

THE SURVIVANCE OF WATER AND ROCK:
AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AND SETTLER AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF
NISHNAABEG THOUGHT WORLDS, OTHER-THAN-HUMAN PERSONHOOD,
AND THE TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a combination of environmental history and autoethnography exploring what it means and looks like for the author to earnestly try to take Indigenous Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood seriously, when he is a settler, living within a dominant settler Canadian thought world. Within Nishnaabeg thought worlds, other-than-human beings—plants, animals, waters, rocks, and other beings—can be persons, kin, and nations possessing capacities including agency, animacy, and spirit. As a case study, the author contrasts dominant settler narratives of the Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW) with Nishnaabeg understandings of the other-than-human persons that the waterway was built onto and into, gathering information through a walking methodology, semi-structured interviews with Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers and settlers working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg communities along the TSW, textual analysis, and archival research. The TSW is a 386-kilometer-long system of locks, dams, and canals built onto waterbodies throughout what is now considered central Ontario, Canada, to connect Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) with Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay) on Odawa Zaagigan (Lake Huron). Analyzing and applying concepts of settler colonialism, the author demonstrates the settler-colonial imposition and violence of the TSW against Nishnaabeg Nations *and* their other-than-human relations. The author then considers how settlers might redevelop relationships with other-than-human persons by critically reflecting on his practice of using a walking methodology to spend time with and learn from other-than-human persons impacted by the TSW. Finally, the author explores other-than-human survivance, speculating on how various other-than-human persons actively and agentially survive against and resist the TSW. Through these inquiries, the author centers other-than-human persons in an analysis of settler colonialism and examines how settlers might take other-than-human personhood seriously, in order to develop ethical relationships with other-than-human persons, better align settlers with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism, and explore what possibilities there are for settlers to realize new thought worlds. The dissertation closes with the author considering further areas of inquiry that arise out of this research project and sharing insights on how Nishnaabeg thought worlds might provide inspiration and aspirations for settlers striving to realize new thought worlds.

*To the creatures and critters of Joeperry Lake / Wolf Lake
and to Our Tree*

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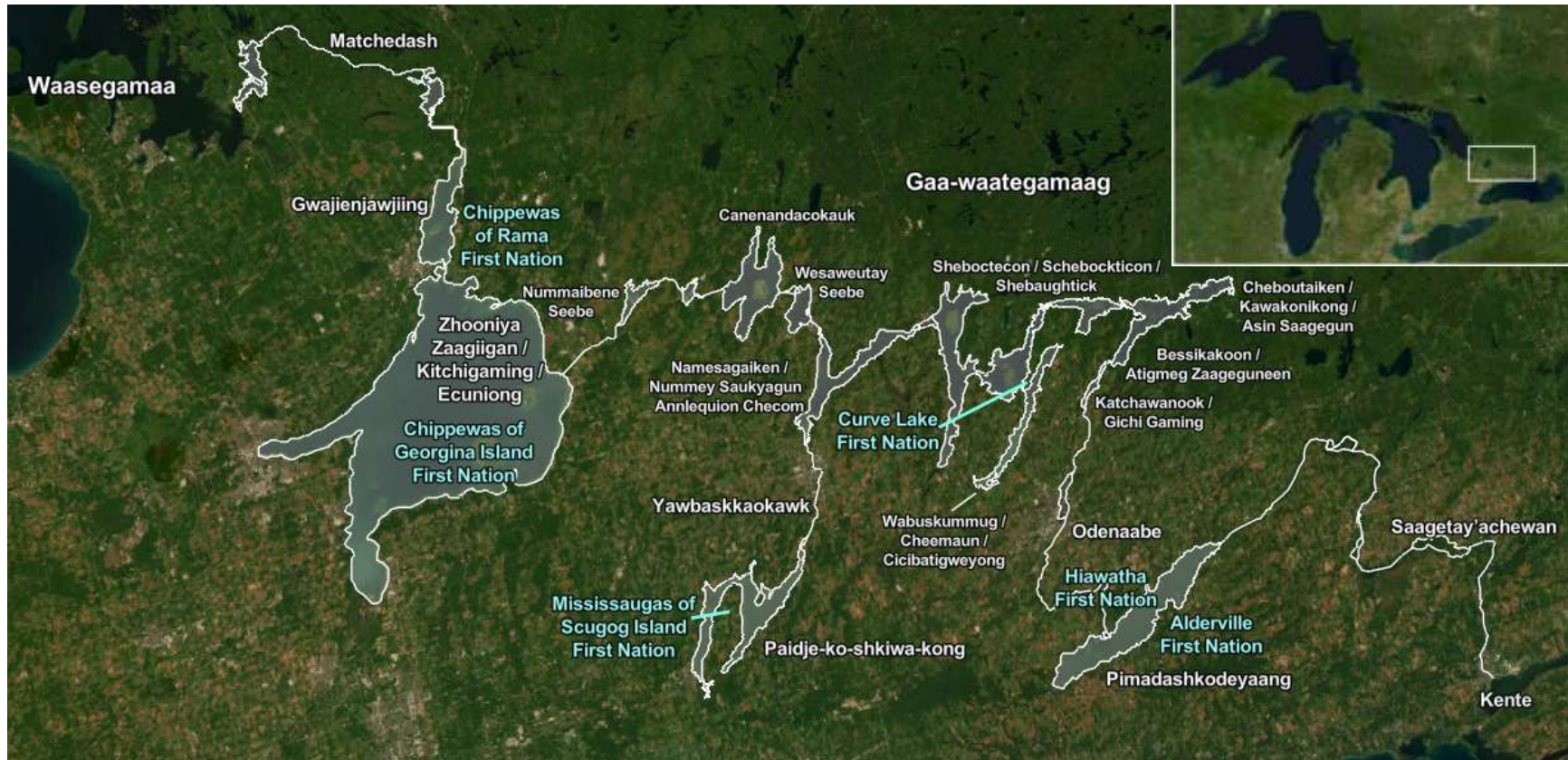
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Figure 1

