching Guides	Other Resources
<p><i>Nobody Cries at Bingo</i> Dawn Dumont</p> <p>Series of vignettes of an indigenous girl's life growing up on the Okanese reserve, from kindergarten to law school. Good starting place for discussions about stereotypes, representation, cultural differences, racism.</p>	<p><i>The Path of the Elders</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>Colonialism and the Canoe: Unit Plan, Gr. 9</i></p> <p>Unit plan with lessons and activities which explore the impacts of colonialism on cultures, communities, language, and religion. Uses the canoe as a tool for accessing topics. Materials referred to in unit plan free: <a href="http://moa.ubc.ca/voicesofthecanoe/for-teachers/">http://moa.ubc.ca/voicesofthecanoe/for-teachers/</a> Unit plan here: <a href="http://moa.ubc.ca/voicesofthecanoe/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/UnitPlan-Colonialism_and_the_CanoeGr9.pdf">http://moa.ubc.ca/voicesofthecanoe/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/UnitPlan-Colonialism_and_the_CanoeGr9.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>Indigenous Young Women Lead: Our Strengths, Our Stories, Our Truths</i></p> <p>Edited by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, this book offers a compilation of essays on indigenous women and leadership by girls and young women across North America. The essays are personal, accessible, and short. Would be a good tool for talking about gender and colonialism in a positive way. Online; free.</p>
<p><i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Sherman Alexie</p> <p>Alexie's first young adult novel follows the story of Junior, a 14 year old cartoonist on a Spokane reservation, who attends the all-white high school in town. Teaching guide and materials here: <a href="http://libwww.freelibrary.org/onebook/obop11/0_Absolutely_True_Diary_Curriculum_full.pdf">http://libwww.freelibrary.org/onebook/obop11/0_Absolutely_True_Diary_Curriculum_full.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>Rebel Music: Native America</i></p> <p>24 minute episode focused on indigenous musicians, especially hip hop artists, including one from the lower mainland. <a href="http://www.rebelmusic.com/?utm_content=bufferd1987&amp;utm_medium=social&amp;utm_source=facebook.com&amp;utm_campaign=buffer#!music/rebel-music/episode/native-america/lightbox/video/rebel-music-native-america-full-episode">http://www.rebelmusic.com/?utm_content=bufferd1987&amp;utm_medium=social&amp;utm_source=facebook.com&amp;utm_campaign=buffer#!music/rebel-music/episode/native-america/lightbox/video/rebel-music-native-america-full-episode</a></p>	<p><i>Rebel Music: Lesson Plan</i></p> <p>Detailed backgrounders and lesson plans to accompany the <i>Rebel Music</i> episode. All materials needed for lessons are linked to or provided in the plans. Note that the appropriateness of some materials may vary based on reading level. <a href="https://legacy.wlu.ca/documents/59892/RebelED_NativeAmerica_LessonPlan.pdf">https://legacy.wlu.ca/documents/59892/RebelED_NativeAmerica_LessonPlan.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>The Learning Circle: 5 Voices of Aboriginal Youth in Canada</i></p> <p>Includes 5 narratives from indigenous youth across Canada and suggested activities for working with these narratives. Includes discussion of issues such as representation/ stereotypes, drug and alcohol abuse, residential schools, and spiritualities. <a href="https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lr_ks_clsrs_learningcircle_lc1416_1329332651159_eng.pdf">https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lr_ks_clsrs_learningcircle_lc1416_1329332651159_eng.pdf</a></p>
<p><i>Tales of an Urban Indian</i> Darrell Dennis</p> <p>One-man play about a kid from a rural reserve moving to Vancouver with his mother. Coming of age story that deals with racism, identity, and</p>	<p><i>National Film Board of Canada: Aboriginal Perspectives</i></p> <p>This website which compiles and categorizes NFB films that relate to indigenous issues. Various</p>	<p><i>The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada</i></p> <p>Produced by INAC, provides background information for teachers and students and provides unit</p>	<p><i>Where are the Children? Reading List</i></p> <p>See above.</p>

