

**“We Are the Movement”: Tkaronto-based Indigenous Youth
Explore Environmental (In)Justice**

By
Meagan Dellavilla

Supervised by
Deborah McGregor

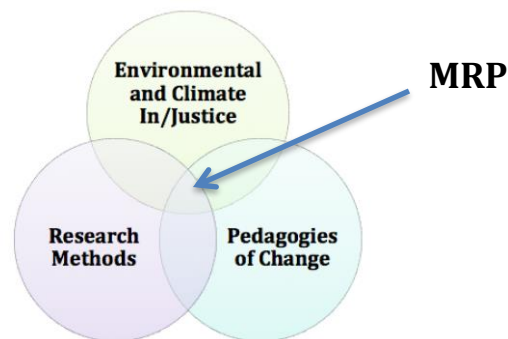
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Foreword:

I entered this program hoping to explore the challenges and opportunities brought about by environmental and climate (in)justice. My interest in such themes was not so much in the quantitative, technocratic measures of pollution, climatic variance and destruction, but rather in the ways in which contamination, exposure, development and violence relate to/challenge cultural continuation, health and wellbeing, identity and displacement. Through questions and conversations, listening and learning, I ultimately undertook a participatory research project (recounted below) focused on both the theory and practice of environmental justice with Indigenous youth based in Tkarronto – an endeavor that brought together the three components of my plan of study.

This project clearly aligned thematically with component one: environmental and climate (in)justice. In weaving together arts-based research techniques and an Indigenous research paradigm (with a careful eye given to ethics), this project also enabled me to demonstrate my learning in relation to component 2: research methods. Finally, I was inspired to undertake this inquiry with Indigenous youth because I was intrigued by both the rise of youth-led resistance across Turtle Island and the emergence of new narratives within these efforts (e.g. protector vs. protestor). This resonated with component 3: pedagogies of change. Moreover, I recognized this rise as complicating uncritical understandings of Indigenous youth (solely) as victims, while simultaneously seeing opportunity in their experiences to explore the degree to which well-being, environmental (in)justice and culture are inevitably entangled. In short, my hope is that this work will illuminate what Anishinaabe scholar and writer Gerald Vizenor (2008) refers to as “acts of survivance”, thereby adding to our nuanced understanding of everyday battles against injustice and enlivening our conversations on how we can move toward justice in a contaminated world.



About the Researcher

I hail from upstate New York (land traditionally occupied and cared for by the Seneca Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy) and am of mixed-European ancestry. Despite concerted efforts to reduce bias, I recognize that this assessment will inevitably be colored by my own experience as a cis-gendered, able-bodied, white settler on these lands. Further, I acknowledge the ways in which these privileges enable me to choose, to some extent, when and how I participate in the environmental justice movement. I do believe, however, that I have an obligation to leverage my privilege in support of these struggles that impact the well-being – to various degrees - of all forms of creation.

Though I brought to this work a strong interest in environmental justice (EJ), my understanding of EJ theory and practice has been drastically expanded through deeper engagement with Indigenous epistemologies and Indigenous peoples willingness to share their lived experiences. For that and much more, I am grateful to all that welcomed me into this space to learn and grow. It is from this perspective that I seek to respect and uphold my obligations to the ancestors and current caretakers of the territories I conduct my work upon: The Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, the Anishinaabek Nation; the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and the Metís Nation.

Abstract:

With concern for the world they're inheriting, young people across Turtle Island are rising up to address local and global concerns. Building from a long lineage of resistance, Indigenous youth, whose communities are often the first to face the consequences of environmental degradation, frequently find themselves on the front lines of these battles. And yet, largely across "Canada", particularly in urban contexts, their voices remain routinely muted. Honing in on the theory and practice of environmental justice – a concept that arguably lays at the nexus of contemporary youth-led pursuits - this inquiry aims to re-center the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous youth who reside in Tkaronto. Weaving together existing literature with the findings of an arts-based workshop series attended by 10 youth, it recounts these experiences in relation to their understandings of enacting change. Emphasizing the cyclical nature of environmental violence, youth point to the importance of land connection, cultural continuity and collaboration in re-establishing balance amongst our relations. Ultimately contending with their capacity as water and land protectors, this paper seeks to advance discussion on how to better support Indigenous youth in their efforts to move toward (environmental) justice while simultaneously striving to ensure that the voices of city-based, Indigenous youth are represented in a parallel pursuit to develop a distinct environmental justice framework informed by Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), legal orders, conceptions of justice and the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples.

Keywords: Indigenous Environmental Justice; Youth; Activism; Participatory; Arts-based

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“Justice is what love looks like in public” - Cornel West

To all those that continually pump me full of love (Dad, Mom, Jenna, Jake, Diana):

Your confidence, your kindness and your care is the kindling to my internal fire - that lights my quiet yet unwavering commitment to creating change.

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And last but certainly not least, I extend endless gratitude to the four-legged, the two-legged, the finned, the winged, and those who wave, blow and/or grow for continuing to carry out their responsibilities despite often being overlooked, overrun and (by many) forgotten.

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Introduction

On March 22, 2018 (World Water Day), fifteen-year-old Autumn Peltier of Wikwemikong First Nation called on delegates at a United Nations General Assembly to “warrior up”. Referencing the long-held practice of conducting oneself with future generations in mind, Peltier offered, “One day I will be an ancestor, and I want my great-grandchildren to know I tried hard to fight so they can have clean drinking water” (Kent 2018).

Running congruent to Autumn’s efforts, young people, as they come of age amid chaos and instability, are rising up to address local and global concerns across Turtle Island (and beyond). Building from a long lineage of resistance, Indigenous youth, whose communities are often the first to face the consequences of environmental degradation, are finding themselves on the front lines of these battles. Perhaps reframing resistance as resilience, these young people are emerging through the cracks of colonial systems – challenging notions of a defeated demographic – to raise their voices with, it seems, no intention of stopping until they are heard.

As summarized by Jaskiran Dhillon (2016), “These young people are bold and brave. They are innovative and imaginative. And they are organizing through an arsenal of tactics that reflect a profound and intergenerational commitment to the land, water and air (n.p.).” Responding to the ways in which communities are re-defining our understandings of justice while re-calibrating our visions for the future, a sub-set of scholars are rallying around the rise of these new narratives, asking questions about how to best sustain and support these efforts. While such theorization might seem bulky in comparison to the agile and active strategies employed by young people on the frontlines, it remains central to the movement’s sustainability, and acknowledges the emphasis Indigenous communities have long-placed on (re)establishing balance between the young and old to ensure collective survival (McGregor 2012).

In an attempt to weave together these parallel currents, this paper contends with environmental justice – a concept that lies at the nexus of youth-led pursuits - as both a theoretical lens and a social movement. In an effort to further situate its exploration in an existing gap, it specifically takes up the task with Tkaronto-based¹, Indigenous youth. Operating under the assumption that it will not be through a viral video that youth create substantial change, but rather through the implementation of their distinct understandings of justice, this

¹ The city now known as Toronto was referred to as Tkaronto prior to the arrival of Europeans. See “A Note on Terminology” section.

paper looks more closely at the values that underpin youth visions for the future than at the strategies they are employing (though the latter will also be briefly touched upon). Accordingly, it begins by simply asking how Indigenous youth who reside in Tkaronto experience environmental (in)justice, and how this has shaped their understanding of the ways we might overcome the associated challenges. Then, assuming a cyclical relationship between experience, understanding, and action, it contends with their unique capacity as water and land protectors to bring about change.

The research is positioned at the intersections of Indigenous theory and environmental justice inquiry, partly because of the absence, or lack of recognition, of an Indigenous environmental justice framework in “Canada”. Reasoning that recognition of such a framework is critical to the facilitation of greater environmental justice for everyone, this work seeks to contribute youth experiences and perspectives to its further development. As such, the interconnected objectives of the paper are as follows:

- 1). It first aims to explore the efforts of Indigenous youth in bringing about greater environmental justice while also beginning to advance discussion on how to better support young people in these pursuits.
- 2). It simultaneously strives to ensure that the voices of city-based, Indigenous youth are represented in the development of a distinct environmental justice framework that draws from Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), legal orders, conceptions of justice and the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples². Though independently important, the construction of such a framework will, hypothetically, also enable future research to feed into the paper’s first intention, as it will join the growing body of literature that emphasizes beginning Indigenous-focused inquiries with Indigenous peoples own conceptions of self (McGregor 2004a).
- 3). And finally, by employing arts-based research methods, it seeks to provide Indigenous youth both with a chance for creative expression and with the opportunity to speak and

² This is an ongoing effort of the Indigenous Environmental Justice Project, a York-based research initiative led by Dr. Deborah McGregor, and will not be achieved solely through this paper.

share directly with the audience of this work – which arguably contributes in no small way to meeting the first two objectives.

Following a conventional format, it opens with context on the conditions facing Indigenous youth in Canada and highlights a few of the many recent examples of youth-led resistance. It then dives into literature focused on environmental justice, beginning with the birth of the contemporary movement before swiftly moving to current contemplations on the importance of uncovering long-held, yet displaced notions of (environmental) justice. For additional context, the paper also offers brief insight into the study location. To meet its objectives, this study facilitated a two-part workshop series with 10 Indigenous youth based in Tkaronto. It, therefore, then recounts the participatory, arts-based research methods that were employed throughout the research process. Finally, it moves into a description of the findings, before concluding with a generative discussion on the future of this field.

A note on terminology

“*Canada*” is placed in quotations to acknowledge both colonial naming patterns and the Land’s pre-colonial existence. Alternatively, Turtle Island, which holds significance across Indigenous creation stories (Johnson 1976), is used to describe the territories now commonly referred to as North America.

The city now known as “*Toronto*” was referred to as “Tkaronto” prior to the arrival of Europeans. Indigenous place names are used in this Major Research Paper (MRP) to acknowledge the historic and continual presence of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, thereby refuting the notion that this land was unoccupied or empty when Europeans arrived. See “Study Location: Tkaronto” below for further context.

The term “*Indigenous*” is used to refer to the first peoples of a place. In the Canadian context, it is used to refer to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. I fully recognize variation across Indigenous peoples and communities and do not use the term to signify a singular identity or lived experience.

The term “*environmental violence*” is used throughout this paper to acknowledge the biological and social impacts of unequally distributed environmental burdens. Drawing on the work of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), the Violence on the Land, Violence on the Body report (2016) defines this term as “the disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm” (Women’s Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network 2016, p.14).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Part I: Indigenous Youth in “Canada”

Perhaps falling prey to the binaries of Western thought, conversation on (and less frequently with) Indigenous youth in Canadian popular media seems to undulate between celebration and crisis (Randhawa 2017; Malone 2018). Amidst curiosity surrounding their leadership in the environmental justice movement remains widespread concern over the social and health disparities plaguing this population. Perhaps amongst the most troubling is the persistency of high suicide rates. In 1995, recognizing the severity of the issue, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) released a report that shocked the Canadian public (Titled, *Choosing Life: A Special Report on Suicide Amongst Aboriginal People*). Though capturing the attention of the nation in the decades since, rates of suicide amongst Indigenous youth have seen little-to-no improvement. According to the Canadian government (2018), First Nation youth remain five to seven times more likely than non-Indigenous youth to take their own lives, while rates amongst Inuit youth remain 11 times the national average. Though a rare occurrence prior to colonization, the severity of the situation has forced several communities to declare states of emergency in recent years (Kirmayer, 2007, Randhawa 2017).

In an unsettling continuation of the long-practiced pattern of pulling Indigenous youth from their families and communities, Indigenous young people also remain grossly overrepresented in the Canadian foster care system. According to the Action Group on Access to Justice (2016), though Indigenous peoples comprise less than 5% of the total Canadian population, Indigenous youth and children represent nearly 50% of kids in care. Further, Indigenous youth remain overrepresented in the Canadian “justice” system – with rates of incarcerated Indigenous youth nearly 8 times higher than those of non-Indigenous youth (Malakieh 2017). Articulating the link between these two problematic patterns, an exploratory report, aptly titled, “Indigenous Justice: Examining the Over-Representation of Indigenous Children and Youth”, asserts, “one of the primary contributing factors for this over-representation [in the justice system] was determined to be family breakdown” (The Action Group...2016, p. 7). Moreover, a recent multi-month investigation into the Canadian prison system suggests that in addition to the passing of new laws that increase the likelihood of sending young offenders to jail, “discriminatory practices and a biased system work against an

Indigenous accused, from the moment a person is first identified by police, to their appearance before a judge, to their hearing before a parole board” (Macdonald 2016, n.p.).