<p>representation.</p>	<p>teachers and professors have uploaded their own teaching guides and lesson plans which use these films or excerpts from them. Some will be suitable for middle-school students; others more appropriate for high school audiences. Main page: <a href="http://www3.nfb.ca/en classe/doclens/visau/index.php?mode=home&amp;language=english">http://www3.nfb.ca/en classe/doclens/visau/index.php?mode=home&amp;language=english</a></p>	<p>plans and activities on, among other things, indigenous place names, treaties, cultural diversity, and literary representation. <a href="https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lr_ks_lc1214_1331134340172_eng.pdf">https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ach_lr_ks_lc1214_1331134340172_eng.pdf</a></p>	
<p><i>Just Ask Us: A Conversation with First Nations Teenage Moms</i> Sylvia Olsen</p> <p>Olsen's daughter had a baby at age 14, which inspired this community project to promote the voices of 13 young moms from Tsartlip First Nation. The project includes material about culture, colonialism, and racism, sexual health. Also suitable for older high school grades.</p>	<p><i>Justice for Aboriginal Peoples – It's Time</i></p> <p>6 minute film by PSAC which concisely explains major events and phenomena in the history of indigenous-settler relations, including contact, the reserve system, the Indian Act, residential schools, drinking water on reserve, and missing and murdered women. Excellent intro and great refresher on history. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5DrXZUIinU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5DrXZUIinU</a></p>	<p><i>Roots of Equality: Gender-Based Violence</i></p> <p>Workshop dealing with gender based violence. Considers missing and murdered indigenous women, Helen Betty Osborne, and Stolen Sisters. <a href="http://www.etfo.ca/Resources/ForTeachers/Documents/Roots%20of%20Equality%20-%20Gender-Based%20Violence%20-%20Workshop%20for%20Grade%207%20and%208%20Girls.pdf">http://www.etfo.ca/Resources/ForTeachers/Documents/Roots%20of%20Equality%20-%20Gender-Based%20Violence%20-%20Workshop%20for%20Grade%207%20and%208%20Girls.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to the Teacher's Toolkit</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
<p><i>Ajji: Dark Dreams of the Ancient Arctic</i> Sean Tinsley and Rachel Qitsualik</p> <p>Collection of gothic ghost stories based on Inuit legends.</p>		<p><i>Aboriginal Education Strategy: Practical Teaching Strategies for the Elementary Classroom</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>Project of Heart: BCTF Guide</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
<p><i>Crazy Horse's Girlfriend</i> Erika Wurth</p> <p>Native American protagonist is a pregnant teenager dreaming of moving away. Undermines cultural conceptions of indigeneity and full of complex, diverse characters.</p>		<p><i>Aboriginal Perspectives: Unit Guide for the Theme Colonialism and Racism</i></p> <p>Compiled NFB films related to indigenous issues. Educators have uploaded their own lesson plans which use these films/excerpts. This unit plan is for secondary students. <a href="http://www3.nfb.ca/ressources_educatives//0121.pdf">http://www3.nfb.ca/ressources_educatives//0121.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>Resource List for Indigenous Education Activities</i></p> <p>See above.</p>