Presumably intertwined with the aforementioned challenges, recent statistics also indicate that rates of addiction and homelessness remain “high” amongst Indigenous youth, particularly those residing in Canadian urban areas, while educational attainment stubbornly stays “low” (Elton-Marshall, Leatherdale, & Mmath, 2011; Stewart 2018; Government of Canada 2016). In fact, a widely referenced statistic suggests that First Nation youth, mirroring the trends of marginalized youth in other parts of the world, are more likely to go to prison than to complete their education (Assembly of First Nations 2011). Moreover, Indigenous peoples remain disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS throughout Canada, with higher rates of inflicted youth than seen amongst other ethnicities (Government of Canada 2011).

Driven by the legacy of colonialism (which remains intimately linked to drug and alcohol dependency, family separation, intergenerational trauma, despair, low self-esteem and fragmented support systems) the aforementioned and complex challenges continue to, at least in part, dictate Indigenous young peoples’ daily realities. In a recent report titled, *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan*, youth from communities in northern Ontario recount the difficulty of combatting this legacy (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth 2014). As they explain,

Growing up, we were impacted by what our parents faced in residential schools. The result is our inability to trust adults, our inability to show or receive affection from our parents and siblings, our draw to alcohol, solvents, and prescription drugs to distract us from our situations, sky-high rates of suicide and damage to our relationships with our elders (p. 31).

They further assert the difficulty of maneuvering a rapidly changing society, implying the difficulty of having a foot in two different worlds, “the modern and the traditional — and yet [remaining] disconnected from both (pg. 13)”.

For Indigenous youth residing in urban areas, feelings of a split identity are often amplified. For a variety of reasons, including increased access to education, employment and health care, Indigenous peoples are increasingly migrating to Canadian cities (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008). As articulated in RCAP’s 1996 report, yet remains true today, “Urban youth do not want to be seen as traitors to their home communities. Many [in fact] have a

deep commitment to helping strengthen and enrich their communities” but they often have little control over the decision to relocate (p. 147). These accusations of betrayal, in combination with the racism that is *still* frequently experienced by Indigenous peoples once off reserve, can heighten feelings of isolation and despair amongst urban youth (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2014). Additionally, urban Indigenous populations in Canada are not only reportedly young, but also very mobile, which further challenges the creation and maintenance of a sense of community and the provision of support services (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008).

Environmental Violence and Indigenous Youth

Though the challenges facing Indigenous Youth, recounted briefly above, remain well documented, given their persistence, one might argue they are not yet well understood. Further, the tendency of researchers to explore each challenge separately reinforces colonial fallacies of individual deficiencies and feeds what Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) classifies as “a Western obsession” with “problematizing the Indigenous” (p. 92). In an effort to avoid repeating this pattern, this paper seeks to instead reframe the aforementioned challenges as inextricably linked to ongoing efforts to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land across “Canada”. Separation from land, a growing body of literature informs us, inevitably challenges the continuity of culture and thereby threatens a strong sense of individual and collective identity (Women’s Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network 2016). Pointing to the impacts of this harm, research indicates that higher rates of youth suicide have been found in communities where opportunities for Elders and youth to interact on the land are limited (Tobias 2015; Chandler & Lalonde 1998). Further exemplifying this perspective, Vanessa Gray (2016), an Anishinaabe-kwe and youth organizer from Aamjiwnaang First Nation, explains,

“For a long time, I didn’t value myself as an Indigenous woman...living on the rez, where you are slowly being killed from the inside out every day, and knowing there’s a problem but feeling helpless because there are so many companies, so many projects going on, people can feel devalued and depressed” (Women’s Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network 2016, p. 18).

Aamjiwnaang First Nation, located adjacent to Canada’s so-called Chemical Valley, is one of the many Indigenous communities on Turtle Island bearing the brunt of environmental burdens (Scott 2008). According to a 2017 statistic, approximately 150 drinking water advisories

remain in place on First Nation reserves (Mitchell 2017). In Alberta, First Nation and Métis communities remain subject to the biophysical and social ramifications of the Tar Sands gigaproject³, the largest industrial project in history, while a precarious network of pipelines threatens to cut through a growing number of traditional territories (Lambert 2011; Catch and Price 2008). Nations in the North continue to battle the accumulation of persistent organic pollutants – the debris of products they’ve hardly (if at all) benefited from - and changing climatic conditions (Tsosie 2007), while Indigenous communities in Ontario resist further destruction to the land via buried industrial waste and large-scale mineral-mining (L.Simpson, J, DaSilva, B. Riffle, P.Sellers 2009). In short, this pattern of directly and indirectly dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land has, as mentioned above, significantly hindered communities’ efforts to “sustain, share and practice Indigenous Knowledge”, as this knowledge is intimately entwined with their access and relation to the land (Big-Canoe & Richmond 2013). Such disruption severs the youngest generation from their cultural practices and traditions, while they worry for the world they are inheriting. And yet, with unwavering commitment, they continue to rise up.

A Youth-led Movement

This spring, a number of youth-led occupations, scattered across Canada, called for reform to the nation’s “justice” system. Known as Soaring Eagle’s Camps, these occupations acted as both vigils for recently lost lives and as sites of youth camaraderie and commitment. Meanwhile, an increasing number of organizations, such as Native Youth Sexual Health Network (Toronto, ON) and Earth Guardians (Boulder, CO), continue to challenge outdated organizational structures by enabling ample opportunity for youth leadership. Employing a similar strategy, youth-led marches, organized by Zero Hour, set to the streets in cities across Turtle Island in July 2018 to demand climate action from their respective governments. Moreover, 21 young plaintiffs, of various ancestries, await their trial date (set for October 2018) in a constitutional climate lawsuit – known as *Juliana v. the U.S.* – that asserts the United State’s government “has violated the youngest generation’s constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property, as well as failed to protect essential public trust resources” (Our Children’s Trust 2018). These strategies, leveraged by social media and complemented by long-practiced but

³ Industrial undertakings with price tags higher than US\$10 billion.

perhaps previously subjugated activist art forms, e.g. music production (see N’we Jinan⁴), are connecting youth in all corners of the world.

Indigenous Resistance

Neither the need for nor rise of youth-led pursuits has emerged abruptly. Since the arrival of settlers, the survival of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island has been threatened. Such conditions have resulted in a long history of resistance against the oppressive regime of the settler-colonial state. In the past three decades, this resistance has come to be largely marked by the Oka Crisis, the Ipperwash Inquiry, the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Idle No More Movement. From month-long occupations to flash mob-style round dances, these resistances have taken many forms (Muskkrat Magaizne, 2013; Recollet 2015). Yet, amongst these more prominent moments, perhaps subtler though equally powerful actions have also consistently been underway.

Guided by ceremony, rather than a narrow political agenda, Grandmother Josephine Mandamin began the first annual Mother Earth Water Walk (MEWW) in 2003. With now more than 10,000 miles behind her, she has covered the perimeter of the Great Lakes in prayer (Mother Earth Water Walk 2017). In acts such as those led and/or inspired by Grandmother Josephine, the emphasis is placed on responsibility. As McGregor (2015) elaborates, the intent of the grassroots water walking movement, which is steeped in notions of respect and reciprocity, is to reawaken “peoples’ understanding of the requirements for maintaining harmonious and reciprocal relationships among beings” (pg. 74). This marks such actions as distinct from those framed by a rights-based discourse. Calling forward the concept of water justice, McGregor (2015) further articulates, undertakings such as the Mother Earth Water Walk allow one to transcend the binary conception of water as a right or a resource and expand notions of justice to include responsibilities to all of our relations (p. 72).

This emphasis on enacting one’s responsibility (over demanding one’s rights) similarly reverberated through a youth-focused panel at the 2016 Indigenous Environmental Justice symposium. Despite the growing popularity of a rights-based environmental movement (e.g. the rights of nature; the right to a healthy environment), the four young, Indigenous women that

⁴ N’we Jinan is a nonprofit organization that brings a mobile recording studio into schools and community centres across North America. Read more: <http://nwejinan.com/about/>

comprised this panel alluded only to their responsibilities – to the water, to future generations, and to their communities. Noting this orientation not only offered further reason to explore youth-led resistance within the environmental justice movement, but also provided reason to situate the youth themselves as key keepers of important knowledge.

Though perhaps popular at present in academia, the exploration (and nurturing) of young peoples' creativity and vigor is not new to Indigenous societies (McGregor 2012). In many cases, though partly displaced by the hierarchal systems of Western thought, youth have long been celebrated within their communities for their fresh perspectives and their abilities to bring new knowledge to the people. As McGregor (2012) uncovers through her study of Anishinaabe stories, "young people, often through spiritual attentiveness or experiences, have introduced new medicines, food and teachings" (p. 105). As these stories uncover, such discoveries have played a significant role in sustaining communities in uncertain futures. Similarly, stories have also revealed the importance of sustaining a balance between the young and old in order to ensure the continuation of life, growth and learning (McGregor 2012). This assertion, in collaboration with widespread concern for the interruption of Indigenous cultural practices and teachings, gave further reason to attend to and amplify the perspectives of young people, particularly in the urban context, where young, Indigenous voices are often muted (Korteweg and Bissell 2015).

As indicated by the literature, "injustice" is not merely a concept but a lived reality for Indigenous youth. Though quite apparent, this assertion offers important framing for the remainder of this work. Given the persistency of colonial systems across Turtle Island, these experiences prove material, influential, and it often seems, unrelenting. And yet, somewhat paradoxically, it is also from this place, it seems, that hopeful understandings of justice emerge. As if to ensure those that come after experience something different, these challenges, or rather those that resiliently refuse to be defined by them, lay a formidable foundation from which a more just future might grow. Below, the intricacies of the challenges facing Indigenous youth as well the ways in which these experiences are shaping their commitment to creating change will be examined through the lens of (Indigenous) environmental justice.

Part II: Environmental (In)Justice –Environmentalism as if beings mattered

As mentioned above, this research builds upon the broad discourse of environmental justice theory. This is, in part, due to the discipline's ability to examine the structural threads of

the aforementioned situation, and to more easily observe the intricacies and interrelatedness of these concerns. Additionally, applying this framework offers the advantage of reframing the challenges associated with environmental violence as Canadian, rather than Indigenous. However, for reasons that will be explained in more detail below, such a framework is not uncritically adopted. Instead, it is considered in collaboration with Indigenous theories on self-determination.

Defined as both a social movement and a theoretical lens, the field of environmental justice (EJ) focuses in on both the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, and the processes that determine those distributions (Scott 2014). As Teelucksingh et al. (2016) explain, “Critical theoretical perspectives in environmental justice uncover the structural, political, and economic processes that are hidden in market decisions (p.383)”. As such, this discipline - which relies on a variety of methods (qualitative, quantitative, spatial and legal) and frameworks (public health, sociology, geography, law, urban planning) - offers opportunity to assess the interconnectivity of both socio-environmental challenges and interventions (Teelucksingh 2017).

The birth of the environmental justice movement is often attributed to a small community in Warren County, North Carolina. In the early 1980s, the residents of Warren County, which, at the time, was comprised largely of African Americans and classified as the poorest county in the state, swiftly mobilized to resist the dumping of highly contaminated soil in their community (Gosine and Teelucksingh 2008). Inciting further analysis into the location of hazardous waste sites throughout the United States, the Warren County crisis along with similar case studies were taken up in a report released in 1987, titled *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States*. As long argued by community leaders, the report revealed racial identity to be the strongest variable in predicting the location of the country’s landfills (United Church of Christ 1987). Understood as an extension of institutional racism, these patterns became proof of environmental racism, or, as defined by sociologist Robert Bullard (1996), a

“policy, practice or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color” (p. 497).

In addition to offering race-based analysis on the distribution of environmental burdens, early environmental justice theory re-conceptualized “the environment” as the places where “people live, work, play and worship”. In addition to challenging Euro-centric constructions of

the human/nature divide, this discipline also, as articulated by Stein (2004), brought concerns for shared well-being “home” (p. 2). Further, the environmental justice field offered an effective lens through which scholars and community members alike could explore interlocking and intersecting social and environmental assaults. Acknowledging such confluence, as well as the influence of other social movements, including the civil and women’s rights, labor, anti-globalization, and anti-toxics movements, both environmental justice theory and the broader social movement became popularly conceptualized as a stream with many tributaries (Cole & Foster 2000).

Environmental Justice in “Canada”

Though influenced by the work of their colleagues and communities to the south, Canadian scholars have expressed hesitancy in uncritically adopting American articulations of environmental (in)justice. As Tkaronto-based sociologists Andil Gosine and Cheryl Teelucksingh (2008) articulate, effective understandings of environmental (in)justice emerge from (and account for) a specific history and geography. Canada’s tenuous, and often understated, history of race relations as well as its discourse of multiculturalism, has long undermined efforts to conduct race-based analyses central to environmental (in)justice inquiries. The aforementioned factors not only distinguish Canadian articulations of environmental (in)justice, but also continue to shape the uptake and development of environmental (in)justice theory in Canada. As a result, Canadian efforts to enable environmental justice remain more piecemeal (Teelucksingh & Gosine 2008; Teelucksingh 2016).

Despite the notable lag in the development of Canadian-specific environmental justice theory, Agyeman, Cole, Haluza-DeLay & O’Riley (2009) suggest there “have been environmental justice movements in Canada for centuries (if not millennia)” (p. 2). Such an assertion recognizes the efforts of communities, namely Indigenous communities, in resisting the far-reaching effects of historic and ongoing settler-colonialism. Further, as articulated by Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor (2018 forthcoming), it acknowledges,

that concepts of environmental justice, including distinct legal orders informed by Indigenous knowledge systems, *already existed* on Turtle Island for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans” (p. 1).

Building from this understanding, the importance of not only challenging un-situated articulations of environmental (in)justice, but also of constructing an environmental justice

framework specific to Indigenous peoples' experiences and Indigenous epistemologies becomes apparent.

Indigenous Environmental Justice

As an emerging field, the concept of Indigenous environmental justice is yet to acquire a concrete (or widely-accepted) definition⁵. However, its development is based on the resounding belief that while important and relevant, conventional environmental justice frameworks do not fully reflect the experiences or worldviews of Indigenous peoples. The development of this distinct framework, therefore, holds significance for several reasons. First, it stresses the importance of starting with Indigenous peoples own conception of self – a key consideration in enabling Indigenous sovereignty, and therefore an essential component in upholding treaty obligations (McGregor 2004a). Second, as demonstrated several times over in Canadian history, solutions conceived of from outside experience and/or worldview too often result in devastating consequences for Indigenous peoples (McGregor, 2018 forthcoming). For environmental justice theory and practice, therefore, to benefit Indigenous peoples – whom, as mentioned, continue to disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental burdens in Canada - it must be rooted in their own experience and worldview. As McGregor (2009) explains, from an Anishinaabe perspective, “relationships based on environmental justice are not limited to relations between people” (p. 27). Rather, they refute the notion, as explained by Marlene Brant Castellano (2008), “that human beings are at the center of the universe and emphasize, “that our lives are nested in complex relationships” (p. 384). As such, assessments of environmental injustice that simply account for assaults on the lives of people, are, at best, incomplete. In turn, efforts to enable greater environmental justice must employ a similar understanding of the ways in which the well-being of all life is, or as McGregor (2009) explains, “all our relations” are, inextricably linked. This notion of interconnectivity and shared responsibility between and amongst humans and our relatives is but one example of the ways in which environmental (in)justice as understood by Indigenous peoples is distinct.

Further, as articulated above, it is widely accepted that history and geography must be accounted for in discussions of environmental (in)justice. Though acknowledged by conventional environmental justice theory, dominant frameworks of this amorphous field are yet

⁵ See ongoing work of the York-based Indigenous Environmental Justice Project.
<http://iejproject.info.yorku.ca/our-team/>

to fully account for the ways in which colonialism has impacted, and continues to shape, the experience of Turtle Island's original inhabitants. As observed by John Borrows (2016), colonialism across Canada (and presumably many other nation states) continues to be "acted upon and reinvented in old and new forms to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples" (p. 142). Vinyeta, Whyte & Lynn, (2016), confound this observation, explaining that experiences of environmental injustice in conjunction with historic and ongoing manifestations of colonialism are a source of unique vulnerabilities for Indigenous communities. Such declarations reinforce the importance of developing an environmental justice framework rooted in the experiences of Indigenous peoples.

Finally, as mentioned above, conventional environmental justice theory offers a framework for assessing the *distribution* of environmental burdens while giving consideration to the presence, or lack thereof, of *participation* and *recognition* in the processes that determine such distributions (Scott 2014). Though expanded upon in recent years (see Schlosberg 2013), this framework, while arguably relevant in the assessment of injustice, has proven inadequate in enabling greater access to justice, particularly for Indigenous peoples living in "Canada" (Dhillon 2017; Coulthard 2014). A brief exploration of these three considerations – distribution, participation and recognition – supports such an assertion.

1. Distribution: As articulated in the Violence on the Land, Violence on the Body report (2016), environmental justice, as defined by Indigenous peoples, can be understood as a grassroots response that values and respects the health of our communities and the Earth (Women's Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network 2016p. 62). This is vastly different from environmental equity, which the report defines as a governmental response that privileges fair treatment in the distribution of environmental burdens. In short, the goal of Indigenous environmental justice, one might simply argue, is not to poison all beings equally, but to stop the poisoning, period. In a conversation about environmental justice (rather than injustice), then, one might argue that distribution becomes immaterial.

2. Participation: In her recent book *Prairie Rising: Indigenous Youth, Decolonization, and the Politics of Intervention*, scholar Jaskiran Dhillon (2016) explores the ways in which the Canadian state perpetuates settler colonialism through inclusionary tactics. Citing Dhaliwal (1994), who asserts, "the privileging of inclusion politics does not account for the ways inclusion can still oppress and fail to alter structures of domination", Dhillon calls into question the

discourse of participation (p. 43). Concluding that alliance building amongst state and Indigenous actors “functions to depoliticize and constrain the field of action around Indigenous politics in Canada”, Dhillon justifiably deflates one’s hope in uncritically calling upon participation to enable environmental justice (p. 194).

3. Recognition: Often conceived of as a precondition to distributive and procedural justice, recognition (within the context of environmental justice theory) refers to the acknowledgement of individual and cultural difference (Schlosberg 2004). However, as argued by Glen Coulthard (2014),

“the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promise to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend” (p. 3).

As such, it can be suggested that this consideration, as with the others, falls short in bringing Indigenous communities, in particular, closer to environmental justice. This brief deconstruction, in conjunction with the preceding three arguments, affirms that, as indicated above, a distinct Indigenous environmental justice framework need be developed not only to properly articulate the conditions of environmental injustice experienced by Indigenous peoples, but also to lay suitable groundwork for enabling greater justice amongst all beings.

The Indigenous Environmental Justice Project

Recognizing the importance of developing a distinct environmental justice framework informed by Indigenous experience and epistemology, the Indigenous Environmental Justice (IEJ) Project came into being. Led by Dr. Deborah McGregor, Canadian Research Chair, Indigenous Environmental Justice, this York-based initiative seeks to situate Indigenous environmental (in)justice not as an offshoot of conventional environmental justice theory, but as a parallel concept grounded in a distinct worldview. Since 2016, the project – employing inductive reasoning - has engaged in dialogue with Elders, artists, land and water protectors, scholars and community members. With research still underway, the IEJ Project continues to make concerted efforts to ensure that voices from various identities (age, gender, occupation, nation, ancestry, etc.) are included in the construction of this framework.

As mentioned above, this paper makes a modest attempt at bringing into the fold ideas and understandings of environmental (in)justice as maintained by, namely Indigenous, youth that reside in Tkaronto. As alluded to above, Indigenous teachings have long emphasized the

importance of balancing the energies and assets of the young and the old (McGregor 2012). This suggests that the development of a distinct Indigenous environmental justice framework must account for the input of younger generations, as they play an important role in the continuation of culture. Though inquiries into youth perceptions of environmental (in)justice have been taken up on or with reserves (Big-Canoe & Richmond 2013), to the best of my knowledge, one is yet to occur in Tkaronto. Given the inherent complexity of exploring Indigeneity in urban environments in conjunction with the tendency of researchers to overlook Indigenous youth who reside in urban areas, these voices remain at risk of being ignored. Acknowledging this gap, along with the distinct social, political, historical, educational and economic factors shaping one's experience in this metropolis, this paper seeks to make a unique contribution to the emerging field of Indigenous environmental justice.

Study Location: Tkaronto

Roughly translated from Mohawk to mean, “where there are trees standing in the water” (in reference to the fishing weirs used by the Wendat), Tkaronto, now commonly referred to as “Toronto” is “Canada’s” largest city (Government of Canada, S.C. 2017c). As the capital of Ontario, over 1/3 of the province’s population resides within city lines (Government of Canada 2017a). Falsely believed, according to linguist John Steckley, to have derived its name from “toronton” - Wendat for “there is a lot” – the city continues, based arguably on ahistorical accounts, to self-proclaim as “the meeting place” (quoted in Gray 2018). Often referred to as one of the most multicultural and multiracial cities in the world, 47% of residents identify as immigrants (Government of Canada 2017a). Estimates on the number of Indigenous peoples residing in Tkaronto range from 23,065 to 69,000⁶, comprising a very small percentage of the city’s overall populace (Government of Canada 2017b). Throughout “Canada”, the Indigenous population is, on average, younger than the non-Indigenous population, and this trend holds true for Toronto (Government of Canada 2017a). It is hypothesized that the lower median age of Indigenous peoples in the city is the result of a shift in likelihood to identify as Indigenous and health inequities that shorten the life expectancy of Indigenous peoples (thereby decreasing the average age of the population) (Government of Canada 2017b).

⁶ Estimates vary due to a number of factors, including but not limited to research methods used and conditions that influence how individuals self-identify.

The first published inquiry into the experience of Indigenous peoples living in Toronto was released as migratory trends - from reserves into urban centers – increased in the latter half of the 20th century (Nagler 1970; Historica Canada, n.d.). Since then, a number of studies have sought to not only better understand the experiences of Indigenous peoples residing in Tkaronto but also to capture the needs and desires of this demographic. Coupled with community advocacy efforts, such inquiries have (at least indirectly) led to the expansion of Tkaronto-based Indigenous organizations. While only nine existed in 1981, there are now over 30 servicing Tkaronto’s growing Indigenous community (Richardson, Dimaline & Blondin, 2002).

Unlike in other Canadian cities (e.g. Saskatoon, Winnipeg) where geographic divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents remain apparent, the Indigenous population of Tkaronto is fairly dispersed (McCaskill, D.; FitzMaurice, K. & Cidro 2011, p. 87). However, a closer look reveals that areas where residency is more heavily concentrated within the city aligns with areas marked by low-income and high incidences of air pollution (ibid). Further, this dispersal, in conjunction with the presence of people from several nations with distinct cultures, languages and traditions, challenges the development of a sense of “nationhood” in the city. As affirmed by Carter and McGregor (2006), in the urban context, organizations are challenged with the dilemma of respecting diverse cultural identities in their efforts to create and maintain a sense of community amongst the urban Indigenous population.