### Secondary (10-12)

Books	Multimedia	Teaching Guides	Other Resources
<p><i>A Really Good Brown Girl</i> Marilyn Dumont</p> <p>Collection of poems by celebrated Métis writer which explore questions of gender, identity, culture, and colonialism.</p>	<p><i>Hi-Ho Mistahey!</i></p> <p>Documentary about Shannen Koostachin, a youth advocate from Attawapiskat, who fought for education rights on reserve and was killed at age 16 before seeing her dream of a new school realized.</p>	<p><i>Indian Residential School and Reconciliation Teacher Resource Guide: Gr. 10</i></p> <p>Comprehensive teaching guide on residential schools, including history, intergenerational consequences, resistance and reconciliation. Includes several case studies, video content available on website, assessment tools, and activities, glossaries, and bibliography for teachers' use. <a href="http://www.fnesc.ca/grade-10irsr/">http://www.fnesc.ca/grade-10irsr/</a></p>	<p><i>Ahihtawikosisan Blog</i></p> <p>Métis author has great articles and resources about colonialism, on topics from cultural appropriation to identity, Cree language studies to summaries of legal decisions. Organized by topic. Some topics may require more context for younger students. <a href="http://apihtawikosisan.com/aboriginal-issue-primers/">http://apihtawikosisan.com/aboriginal-issue-primers/</a></p>
<p><i>As Long as the Rivers Flow: A Novel</i> James Bartleman</p> <p>The story of a woman taken from her home to residential school at age six, the removal of her child, and her subsequent search for him. Deals with residential schools and concept of inter-generational trauma.</p>	<p><i>Rebel Music: Native America</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>Rebel Music: Lesson Plan</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>First Nations Pedagogy Online</i></p> <p>Includes information for teachers on pedagogy, as well as access to a variety of open-source tools, activities, and lesson plans developed by and for educators. Must request a (free) account to access. <a href="http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/invitation.html">http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/invitation.html</a></p>
<p><i>As I Remember It</i> Tara Lee Morin</p> <p>Morin's book is a memoir of her own experiences being removed as a baby from her indigenous mother and growing up in foster care.</p>	<p><i>The Path of the Elders</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>Aboriginal Literatures in Canada: A Teacher's Resource Guide</i></p> <p>Lists and provides information about both fiction and non-fiction works by indigenous writers with a focus on Métis, Anishinaabe, Mohawk, Cree, Mikm'aq, and Okanagan writing. Includes background section for each group for teachers. <a href="https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/UserFiles/File/UploadedAmina/AboriginalLiteratureinCanada.pdf">https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/UserFiles/File/UploadedAmina/AboriginalLiteratureinCanada.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>The Law Project Teacher Resources</i></p> <p>Website with lesson plans about human rights and social justice, divided by course and grade. Subdivided into categories by topic, ie Criminal Justice has modules on indigenous issues, youth, and women's rights. Lots of materials on residential schools. <a href="http://www.lawproject.ca/TeachingCentre/teachingResources.php">http://www.lawproject.ca/TeachingCentre/teachingResources.php</a></p>
<p><i>In Search of April Raintree</i> Beatrice Culleton Mosonier</p> <p>Two Métis sisters in Winnipeg are removed from their family</p>	<p><i>Club Native</i></p> <p>Documentary about the history of blood quantum legislation and band</p>	<p><i>100 Years of Loss Edukit</i></p> <p>Edukit is designed to accompany the Legacy of Hope Foundation's exhibition on residential schools.</p>	<p><i>Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to the Teacher's Toolkit</i></p> <p>See above.</p>