For further context on the experience of Indigenous peoples in Tkaronto, the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) reports can be accessed online. Though criticized for largely excluding Indigenous scholars, the reports released by TARP, commissioned by the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC), offer a broad-based, in-depth understanding of the situation. A revised report complete with a community action plan for Toronto’s diverse Indigenous community is expected to be released in 2019.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Research Framework: Picking up Twin Threads

This research process draws inspiration from an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson 2008). As explained by Wilson (2008), such an approach emphasizes “methods that are more fully integrated with an Indigenous worldview” (p.21). As such, it offers a framework for a more interconnected process and an opportunity for the research to be guided by Indigenous peoples’ own conception of self (McGregor 2004b). Such an approach is imperative if findings are to benefit, or the very least prove relevant to, Indigenous peoples. Further, as has been evidenced by the work of the IEJ Project to date, the layperson, particularly one influenced by Indigenous worldview, has a distinct understanding of environmental (in)justice. To tap into this understanding, it was crucial that this research process build from the knowledge, principles and values long held and practiced by Indigenous peoples. Perhaps most significantly, though, employing this paradigm offered space to neither pathologize nor romanticize the situation it sought to explore (Tuck 2009). Coupling the work of Wilson (2008) with the advice of Tuck (2009), this inquiry, therefore, aimed to “account for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, and the wisdom of lived lives and communities” to paint a more nuanced understanding of environmental (in)justice (p. 417).

Of course, achieving such an objective required intimate interaction with participants. Given the *dirty*, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) candidly asserts, history of research, as well as my positionality, such an exploration, therefore, threatened to quickly become tenuous. In response, I turned to arts-based, participatory methods, to complement this pursuit. As articulated by Yuen, Linds and Goulet (2013), colonial institutions have long operated in ways that suppress, namely Indigenous peoples’, imagination. In an effort to counter such harm, I employed arts-based methods with the hope of creating a supportive environment for imaginative discourse. Further, drawing on Smith’s (1999) assertion for decolonizing methodology, the application of this approach sought to give “voice to things that are often known intuitively” through enabling opportunity for self-reflection and expression (p. 3).

Arts-based participatory research has further been proposed as a more emancipatory and egalitarian approach to both inter and intra-cultural inquiry (Gubrium 2009; Packard 2008). Though not an Indigenous research method, such approaches have proven effective when employed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars with Indigenous youth. An analysis

of a project initiated by Castleden and Gavin in collaboration with Huu-ay-aht First Nation (2008) found arts-based methods specifically successful at “balancing power, creating a sense of ownership in the research, fostering trust and building capacity” within Indigenous communities (p. 1398). Reflections from other arts-based initiatives previously and successfully undertaken with Indigenous youth in “Canada” offered further inspiration in the design of this research process (Flicker et al. 2014; Flicker et al. 2017; Skinner and Masuda 2013; Stewart 2009). For example, Métis scholar Lynn Lavallée (2009) offers a way in which one might adapt participatory research methods to better align with Indigenous peoples’ cultural symbols. In a method she coins Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection (2009), participants, instead of using cameras and pictures, as in Photovoice, use other kinds of symbols (e.g., paintings, drawings, sculptures, crafts, songs, teachings, and stories) to respond to a research prompt (p. 30). Though not fully employed in this study, Lavallée’s work served as an important reminder that participatory, arts-based research methods are a Western-influenced approach often undertaken with non-Western populations (Castledon 2008). As such, it proved important to remain mindful of culturally irrelevant or insensitive facets of this approach. In attempt to ensure that cultural incongruences did not distort the findings of this work, this study also drew inspiration from Flicker and Nixon’s (2014) DEPICT⁷ model for collaborative, qualitative analysis. By giving participants the opportunity to make sense of their own contributions, this approach sought to enhance both the validity of the research findings and the democracy of the research process.

Despite concerted efforts to pull inspiration from culturally relevant and/or more experienced sources in the construction on this project, I remained very aware of my own biases and the ways in which they would inevitably color my work. Therefore, in addition to looking to other scholars for guidance, I also turned to the treaties that govern the land I now occupy to guide the ethics and spirit of this research. The historic Kaswentha, or Two Row Wampum, is one such agreement. As articulated by Deborah McGregor (2004b), the Two Row Wampum treaty belt depicts two separate vessels – a ship carrying the Dutch, and a canoe carrying the Haudonsaunee – “travelling side-by-side- down the ‘river’ of existence” (p.63). As McGregor (2004) further explains, “the people from each vessel are meant to interact and assist each other

⁷ This is an acronym for the six steps involved in the process - Dynamic Reading; Engaged codebook development; Participatory Coding; Inclusive Reviewing and Summarizing of Categories; Collaborative Analyzing; Translating.

as needed” (p.63). Drawing on the work of geographer Nicole Latulippe (2015), I called on this belt as a conceptual framework for my research (p. 8). As explained, this inquiry privileged Indigenous experience and ways of knowing while simultaneously employing qualitative methods informed by Western intellectual tradition. Echoing the assertion of Latulippe (2015), approaching this work via a “ treaty perspective allowed me to pick up these twin threads in a spirit of respect and reciprocity” (p.8). Despite the convenience of this framework, it is necessary to acknowledge that these agreements I refer to were made under a power differential between settler-colonial representatives and Indigenous peoples less pronounced than today (Coulthard 2015).

The Process

As is increasingly the case with community-based research, this project morphed and solidified in collaboration with community partner, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT). It began with a proposal to the Native Canadian Centre’s Youth Council. Though originally proposed as a workshop series geared toward young women, aged 16 to 24, youth council members voiced concerns over exclusivity. As such, the age range for participants was expanded, welcoming youth as young as 12, and all genders were offered the opportunity to join us. Further, though originally designed with the intent of bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth together, the researcher prioritized the engagement of Indigenous youth. Given the strong interest, all spots were filled by Indigenous youth before the opportunity was offered to others. Finally, scheduling of the workshops was arranged based on youth input, obtained via the NCCT Youth Council, and availability of space at NCCT. The series spanned two back-to-back evenings, totaling six hours. Though I made a concerted effort to have an Elder present for the introductory and closing sessions of the workshops (Flicker et al. 2015), due to scheduling – a reality of collaborative research processes – and the high demands on Elders in urban settings, this wasn’t possible

Recruitment:

I began recruiting youth by first engaging with the ENGAB⁸ Youth Program of NCCT. Alyssa Luttenberger, the program’s Mino Maadziwin Coordinator, helped me in distributing

⁸ The name ENGAB is derived from Eshkiniigjik Naandwechigegamig – A Place for Healing Our Youth and Aabiish Gaa Biinjibaayin? – Where did we come from?

information and signing up interested youth. I also shared information on the workshop series with the Urban Indigenous Education Centre⁹, the First Nations School of Toronto¹⁰, Native Youth Sexual Health Network¹¹, and Native Child¹². Participants were offered an honorarium and compensated for travel expenses to acknowledge their contributions to this work. Though promoted as an “arts-based environmental justice” workshop series, participants were not required to have “expertise” in the discipline. Instead, it was assumed that familiarity with the formal term or not, one’s “life experience” would prove their insight relevant. Further, challenging Western conceptions of “activism” (McGregor 2013), it did not require participants be explicitly involved in the environmental justice movement. (See appendix, Image 1, for recruitment poster.)

Ethical Considerations:

Although participants self-selected to participate in the workshops and the objectives were clearly explained, there is always the possibility of discussions around justice triggering distressful memories or experiences. To account for this possibility, arrangements were made to ensure that support was available on site from trained NCCT employees if it was needed. In an effort to further create a comfortable and safer¹³ space for participants, sage was also available for smudging. This was led by various youth participants as needed. Further, ample food and drink was provided and participants were encouraged to grab a snack and take breaks as they wished. Finally, a fellow IEJ Project team member, Jayce Chiblow, also joined us for the

⁹ The Urban Indigenous Education Centre (formerly known as the Aboriginal Education Centre) offer a variety of services with the goal of closing the opportunity gap for Indigenous students in the Toronto District School Board. More info here:

<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/Aboriginal-Education>

¹⁰ The focus of the First Nations School is to offer a tradition-based curriculum that meets the requirements set by the Parent Council, the Toronto District School Board and the Ontario Ministry of Education. First Nations Public School is unique in that Indigenous values, spirituality, culture and Ojibwe language are integrated throughout the school curriculum. Learn more here: <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Find-your/Schools/schno/5360>

¹¹ The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is an organization by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice throughout the United States and Canada. Learn more here: <http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com>

¹² The youth program at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto offers culturally- based, holistic and integrated support services. Learn more here: <https://www.nativechild.org/youth>.

¹³ I acknowledge that not everyone experiences spaces in the same way and that I, therefore, couldn’t guarantee a “safe” space for all participants. I, instead, did my best to create a space where people could be comfortable coming as they are.

workshop series. Originally from Garden River First Nation, Jayce is now in Tkaronto studying for her Master's in Environmental Studies at York. At the time of the workshop series, she was 24-years old and, therefore, helped to blur the line between participant and facilitator.

Using arts-based, participatory methods also brought about a plethora of ethical considerations. Ownership, and, consequently, recognition are frequently cited as important considerations in such projects (Hodgins & Boydell 2014). I allowed individuals that were interested to keep their art pieces, minimizing concern surrounding ownership of these outputs. Further, appreciating that the youth participants – by sharing their knowledge and creativity - were going to offer a great deal to this work, and believing this was, therefore, worthy of recognition, I provided them with the opportunity to be acknowledged (by first name, first and last name or pseudonym) for their overall contributions to the project. It was made clear, however, that this was not necessary. This recognition occurs in the opening of this paper. To avoid conversations of consent every time someone shared an idea, I opted to keep individual contributions anonymous. To account for this, I assigned each participant a code name (e.g. Y1 = youth 1). Below, quotes are attributed via these code names.

Participants were informed at the beginning of the workshop series that their art would serve as data, and that supplemental data would be collected via hand-written notes and audio recordings. I was very clear in telling participants when the audio-recorder was and was not on, and explained from the beginning that it could be turned off whenever a participant wished. These recordings have since stayed solely in my possession on a password-protected device. I transcribed them afterward and used the transcription to guide the supplemental analysis I conducted. In accordance with the provided consent form, they will be destroyed five years after the project's completion. Participants were also reminded at the beginning of the workshop series that they, too, were expected to keep their peers' perspectives and experiences confidential.

Workshop Outline - Workshop 1:

Following a land acknowledgement, the youth partnered up and were asked to introduce one another. I was also sure to introduce myself, identifying where I am from and my ancestry. This exercise was used to warm up the group. We then moved into a simple word-association activity. Large pieces of paper were hung around the room each labeled with one of the following terms: environment, injustice, justice, protester, and (water/land) protector. The youth circled the room writing and/or drawing whatever came to mind when seeing each word. It was

emphasized that, of course, there were no right or wrong answers. Responses were briefly discussed to open up conversation amongst the group and to begin developing general consensus around the significance and meaning of each term (see appendix, Images 2 - 6). Recognizing that the term “environmental (in)justice” is jargon of the academy, I then spent a few minutes discussing “formal” definitions of the concept with the group. Each participant was handed a sheet with 1. Robert Bullard’s (1990) definition of environmental racism, 2. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (2018) description of environmental justice, and 3. The understanding of environmental justice offered in the Violence on the Land, Violence on the Body report (2016). The participants were asked if and how each definition resonated with them. To limit bias, the participants were not originally told where each definition originated. After a bit of discussion, I revealed the source of each definition. Together, we related the concept to contemporary and widely discussed examples of environmental injustice impacting Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (e.g. Standing Rock/Dakota Access Pipeline).

Next, the youth were asked to think about environmental (in)justice as it impacts their own lives. They were invited to construct maps to identify spaces and places in their everyday lives that they might consider sites of environmental injustice and/or pockets of environmental justice. The term “map” was used loosely to guide participants without limiting outputs. While some interpreted the term in its literal sense – drawing grid-like depictions of their “community”, others opted to create mind (or word) maps. A variety of art supplies were available for use during this portion of the workshop, including canvases, paint, markers, oil crayons, paper, plant-based inks foraged and created in Toronto, craft supplies, and needle, thread and fabric. (See sample of maps in appendix, Images 7 – 9.) Each participant was then offered 2 to 3 minutes to summarize his/her/their “map” for the group. The intent behind this activity was for it to be both a brainstorming exercise as well as an opportunity to bring the concept of environmental (in)justice “home”.

Building on the now flowing creativity and conversation, the youth were given the remainder of the time (in workshop 1) to respond to the following prompt:

Based on your experiences, how can we establish more just or balanced relations (i.e. environmental justice) in Tkaronto? What role do/will/can you play in this?

Youth were invited to respond via written, visual and/or theatrical narrative. The aforementioned art supplies were again made available to the youth. Four iPads were also offered to youth that

wanted to respond digitally through video or photo. (See sample of narratives in appendix, Images 10 + 11.)

Workshop 2:

When we returned the following day, the youth were given a few minutes to reorient themselves and wrap up their narratives. Sensing lingering confusion around the “boundaries” of environmental (in)justice (What is it? What is it not?), I spent a few more minutes sharing others’ understandings of the term. Videos produced by the IEJ Project were used to facilitate this process. The youth were then asked to share their narratives with the group. Drawing inspiration from the DEPICT method for collaborative, community-engaged analysis, listeners were handed a sheet with nine boxes and asked to write 2-3 “themes”, or main ideas, that they picked up while listening to their peers’ narratives (Flicker and Nixon 2014). (See appendix for completed sheets, Images 12 – 22.) It was explained that this process was being used so that the youth could assist me in analyzing or “making meaning” of these narratives.

Following these presentations, we shifted into a focus group-style conversation to think about environmental (in)justice in relation to identity (focusing on the participants’ distinct understandings of this term as Indigenous peoples, and variations of experience across gender), responsibilities (youth activism), and knowledge mobilization (where did they want to see this research go?). Finally, we spent our remaining time summarizing and reflecting on the six hours we spent together. Though slightly adapted to fit the context of the study, I drew inspiration for our summative activity from Kim Anderson (2000) who employs Sylvia Maracle’s process of self-definition in her reconstruction of Indigenous womanhood. Using the medicine wheel as a representation of balance (Lavallée 2009), as also done by Anderson and Maracle, the following questions were written across large sheets of paper:

Through the lens of environmental justice,

Quadrant 1: Resist – What is not wanted?

Quadrant 2: Reclaim – What does environmental justice mean/look/feel like to us?

Quadrant 3: Construct – What is our vision? (Or what kind of “environment” do we want to live in?)

Quadrant 4: Act – What are (y)our responsibilities?

It was explained that this was only meant to act as a guide and that we could summarize across/between quadrants if more appropriate. It was again reiterated to participants that they

were playing an important role in helping to synthesize the data gathered throughout these workshops. As a group, they discussed and offered answers based on both their personal experiences and the sentiments shared during our time together. (See photo of responses in appendix, Image 23.)

Analysis:

Following the workshops, I further coded and categorized the collected data (e.g. audio-recorded conversations) using an inductive, qualitative content analysis approach (Cho & Lee 2014). I further drew from a conventional Photovoice analysis to examine the maps and narratives – asking, “What do I see here?” and “How does this relate to the participant’s own explanation of the work?” (Wang 1999). Taking the sentiments shared during the participatory analysis into account, I then sorted the data in relation to time, history, harm, voice/role (of all beings) and access. Though I was hesitant to imply that a hard line exists between environmental injustice and environmental justice, I ultimately identified two interlocking patterns (described in detail below) that emerged from the data. In effort to bring the perspectives of the participants directly to the reader and to indicate that the findings are in fact grounded in the data, I relay a number of direct quotes from the participants in Section 4: Findings. As mentioned above, for reasons of confidentiality, these contributions are attributed via code names below (Y1 = youth 1; Y2 = youth 2, and so on).

Based on the findings of this analysis and taking into account the desires of the youth participants, a follow up gathering was then organized. Influenced by an Indigenous research paradigm, it was designed as a continuation of the research process, rather than a conclusive and discrete next step. However, for continuity and clarity, the insights garnered from this gathering will not be amalgamated into the “findings” section, but rather recounted in the conclusion below.

A Brief Reflection

There seems an overwhelming assumption that research processes always proceed according to plan – perhaps because researchers omit (or simply skim over) that which required significant adaptation. In reflecting on the aforementioned process, I offer the following as lessons learned.

Employing Arts-based Methods: First, though my intent was to create opportunity for participants to respond to prompts in a way that resonated with them, I fear some of the youth may have been overwhelmed by choice. Perhaps this is, for example, why the iPads were not used. In hindsight, I probably could have offered fewer options and fewer supplies, thereby simplifying the process. Further, I was reminded that not everyone responds well to art. While one participant entered the workshop eager to grab a canvas and start painting, others demonstrated a clear preference for simple discussion. Maintaining a balance between these preferences – which required different working environments (e.g. time, noise level) - felt a bit awkward at times. Despite these glitches, I do maintain that the availability of art supplies and the option to respond via art as one wished created a more open and inclusive environment for participants.

Cultural Bias: Additionally, I observed the importance of adapting processes to fit cultural context. For example, drawing on Kassam, Avery and Ruelle's (2016) work, G. Lowan-Trudeau (2016), suggests using "case-based approaches of local relevance" to gain "deeper insight into complex environmental issues that defy a single solution" (p.120). Building from this assertion, I designed a mapping exercise to help myself and the youth dive into their experiences and understandings of environmental (in)justice. As will be described further below, due to what I'd classify, at least in part, as incongruences in ways of understanding, the activity didn't work as I had anticipated, but still resulted in helpful outputs.

Facilitation Skills: The process of participatory analysis also proved less than perfect. Perhaps due to the way that I facilitated the process, it asked a lot of the youth. Though amended - with the intention of simplifying - between workshops, a number of the youth still didn't provide the written feedback I had anticipated. In fact, despite my efforts to explain the importance of this step, I sensed an overall disinterest in this part of the process. Though I was able to adapt by facilitating summarizing discussions, I fear this didn't give the quieter youth an equal opportunity to share their opinions. I hope to continue improving my ability to facilitate this step of the process in the future.

Location: Additionally, in a perfect world, these conversations would have taken place on the land. As urban-dwellers, in particular, we seem to frequently find ourselves confined to small, at times even window-less rooms. Though not imperative, having conversations about (re)connecting to the land while on the land seems more appropriate.

Commitment + Communication: Despite my efforts to seek youth input, offer a fair honorarium, and so on, I had difficulty getting youth to commit to the workshop series and the follow up gathering – particularly ahead of time. For example, I arrived at NCCT on the day of the first workshop with eight youth registered. Two of those eight did not show up, but a number of youth that happened to be at the centre that evening decided they wanted to join us. Though I welcomed everyone to stay, I had to explain that, given my tight budget, I was only able to offer honorarium to ten youth (on a first come, first serve basis). Recognizing the likelihood of absences, I registered twelve youth, though I was only able to offer honorarium to ten, for the second gathering. Ultimately, only seven arrived – and only two of the seven were from the original cohort. Though I fully and humbly acknowledge that these workshops were a very low priority for many youth, particularly when facilitated by someone they didn't necessarily know or trust, I am left with questions on how to (logistically) handle this in the future. Further, one youth that participated in workshop 1, and seemed eager to return the following day, sent a sibling to take their place for workshop 2. The participant had started creating a beautiful painting the first day, which their sibling finished the second day. The sibling expressed hesitation in explaining the meaning of the painting, so I agreed to follow up directly with the original participant. I sent a couple of emails to the participant kindly asking for their interpretation but did not receive an answer. This left me with questions on how to (ethically) account for and include this output. While a picture is included in the appendix, I decided not to take up the piece in detail in the findings, for risk of unfairly imbuing only my (perhaps incorrect) understanding of their work.

External Expectations: Finally, melding an Indigenous research paradigm with the expectations of the academy proved tricky. In employing a more holistic approach, each element of the process somewhat blended into the next, and, therefore, blurred the discrete (in Western terms) steps of the process. As such, this made recounting the process linearly, as is the convention, rather challenging. This, difficulty, however, was easier to maneuver than the challenge of time. I often felt like the timelines of the university, at least at the master's level, didn't allow for the relationship building that is central to employing an Indigenous research paradigm to organically unfold.

Chapter 4: Findings

In an effort to emulate the interconnectivity underpinning Indigenous knowledge systems, the following findings are not divided into discrete themes (Wilson 2009). Instead, foundational findings that coursed through our conversations are first recounted. Then, two more detailed patterns that emerged from the research are revealed in the cyclical ways that they were articulated by the youth. For simplicity, two simple graphics are offered as summative tools below. Of course, the line between these two patterns is neither discrete nor statically determined. As such, they are perhaps best understood as interlocking and entangled.

The participants of this project identified as First Nation, Métis and Inuit and hailed from a number of different communities, though all were currently living in Tkaronto. The group was comprised of two males, two two-spirited youth, and six females. One youth explicitly identified as schizophrenic; another alluded to a diagnosis of bi-polar disorder. The same youth that participated in the first workshop participated in the second with the exception of one youth who sent their sibling in their place on the second day because something had come up. When asked why they signed up for the workshop, the majority of the youth indicated an interest in the topic, while a couple admitted to being drawn in by the honorarium and free food.

Of the ten youth that participated in the original workshop series, only one arrived acquainted with the term “environmental justice”. Despite unfamiliarity with the formal definition, it seemed to pique their interest. Summarizing this sentiment, one youth inquired, “is this like high school or college? We never learned this, but I like this. I think I’d get this” (Y7). As conversation continued, it also became clear that many were highly engaged in the practice – if not the theory – of Indigenous environmental justice. When asked, in a summarizing discussion about their contributions to the environmental justice movement, one youth exclaimed, “WE ARE THE MOVEMENT!” (Y3). In an uproar of laughter, her peers echoed agreement.

Despite their interest and investment in the theory and practice of EJ, the majority of the participants did not find the provided definitions of the term useful. They found them “long” and “difficult to read”. Through further discussion, the participants offered that it was important that a definition of the concept account for “exploitation and discrimination” and that it “connect to the land”, which they felt came through in the definition offered in the Violence on the Land, Violence of the Body (2016) report. Further, similar to conventional environmental justice

theory, the youth emphatically connected the concept to racism and colonialism. This was perhaps best evidenced when a participant concluded, “The root of the problem would be, I guess, well, it's a type of racism” (Y1). Yet, distinct from conventional environmental justice theory, it quickly became apparent that for this group, environmental justice was not something that could naturally be understood in terms of place or discrete location. Rather, it was experienced and understood as pervasive. During the mapping exercise – where participants were invited to identify spaces and places in their everyday lives that they might consider sites of environmental (in)justice – only two youth opted to create a more “conventional” map. Despite this visual depiction, their descriptions still conveyed a more affective understanding of the concept. As a participant who grew up in her community but now resides in Tkaronto explained,

This is where I mostly felt at home [pointing to home community]. I never encountered racism, or nothing, I never worried about my earth getting destroyed - I just thought we're going to be alive forever... but when I took the ride, my first eight hour drive to Toronto - when I drove, I saw construction... and now I don't like going by the water here because it just makes me feel sad on how much our water is hurt (Y4).

Emphasizing this juxtaposition, she tore the map into two. (See Image 7.) Many other youth defaulted to what they referred to as “idea maps”. Using metaphor to depict her spatial understanding of environmental (in)justice, one participant articulated finding safety in the strong roots of her culture and comfort in the grassroots movement for justice. She contrasted this to the experiences of those who also live in the city but who have the privilege of sidestepping the many concerns plaguing her community. As she explained,

I drew a lock on that door because it's inaccessible and [my neighbors] kind of trap themselves in there in their inaction, but they're watching. They just have this comfort that they can buy themselves into (Y5). (See Image 8.)

Another sewed a pouch for her cellphone – using blue fabric to symbolize the water, and her phone, which slipped inside, to illustrate the dumping of waste that happens along Lake Ontario. (See Image 9.) Further reflecting on this pollution, she offered, “people want clean water but they don't want to put in the work” (Y1).