<p>and raised in separate foster homes. Resource for novel study here:  <a href="http://www.nwtliteracy.ca/resources/adultlit/raintree/raintree.pdf">http://www.nwtliteracy.ca/resources/adultlit/raintree/raintree.pdf</a></p>	<p>membership laws, and the contemporary issue of intercultural dating. Follows several Mohawk families on the Kahnawake reserve.</p>	<p>6 lesson plans, discussion guides, and supplementary resources /activities for extended learning. Download here:  <a href="http://staging.legacyofhope.ca/resources/">http://staging.legacyofhope.ca/resources/</a></p>	
<p><i>Amongst God's Own: The Enduring Legacy of St. Mary's Mission</i></p> <p>Chronicles the history of the St. Mary's residential school near Mission, British Columbia, using the narratives of 35 elders who attended the school and other primary historical documents.</p>	<p><i>Finding Dawn</i></p> <p>Documentary about the search for a missing indigenous woman. Excellent way to introduce and explore relationship of colonialism to gender roles and violence against women. Online, free:  <a href="https://www.nfb.ca/film/finding_dawn/">https://www.nfb.ca/film/finding_dawn/</a></p>	<p><i>Walking on the Lands of Our Ancestors: An Experiential Approach to First Nations History</i></p> <p>Victoria teacher and Governor-General's Award recipient Anne Tenning summarizes a few tools she uses to integrate indigenous pedagogies and content into the classroom. Suitable for gr 9-12.  <a href="http://www.canadashistory.ca/FileStorage/80/8081d337-55cd-40bf-97b5-c4bad2b9d304.pdf">http://www.canadashistory.ca/FileStorage/80/8081d337-55cd-40bf-97b5-c4bad2b9d304.pdf</a></p>	<p><i>Project of Heart: BCTF Guide</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
<p><i>Give Me My Father's Body: the Life of Minik, the New York Eskimo</i></p> <p>Ken Harper</p> <p>The true story of an Inuit boy taken to New York by explorer Robert Peary as a "specimen" at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his adoption and subsequent tragic life.</p>	<p><i>I'm Not the Indian You Had In Mind</i></p> <p>Spoken word short written and performed by Thomas King. Deals with representation and stereotyping.  <a href="http://www.nsi-canada.ca/2012/03/im-not-the-indian-you-had-in-mind">http://www.nsi-canada.ca/2012/03/im-not-the-indian-you-had-in-mind</a></p>	<p><i>Critically Analyzing Aboriginal Picture Books</i></p> <p>Lesson plan for 11/12 students to examine representations in children's books about indigenous peoples.  <a href="http://www.k12studycanada.org/files/lesson_plans/2010SCSI_CarjuzzaaJ_CriticallyAnalyzingRevealingPictureBooksAboriginalCanada_Gr11_12.pdf">http://www.k12studycanada.org/files/lesson_plans/2010SCSI_CarjuzzaaJ_CriticallyAnalyzingRevealingPictureBooksAboriginalCanada_Gr11_12.pdf</a></p>	
<p><i>Anatomy of a Girl Gang</i></p> <p>Ashley Little</p> <p>The story a five-girl gang who terrorize Vancouver, including one indigenous character fleeing life on the reserve.</p>	<p><i>CBC 8<sup>th</sup> Fire Series</i></p> <p>4-part Docuseries on indigenous-settler relations, contemporary issues, hosted by Wab Kinew. Available on CBC Curio or iTunes. 40 mins/episode.</p>	<p><i>8th Fire Teacher's Guide</i></p> <p>Detailed guide with lesson plans, discussion questions for each episode. Free.  <a href="https://media.curio.ca/filer_public/e5/c9/e5c95239-396c-4772-ae5-cf84389c7e00/8thfireguide.pdf">https://media.curio.ca/filer_public/e5/c9/e5c95239-396c-4772-ae5-cf84389c7e00/8thfireguide.pdf</a></p>	
<p><i>Bearskin Diary: A Novel</i></p> <p>Carol Daniels</p> <p>A Cree girl is adopted into a Ukrainian family during the 60s scoop. Deals with questions of abuse, racism, and identity.</p>		<p><i>Aboriginal Education Strategy: Practical Teaching Strategies for the Secondary Classroom</i></p> <p>Links to lesson plans on various topics integrating indigenous perspectives and issues into the classroom.  <a href="http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/secStrategies.html">http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/secStrategies.html</a></p>	

### Post-Secondary

<b>Books</b>	<b>Multimedia</b>	<b>Other Resources</b>
<p><i>Ravensong</i> Lee Maracle</p> <p>Novel about a teenager in the 1950s living on an urban reserve in the wake of a flu epidemic in her community and a classmate's suicide.</p>	<p><i>Hi-Ho Mistahey!</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>BCTF Aboriginal Education Bibliography</i></p> <p>Comprehensive bibliography of non-fiction books by Indigenous authors and/or about indigenous issues and histories. <a href="http://www.bctf.ca/AboriginalEducation.aspx?id=5654&amp;libID=5726">http://www.bctf.ca/AboriginalEducation.aspx?id=5654&amp;libID=5726</a></p>
<p><i>Celia's Song</i> Lee Maracle</p> <p>The somewhat-sequel of <i>Ravensong</i> follows now-adult Celia, a seer who navigates the near-death of her cousin's young child and the trauma and abuse in a Nu-Chah-nulth community.</p>	<p><i>Club Native</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>Ahihtawikosisan Blog</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
<p><i>Born With a Tooth</i> Joseph Boyden</p> <p>Collection of short stories about lives of indigenous people in Ontario.</p>	<p><i>Finding Dawn</i></p> <p>See above.</p>	<p><i>Project of Heart: BCTF Guide</i></p> <p>See above.</p>
<p><i>Monkey Beach</i> Eden Robinson</p> <p>Novel about an indigenous teenager from coastal British Columbia in the aftermath of her brother's disappearance.</p>		
<p><i>Blasphemy: New and Selected Stories</i> Sherman Alexie</p> <p>Some of Alexie's most well-known works, as well as new stories. Deals with colonialism, environmental issues, cultural genocide, representation</p>		
<p><i>Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood</i> Sam McKegney</p> <p>Conversations with indigenous men and women in Canada, USA, and Oceania about what it means to be an indigenous man. Great resource for discussing gender, colonialism, and the traditional/modern binary.</p>		

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