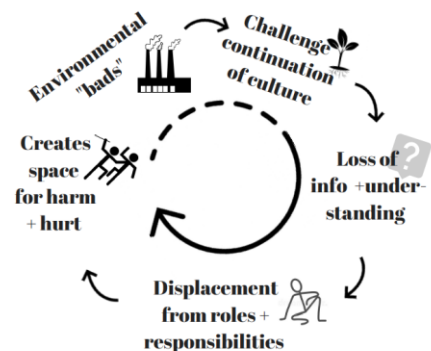
Pattern 1: The Cyclical Nature of Environmental Violence

As we progressed through the activities, interlocking insights, perhaps not best described linearly, continued to emerge. (See graphic 1 for visual summary). Though the intent was for these workshops to remain strengths-based (Tuck 2009), participants were very outspoken on the interlocking impacts of environmental violence. As such, it seemed necessary to honor, though not dwell, in the pain. Further, these conversations proved insightful in situating understanding around the concept. It quickly became apparent that so-called environmental “bads” (e.g. pollution; land/water contamination) were challenging the continuity of cultural practices and fostering disconnection between Indigenous youth and (what in English we refer to as) the environment. According to the youth, this happens in distinct ways in the city of Tkaronto. Citing difficulty accessing ceremony, traditional (and trusted) teachers, as well as traditional foods, youth also alluded to the overlap between cultural and environmental concerns. Exemplifying this overlap, one youth indicated, “It’s not the same – the medicine is tainted here. It’s sick (Y8).” As they went on to explain, this interruption to culture has led to a loss of information, and consequently, a loss of understanding, which they, as young people, are intimately experiencing. This gap has resulted in the displacement of traditional knowledge, which has created space for harm and hurt. Referencing the lateral violence that emerges from the wound of colonial violence, one youth explained, “That’s a sickness that been put upon our people for over 500 years. Genocide has major effects on people and the ways we then interact with one another” (Y3). Another youth demonstrated a different response to this assault. When prompted throughout the workshop series, his responses often reverberated with apathy. As he explained at one point,

“Life is stupid sometimes. It can get really dumb, so I was like screw all that. Fuck it. Just screw it all. I don't care enough to feel offended or not offended. I don't care” (Y7).

Intrigued by these varying responses, we began to have conversation on how the impacts of ongoing environmental violence affect individuals across the gender spectrum differently. Offering a female perspective, one suggested,

GRAPHIC 1



Let's say, for example, they over-sexualize aboriginal women... that's probably the reason why some may be suicidal - they don't think they're worth it because they're sexualized and that can also lead to others abusing each other, because they're angry and upset about this (Y1).

Shifting focus to the experience of two-spirited people, another added,

...high prostitution rates, high suicide rates, there's high addiction rates within two-spirited community because there is so much lateral violence within our community against two spirited people. And how are they supposed to go to a sweat? If you're a woman, but prefer to dress as a man, they want you to wear a skirt or they don't let you go in the sweat... but you don't identify like that (Y3).

Then, speaking of the male experience, it was stated,

Untreated mental health in general [is an issue] but I see it impact men severely, especially in our community because there's that thing where you just have too much pride to ask for help... and accessing those services is super hard. You're on waitlists for how long? And what was our view prior to contact on mental health? We thought maybe schizophrenia was the ability to talk to creator. They have - they're able to speak with spirit, and we're pushing western medicine, rather than fostering those gifts from a young age (Y3).

Classifying the impacts of colonialism as the “disease”, the connection between the gendered impacts of environmental violence and the challenges plaguing Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island (reframed as “symptoms”) are summarized in Table 1 in the appendix. Though I created the table for organizational purposes, the content comes directly from the youth participants.

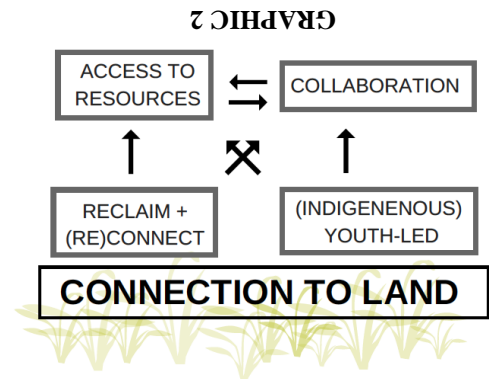
Pattern 2: Moving Toward Environmental Justice

As conversation shifted toward the establishment of more just or balanced relations (i.e. environmental justice), a related yet distinct set of themes began to emerge. (See Graphic 2 for visual depiction.) Underpinning these discussions was the assertion that to begin this process, we must first come into balance with the land. As one participant explained, “Everything comes from land... and so I feel like if we want to make a balance with anything, we should come into balance with the land first” (Y4). Further emphasizing the importance of fostering this connection, another youth added, “We have to stop looking at land, though, like we own it. No

one owns the land. No one *can* own the land. They own us - we go back to them at the end of the day, we have to remember that” (Y3). To explicitly remind us of the Land’s agency and “being-ness”, she drew eyes, a nose and a smile upon a hill and a tree. (See Image 10.)

Building from here, the youth expressed the importance of reclaiming their culture and relearning their teachings. They classified this process as both a responsibility and an opportunity, and further emphasized the importance of keeping their efforts youth-led. Referencing her “ancestral connection to the land”, one youth explained,

I think what I bring to the EJ movement is my voice, and you know speaking my truth as an Indigenous youth, and speaking for those that can't speak, and educating those that don't know. That is my capacity - and that's what I bring to the table... just walking in those 7 grandfather teachings, and living that in all aspects of my life, with the land, with my relations, with people, with everything (Y5).



In order for a youth-led movement to be sustainable and successful, though, participants identified two complementary matters: collaboration and access to resources. They acknowledged the importance of bringing non-Indigenous youth, and people other than youth into this work. “It affects them too, and they have a role to play” (Y8), one concluded. Another participant, reflecting on her responsibilities, explained, my contributions “shouldn't be unique - because that should be the first thing that you learn - it shouldn't be unique for someone to protect the water” (Y4). Building on this, another added, inviting ALL people to understand the land from an Indigenous point of view is super important... because I do believe we all, regardless of our skin color, share that teaching – to respect the land... it's just lost, right?” (Y3). In further recounting the importance of responsibilities, one participant pointed out, “animals take care of the earth, too, it’s not only us”(Y2). Retelling a story she heard from an uncle – in which a snake, at ki’s¹⁴ own demise, assisted a medicine man in alleviating a patient’s pain - another participant offered, “I guess it's because the snake knew he had a job to do, and he

¹⁴ Arguing that “it” robs a person of selfhood and kinship, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015) suggests using “ki” (a gender neutral pronoun) “to signify a being of the living Earth”.

wanted to do that job” (Y4). Emphasizing the importance of understanding cooperation in relation to all of Creation (or beyond the human realm), the youth again indicated their distinct understanding of environmental justice.

While the overall tone of the conversation on collaboration remained inclusive, it did become apparent that this work did not only entail the development of new partnerships, but rather, needed to also include the rebuilding of strained relationships. When asked during the opening activity what the participants associated with the concept “injustice”, one responded “white people” (Y4). During later conversations, participants shared unsettling anecdotes about encounters with individuals of authority – particularly doctors and police officers in the city.

Access to resources, particularly space to connect with the land, came up as an important consideration for the city of Tkaronto. As one participant envisioned,

we need a “plot of land where we can create some sort of little Indigenous corridor...where we can have a park, a recreational park, where we can grow our traditional medicines, and possibly conduct ceremony and build our own lodge, in the core of Toronto, so you're able to practice ceremony on the land...instead of on a roof top” (Y3).

Connecting these two considerations, a participant explained, “we have a hard time [as Indigenous youth] getting our voices heard”, but we might be more effective if we “create partnerships with the right people” (Y6). Further reflecting on the process by which resources are allocated, a youth added, “when you don't come from power, it's hard to gain it” (Y5). Envisioning the implementation of a different power axis - perhaps the one employed in a movement led by Indigenous youth - she added, “it's really important to not say that these voices have more power, but to say that every voice has power” (Y5).

In short, the participants of this workshop made clear that despite the challenges that they and their communities continue to face, they are committed to creating change, and central to that change remains connection – to the land, and to one another. Though displaced by colonialism, curtailed by industrial ruin and complicated while residing in an urban area, their visions for the future stem from understandings of justice that run deep in their culture and community. As one youth commented, it’s “in her blood” (Y5).

Chapter 5: Discussion

“And the funny thing is, [those in power] think they're fixing it but they're just pulling little things out - like little threads that are connected to it...” (Y1)

“The Threads” of Environmental Injustice

The pattern depicted in Graphic 1 (above) remains consistent with parallel inquiries into environmental violence. As implied by the participants of this study, and supported by corresponding research, the cyclical nature of these challenges often enables the harm to fester (Women’s Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network 2016). This understanding illuminates that the myriad concerns appearing to disproportionately impact Indigenous youth in the city of Tkaronto – addiction, incarceration, mental health, homelessness – might best be described as the “debris” of colonialism (Stoler 2013). Such an articulation not only demands the aforementioned concerns be recognized as Canadian (rather than Indigenous), but also offers insight into less-frequently leveraged points of intervention. Though the work of agencies filling the immediate needs of the community ought not be discounted, simply addressing the side effects – or “the little threads” - does not tend to the bifurcated root of the problem. In fact, one might argue concentrating support solely within this cycle of harm enables the problem’s one rhizome (racism) to become more firmly rooted – for it is, of course, much easier to discount Indigenous peoples’ agency, resilience and intelligence when attention is placed on the disproportionately high rates of addiction, incarceration, mental health and homelessness plaguing the community. While these services remain incredibly important, the findings of this research, echoing the assertion of Tobias (2015), suggest the importance of ensuring interventions designed to assist Indigenous communities recognize the multiple factors that intersect to influence Indigenous well-being (p. 187).

Picking up on the persistency of this challenges while poignantly summarizing an inherent objective of the ongoing colonial project, a participant further offered,

“so much of our culture is based in respect for the land, and when you take those ties away and that tradition away, you're taking away that ability to be, you know, good to the land, which is ingrained in the teachings” (Y5).

This articulation not only implied the ineffectiveness of “symptom-based” systems of change but also asserted a connection between land and wellness, regardless of geographic location. As Big-Canoe and Richmond (2013) remind us via a related study, “herein lies an important and often

overlooked inter-relatedness; the health of the land is inseparable from the health of those whose existence relies so indelibly on it” (p. 128). As the participants of this study made clear, everyone’s existence - urban or rural, Indigenous or not – relies on the land, suggesting ki’s wellbeing can no longer be ignored.

“Pulling the Rope” - Supporting and Sustaining a Youth-Led Movement

“...But they're not pulling the whole rope, they're just pulling out little things...it's a much bigger problem than they think” (Y1).

Pulling this metaphorical rope, thereby breaking from the cycle of environmental violence, begins, as articulated by the youth, with connection to the land. Such an assertion distinguishes the participants’ insight from conventional environmental justice strategies that focus primarily on policy reform and prioritize human well-being. Conventional strategies, though critical in producing incremental change, frequently remain confined by neo-colonial systems and thought processes. Conversely, interventions grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems, as demonstrated by the insights recounted here, offer an alternative and exponentially larger understanding of interconnectivity. At the risk of oversimplifying, such interventions, one might summarize, sprout from balance, love and relationality, or the values long-practiced in Indigenous understandings of justice (McGregor 2009), rather than a human-centered discourse focused predominantly on equity.

Though connection to land requires access to land, access to land, parallel research reminds us, is not in and of itself sufficient (Big-Canoe & Richmond 2013; Priest et al 2009). Rather, it is “strong social relationships at the community level,” as Big-Canoe and Richmond (2013) state, that “are vital for making the opportunities possible for sharing, practicing and preserving Indigenous knowledge”(p. 133). As explained by Noelani Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (2017), the continuity of Indigenous knowledge via sharing, practicing and preserving tradition is often an overlooked component in the process of “enacting alternatives to settler colonial, capitalist enclosures” (p. 186). In other words, it is through this sharing, practicing and preserving that we enact Indigenous understandings of environmental justice. Given participants concern with access to “traditional and trusted teachers” in Tkaronto, such an assertion becomes particularly relevant. Though perhaps riddled with complexity given the city’s size and variances across Indigenous traditions, it seems an opportunity ripe for further exploration.

In somewhat of the same vein, the structuring of social relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples also warrants further contemplation¹⁵. Providing hope, other projects have indeed proven that there is potential for “communities with a history of cultural misunderstanding and political conflict” to come together to steward a shared environment (Holtgren, M.; Ogren, S.; Whyte, K 2015, p.2). Implemented by the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians in the Big Manistee River Watershed, one such project, which invited government and non-profit representatives, and settler Americans to ground sturgeon restoration efforts in Anishinaabek conceptions of sustainability, enabled participants to “develop their own genuine relationships to nonhuman species [and] expand or adapt their worldviews to others” (ibid). It further highlighted the potential for collaboration around land connection. In conversations about collaboration, however, contemplation on leadership becomes critical. Though participants consistently voiced a commitment to unity, they simultaneously held strong in their expressions of leadership. The weight they (as Indigenous youth) placed on leading the movement seemed to stem not from a desire to simply flip the existing power dynamic, however, but to ensure that strategies of change were grounded in their understandings of justice. As contemporary literature explains, such an intent, which “seeks to transform settler colonialisms for all who are caught within such relations of violence” is substantially different from a settler futurity that is defined by “containment, removal and eradication” (Goodyear-Ka’ōpua 2017; Tuck & Gatzambide-Fernandez 2013).

A brief exploration into how young people are conducting this struggle offers preliminary insight into how we, collectively, might enable Indigenous futurities (which inherently attempt to uproot racist and colonial constructs). As defined by Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy (2014), the concept of futurities is used to signify “more than the future” (p.16). It indicates “how human narratives and perceptions of the past, future, and present inform current practices and framings in a way that (over)determines what registers as the (possible) future” (ibid). The emergence of the “protector” narrative offers a grounded point of entry into the possibilities of Indigenous futurities. Opening opportunity for the enactment of various forms of action, the term “protector” has become associated with the fulfillment of one’s duties. Unlike the exclusionary, firm lines

¹⁵ This section specifically focuses on alliance building between peoples of aligned intent. Though the participants’ concern over historically-damaged relations with persons of authority (police officers and doctors) need also be taken up, such repair, it seems, might require further contemplation then can be offered here.

historically formed by protestors, the protector is understood to create space for dialogue (Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2017). Such a distinction has been embodied by the youth engaged in Tkaronto's Soaring Eagle's Camp.

Tkaronto's Soaring Eagle's Camp: A Case Example

In March 2018, following the acquittals of the men charged with the deaths of Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine, Indigenous youth and their allies set up peaceful occupations, known as Soaring Eagle's Camps, across the country. Acting as both a vigil for stolen Indigenous lives and a site to advocate for change to the "justice" and child-welfare systems in Canada, the Tkaronto-based chapter held strong for 83 days outside of the provincial courthouse¹⁶. On a cold and rainy evening in early April 2018, two IEJ team members and I huddled in a tent with four young men that demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the camp. Over cups of sweet grass tea, we discussed the motivations behind their work, their visions for justice, and ways to support the youth-led movement.¹⁷

Demonstrating grit, humility and a "just do it" mentality, the youth exercised their right to conduct spiritual practice and peaceful assembly, as recognized by the Ontario Human Rights Commission under the Charter of Rights and Freedom, in the establishment and maintenance of the camp. Once established, the youth were approached by other social movements and organizations, who reportedly expressed interest in joining forces. However, the youth remained adamant in their independence, which allowed them to avoid bureaucratic obstructions and ensure that youth voices were not overshadowed. While this may have limited their access to resources (financial and otherwise), it also allowed the youth freedom to enact change unencumbered by the others' mandates.

Operating as a "porous" occupation, a strategy increasingly demonstrated by "protectors" (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2017), the youth enthusiastically welcomed people of all ages and ancestry. This offered opportunity for conversation and a new kind of community to develop, which

¹⁶ The following section is informed by a handful of visits to the camp and conversations with members of camp's youth council. I recognize that further exploration of the camp's organizational structure (e.g. decision making processes) might be useful to groups wishing to emulate this approach but this is not something that I can fully or confidently speak to.

¹⁷ Hear directly from youth via a short video created by Nasreen Husain, IEJ Research Assistant: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVecp_PPfd0&feature=youtu.be

sixteen-year-old Caleb Woolcott (2018), an ally who grew up in Tkaronto, deemed his greatest hope for the occupation. As he explained to us,

I want to see community being built. I think the courthouse that we're sitting in front of is an ugly community - if you can call it that - that's meant to drive people apart and to divide and conquer. And so to take space back from that system and to build our own relationships, our own working relationships so we get stuff done together, is pretty amazing and inspiring.

As an occasional visitor to the camp's socials, I routinely found the atmosphere inclusive, hopeful and humble yet mighty – which I credit to the efforts of the Indigenous youth who remain at the helm of this initiative. In May 2018, the youth council decided to transition the camp to a pop-up style occupation. This has enabled the youth to continue to connect with the public during key moments (e.g. the provincial election; Canada Day), without overextending the small group that has remained committed to the camp. When asked how others could support their efforts, the youth resoundingly responded with two simple instructions: listen, and join! As Tyler Bryan, summarizing the sentiments of his peers, stated during our chat in April, “Come out and have a conversation with us. Meet the people who are here. And if you want to get involved, just get involved. Come see what we're doing”. Knowing these youth, I imagine, despite the camp now taking a new form that the invite still stands.

Contributions to an Indigenous Environmental Justice Theoretical Framework

Demonstrated above, Tkaronto-based Indigenous youth seem to already be armed with a distinct environmental justice framework (though perhaps not self-expressed as such). It quite apparently stems from Indigenous conceptions of justice – in which all of creation, humans included, is understood to be in relation (Kimmerer 2013; McGregor 2009). As recounted numerous times, this distinguishes the participants' understandings of justice from conventional EJ notions and interventions that focus solely on human well-being. While it is suggested that further conversation on this theme be undertaken with young people, in other Canadian cities and on reserves, it seems apparent that given research conducted to date, young people are confident and curious to learn and lead in culturally grounded ways.

Despite this hypothesized consistency, additional research may uncover experiences and perspectives distinct from the ones offered by this study. These distinctions were even beginning

to emerge within this research – particularly as conversation advanced into gender-specific experiences with environmental (in)justice. Yet this seems an important finding, rather than a shortcoming, of this work. If an Indigenous environmental justice framework is to truly build from Indigenous experience and worldview then it must, as with any strong framework, pick up on the common themes that run through the discourse while simultaneously remaining inclusive of varied experiences (e.g. across genders) and understandings of justice (e.g. across generations).

Finally, given youth focus on re-prioritizing connection to land, it may prove helpful for future research (from the IEJ Project or elsewhere) to further explore the process of “reconciliation” with all relatives. Ideally, such inquiries can build from the places where, in small pockets of Tkaronto, this work is already underway. For example, Naadmaagit Ki, or Helpers of the Earth, is a Tkaronto-based, Indigenous-led restoration initiative that is focused on restoring native eco-systems along the Humber River and properties throughout the city. Further, through FoodShare Toronto’s Indigenous Food Access department, an inter-cultural, youth food justice program is currently underway. Titled “Learning from the Land”, the project, which was open to youth of all ancestries, offers participants the opportunity to learn with a variety of Indigenous knowledge keepers. In addition to sharing historical, cultural, botanical and food knowledge, it also seeks to build community amongst the participants.

Chapter 6: The Eighth Prophecy

“That's our 8th prophecy, our youth are going to stand up and we're all going to be equal....or else they're just going to destroy us” (Y2).

During the first workshop series, the youth participants were both excited and explicit about wanting to connect with other youth to further discuss environmental (in)justice as well as cultural revitalization, and the connections between these two themes. The youth also asked for what they classified as “interactive” outputs to the research. As such, a follow-up gathering was planned. All participants were invited to contribute to this process, and one, Epiphany Hunt, eagerly accepted my offer to become a youth advisor for the gathering. This gathering was nested within the 2018 *Connecting Culture and Childhood Project* symposium, which brought together young people and researchers from 5+ countries to discuss the importance of cultural preservation and revitalization through art practice. With the support of the symposium, seven Indigenous youth – two from the original research cohort – that reside in Tkaronto joined young people from Venda, South Africa, Kimberley, Australia, Uganda and the Greater Toronto Area in an exchange of arts practices and a fluid conversation around how learning and sharing culture (re)connects us to the Land and the Waters. With the support of the Indigenous Environmental Justice project, a 19-year old Anishinaabe artist, Patricia Martin, used these interactions as inspiration for a painting. Though this idea – of creating art that captures an evolving conversation - stemmed from the practice known as graphic recording (Boydell et. al 2012), significant adaptations – such as style of art - were made to better align the process with this project.

The painting, titled “Mino Bimaadiziwin” by Martin, emerged as visual record of the concepts explored throughout the research process. Though inevitably influenced by the artist’s Anishinaabe ancestry, it encapsulates shared values and desires, but most importantly, centers youth perspectives. With eye-catching colors, a layered background of gold, olive and scarlet seeks to signify the warmth and love that reverberates from cultural revitalization – regardless of nationhood or ancestry. Featuring seven ancestors each walking in the *right* direction, the painting leaves notable *space* for future generations. The pictured relatives, each connected to the Land in a distinct way, convey a commitment to those yet amongst us through the symbolic offering of an open palm. Emphasizing the responsibilities we each carry, the painting depicts –

by modeling the figures after various participants at the symposium - the coming together of young and old, man and women, Indigenous and settler, and ancestor and descendent in pursuit of this shared vision. (See Image 24 in appendix. Bio for artist also included.)

Carrying forward the notions of continuity and collaboration, the hope is that this painting will now travel to various sites as a way to continue these contemplations and to engage more people, particularly youth, in similar conversations. The artist and I are in agreement that the content and meaning of the painting may morph as more young people are brought into these discussions.

Additional efforts were made to share the findings of this work in ways that coincided with an Indigenous research paradigm. For example, two participants from the original research cohort were invited to co-present on the topic of Indigenous environmental justice at a local high school's 2018 eco-conference. Despite concerted efforts, the participants' work/school schedules ultimately did not allow them to join the IEJ Project for the presentation. Further, while planning the second gathering, I invited participants from the original research cohort to share their own cultural practices at the symposium. One excitedly signed up to facilitate a workshop on Anishinaabe social dancing but had to cancel at the last minute because of a family emergency. Finally, both the original workshop series and the follow up gathering were designed with the intent of bringing youth together to share their knowledge amongst one another. In this way, "knowledge mobilization" was arguably built directly into the research process.

Conclusion:

"We're not going to be put at the bottom of the list - if you're not going to listen to us now, then we'll wait until you're ready to listen to us. We'll wait right here" (Y3).

In the above pages, I recount the findings of an arts-based workshop series that engaged 10 Tkarronto-based Indigenous youth in conversation about environmental (in)justice. As articulated in the introduction, I weave these findings with existing literature to meet a three-pronged objective. Admittedly limited by the absence of directly related inter-generational perspectives, the timelines of the university, and my inevitable cultural bias, I acknowledge the ways in which each objective, though reached, remains ripe for further inquiry.

My first intention was to draw greater attention to the unwavering commitment Indigenous youth have – in various ways – demonstrated in their crusade for change. In contemplating youth-led resistance within the EJ movement, I demonstrate the ways in which such actions stem from intimate and relentless experiences of injustice. I further leverage the importance of connection – to one another, and to the lands and waters, both of which inevitably prioritize cultural continuity – as a catalyst to change. Further research might pick up on strategies for reestablishing historically strained relations or explore the ways in which enacting one’s responsibilities both challenges and clashes with colonial systems. Either might be considered as playing a central role in the (re)development of critical environmental education curricula. I further sought to contribute to the ongoing development of an Indigenous-informed environmental justice framework by working with an often-overlooked segment of the Indigenous population. This work demonstrated that Tkaronto-based Indigenous youth possess a distinct understanding of environmental (in)justice and that the insight, energy and curiosity, as long conveyed by Indigenous teachings, of young people remains critical to our future learning and growth. As such, I hope this inquiry not only encourages others to consider taking up future desire-based contemplations with these bold and brave young people, but also highlights the significance of constructing an Indigenous environmental justice framework. It is with hope that such a framework will guide future research toward enabling greater environmental justice for all beings. Further, by creating space for creativity and self-expression, achieved through the implementation of arts-based research methods, I hope to have both advanced the aforementioned objectives and provided opportunity for participants to directly convey their contributions to this work. Though still an unraveling approach, centering the participants’ voices in a culturally relevant way seems to have potential in protecting shared perspectives from further distortion. Finally, I extend my hope that, in some small way, this paper through meeting all three of these objectives will encourage more people to listen to and join, as encouraged by Tkaronto’s Soaring Eagles, our youth as they rise - for their voices not only demand to be heard, but recognized as a beacon of light for our collective survival.

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Appendix

Image 1: Recruitment Poster

The poster is a vertical rectangle with a yellow background and a blue border. It features a central white box with a blue border containing the main text. The text is in a mix of bold and regular fonts, with some lines in blue. The overall design is clean and professional.

**ARE YOU:
INTERESTED IN THE
ENVIRONMENT? AN
ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE?**

The Indigenous Environmental Justice Project, in collaboration with the ENAGB Youth Program, is looking for Toronto-based, Indigenous youth (12-24 y/o) to participate in an arts-based research project.

You will be asked about your understanding of justice and to creatively explore your relationship with the environment.

We will meet from 5pm - 8pm on:
Monday, March 12, 2018
AND
Tuesday, March 13, 2018

We ask that you commit to BOTH sessions. You must pre-register to participate.

Location: Downtown Toronto - address to be provided upon registration

Participants will be compensated for their time (\$80) and for travel. Food and drink will be provided.

This study has received ethics clearance from the York University Research Ethics Review Board.

For more information or to sign up, please contact Meagan at iej@yorku.ca or 585-705-1246.

8 slots available - Participants accepted on a first-come basis.

The IEJ Project @TheIEJProject <http://iejproject.info.yorku.ca>

Image 2 – 6: Word Association Activity

Injustice

- BROKEN TREATIES
- NO CLEAN WATER
- DEFORESTATION
- OVER HUNTING/FISHING
- The chest of food with no food - LIES
- All white jump members
- laws or just on ethnicity and age
- unfairness
- white people
- prioritization of profit
- short sightedness
- exclusion

LIES

Justice

- System's that support the cause → TRUTH.
- using laws that are based in justice and respect, feasible and understandable and possible to practice
- fairness
- moral decisions
- inclusion
- priorities
- listening, acting
- preservation, restoration
- honour
- equality

- tucked up society

Environment

- Recycle used materials
- plant trees
- clean - if beach
- asking the people to make clean the environment
- Environment is Home
- habitat
- land
- water
- inhabitants
- life
- Mother Earth
- world
- Connection to the land.
- Everything connected.
- finned, winged, four-legged, two-legged
- water bears

OIL PIPE LINE

Protester

Standing UP

- Peaceful fighters
- laws of freedom and what is being to the environment and age group
- Fighting for what you believe in
- Standing up

- PIPE LINE

Protector

- Defend. - safe Death
- warrior societies
- signs and laws to protect people and respect, on
- Stopping time from repeating itself.
- protecting

- Eagle

Image 7-9: Sample of Participants' "Maps"



Image 7

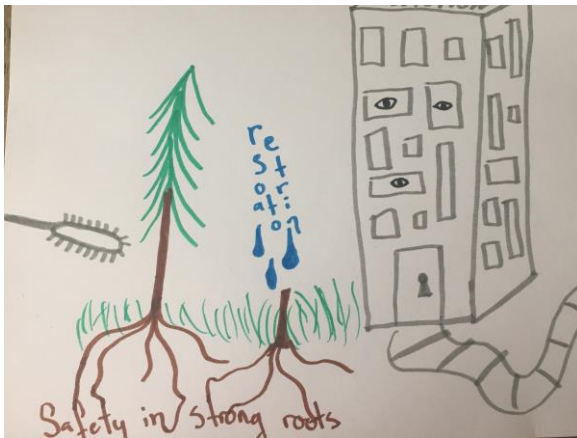


Image 8



Image 9

Image 10 +11: Sample of participants' responses to primary research prompt

Based on your experiences, how can we establish more just or balanced relations (i.e. environmental justice) in Tkaronto? What role do/will/can you play in this?

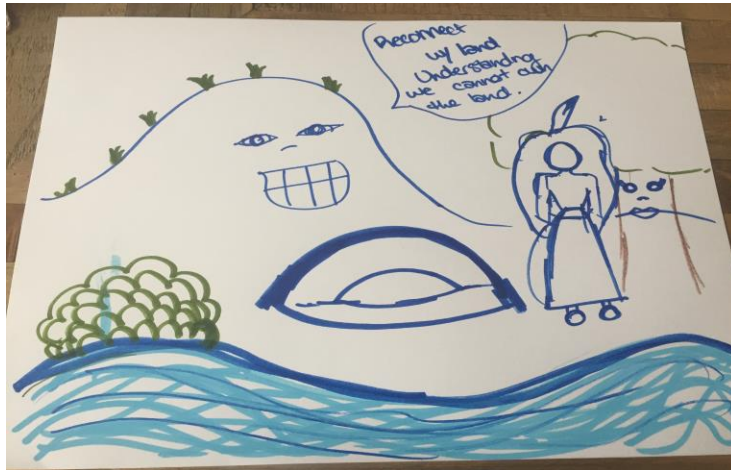


Image 10

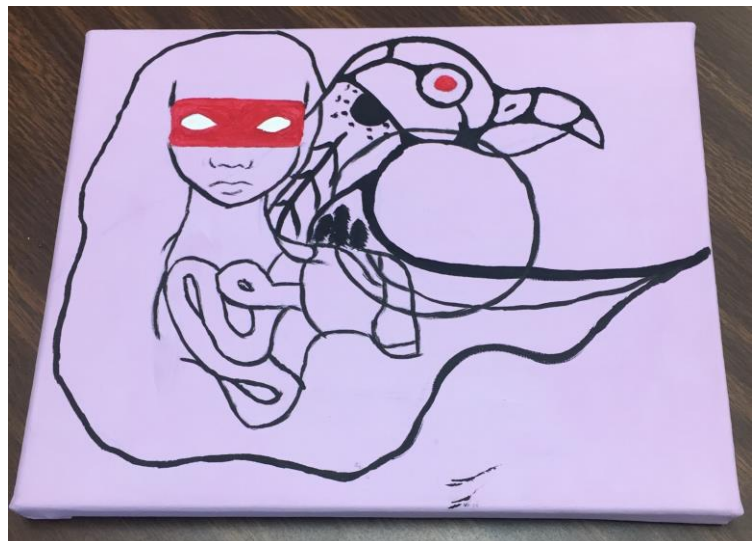


Image 11

Table 1: Gendered Impacts of Environmental Violence

Gender	“Disease”	“Symptom”
Male	“Untreated” and/or mischaracterized mental health	Homelessness Addiction MMIM Violence
Two-Spirit	Gifts are forgotten Identity is misunderstood Excluded from ceremony or forced to participate in a way that doesn’t feel right	Suicide Difficulty accessing health care Addiction Prostitution
Female	Displaced from traditional role(s) Hyper-sexualization + characterization by colonized media sources	Prostitution Victim of domestic violence MMIW

*This table represents the perhaps less obvious impacts of environmental violence. It does not claim to be comprehensive but instead relays the impacts that were identified by the youth participants.

Image 12 – 22: Participants' Analysis Charts

*Names are blacked out for anonymity

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

**QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?**

1. partnerships collaboration giving voice	2. "Canada first"/land who are the right leaders? how do we make decisions?
3. human selfishness environmental exploitation sustainable ways of life	4. pollution inaction apathy
5. decolonization land has spirit teachings, share knowledge of land Indigenization	6. medicines learning

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

7. food - access, means of production, sustainability	8. "get political" protests ineffective
9. clean water environmental restoration smaller human footprint on environment	

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

1. 1. Elect for a Better person 2. Have Connection to land \longleftrightarrow 3.	2.
3. - Value the earth's well being - don't exploit the earth? - learn how to "take what you need"	4. - Make homes for homeless people? -
5. - reconnecting w/ the land - Shared vision - access to medicine - advocacy	6. - reverse harmful effects against the environment - focus on growing food -

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

7. <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Go political- Stop protesting	8. <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Clean water- plant trees?- Less artificial product
9.	

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

1.	2.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↳ healthy ↳ equal - ally - work together for environment - connection to land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of access to traditional foods/medicine
3.	4.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of effort by most - specific reference to water - pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working together to all people. - land - access, reconnecting, reclaiming responsibilities, sharing knowledge - access to medicines - maybe an indigenous urban farm/park, where you can do ceremony grow medicines. - give people opportunity to understand indigenous perspective.
5.	6.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - grow our own food, desire to live off the land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>clean</u>. Restore, cleanse. - work together - <u>action</u> - Everyone participate.

YOUTH

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

7. [redacted] Canadian - establish relations - political	8.
9. [redacted] - clean water - less artificial development + more efforts to restore healthy lands.	

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

1. [redacted] Partnerships with corporations	2. [redacted] focus on our country - better ourselves first - connect to the land
3. only take what we need	4.
5.	6.

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

1. Keep fresh air and green the water and plant seeds for vegetation	2. Open clean air and green scenery and recycle in a cleanse sense
3. Work together to plan and make towards a agreement with the community	4. Volunteer and volunteer provide a committee and to your part in the environment world.
5.	6.

March 15th

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?



1. Partnerships	2.
3. ONLY Take what we need - We are not more important the the earth world	4.
5.	6.



Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

1. • partnerships • Share Ideas • allies	2. • Proper judgement • Shared opinion • Connection to land/water
3. • Proper judgement • Value earth or respect • Greed = earth dying	4. • • •
5. • •	6. • • •

Instructions: Write 3 themes/ideas that stick out in your peer's story.

QUESTION: How might we establish more just or balanced relations? (What DO we want for our environment? And how might we get there?)
What role do/will/can you play in this?

1. -Share story -ANS -partnership	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.

WE ARE THE MOVEMENT



Artist Bio:

My name is Patricia Martin, I am Turtle clan. I was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario; my family is from M'Chigeeng, Sagamok, and Newfoundland. In high school I used various art mediums, but my favourite is paint. The fluidity of paint is freedom. I have never met a paint I didn't like. I once beat a tube of thick, dry watercolour paint over a canvas for nine hours straight and made a Michelangelo-esque portrait of Zayn Malik.

My belief is that art can be the foundation of a community. Sharing different perspectives and opinions will be the basis for creating change. I aim to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Everything I do is with the intention of building a brighter future.

Contact me!

Email: peachykwe.business@gmail.com

Call/Text: 647-390-9803

Image 24: "Mino Bimaadiziwin" (2018)



Artist Statement:

“Mino Bimaadiziwin” (2018)

2' x 3'

Wood panel

Our responsibility is to walk in *mino bimaadiziwin*, the path of understanding, relating to and taking care of the entirety of nature. One Indigenous teaching states that there are seven generations behind you and there are seven generations in front of you. The seven figures walking (in the *right* direction) represent our ancestors from the past. Our future ancestors are “invisible” because we will never know our future relatives. We must walk gently on Mother Earth, in *mino bimaadiziwin*, before the next generations arrive.

The sky is fiery to make your heartbeat faster, to evoke the awareness and urgency that we must feel to save our planet. The red water on the lower part of the painting symbolizes the healing power of women. Water is women’s medicine, and women were keepers of the water. At this moment, the water needs us. We are damaging the environment so bad that the water is becoming unhealthy. We know that water is the foundation of life, and we must act quickly to save water, Mother Earth’s blood.

It is not only the duty of Indigenous peoples to take care of the land. The human race must understand that we *all* have a responsibility to the planet, and realize that environmental justice is within our grasp. Open your eyes, this is all we have.