Map depicting the route of the Trent-Severn Waterway



Note. Map includes the First Nations communities along the path of the waterway and Indigenous names for the Waterbodies who the waterway has been built onto and into. See footnote 1 on page viii for more information about the Indigenous names included on this map.

Map created using ArcGIS Online; “World Imagery” basemap from Esri (2023).

I would like to start with the Waters and Lands.

*This research project and dissertation represent an effort
at rethinking and redeveloping my relationships
particularly with a path of Waters¹ and their relations—
Indigenous Nishnaabeg Nations and other-than-human persons—
stretching from the bay of Kente (Bay of Quinte)
on Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) in the southeast,
to Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay) in the northwest.
From the bay of Kente, this path follows Saagetay’achewan (Trent River)
to Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), Odenaabe (Otonabee River) up to
Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes)—flowing through, namely,
Katchawanook / Gichi Gaming (Katchewanooka Lake),
Bessikakoon / Atigmeg Zaageguneen (Clear Lake),
Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake),
Sheboctecon / Schebocticon / Shebaughtick
(Lower Buckhorn Lake, Buckhorn Lake, and Pigeon Lake),
Wabuskummug / Cheemaun / Cicibatigweyong (Chemong Lake, formerly Mud Lake),*

¹ As I discuss in my introduction, the region that my research focuses on—along the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon—spans across territories where different Indigenous languages are spoken, as well as different dialects and regional variations of Indigenous languages. When I use Indigenous terms in this paper, I note the language that these terms come from when I am aware of it. However, the terms that I use are inconsistent with regard to dialects and regional variations. Even in the languages that I mention, there are alternate terms and spellings for many of the terms that I use.

The Haudenosaunee language name for the Bay of Quinte comes from Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na and the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte Research Department (2022, para. 6). As I will outline, I am primarily engaging with Nishnaabeg understandings; however, I was unable to find a Nishnaabeg name for the Bay of Quinte. “Gchi-Nibiish” as an Anishinaabemowin—the Nishnaabeg language—name for Lake Ontario comes from Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams (personal communication, February 26, 2024). The Nishnaabemowin—the Michi Saagiig variation of the Nishnaabeg language—names for Georgian Bay, the Trent River, Rice Lake, the Otonabee River, “Chi’Nibiish” for Lake Ontario, “Gichi Gaming” for Katchewanooka Lake, “Atigmeg Zaageguneen” for Clear Lake, and “Asin Saagegun” for Stoney Lake come from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2013a, pp. 115, 126), a member of Alderville First Nation, a predominantly Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg First Nation. The name for the Kawartha Lakes comes from Olivia Whetung (n.d., para. 2), a member of Curve Lake First Nation, a predominantly Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg First Nation. The names “Katchawanook” for Katchewanooka Lake, “Bessikakoon” for Clear Lake, “Cheboutaiken” and “Kawakonikong” for Stoney Lake, and “Wabuskummug” and “Cheemaun” for Chemong Lake come from Mae Whetung-Derrick (1976, p. 21), a member of Curve Lake First Nation. The names for Lower Buckhorn Lake and Buckhorn Lake, and “Cicibatigweyong” for Chemong Lake come from Ellery Leitch et al. (2008, pp. 57, 58, 76). Leitch et al. mention that “Shebaughtick-wyong East Lake” is also used on some maps, from the 1810s, to refer to Chemong Lake (p. 57). And Ferne Cristall et al. (1973) suggest that “Shebaughtickwyong” is also a

*Namesagaiken / Nummey Saukyagun / Annlequion Checom (Sturgeon Lake),
a side channel down Yawbaskaokawk (Scugog River)
to Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong (Lake Scugog),
Wesaweutay Seebe to Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake)
down to Nummaibene Seebe (Talbot River)—
to Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe),
Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching),
and Matchedash (Severn River).
In addition, forty-four other lakes
now provide Water to this system (Jaakson, 1973, p. 1225).*

*The Land rises 180 m between the mouth of Saagetay'achewan in the southeast
and Canenandacokauk—the highest of these Waterbodies—
before dropping 80 m again by the end of Matchedash.*

*The territory that many of these Waters fall within has been referred to as “The Land Between,”
an ecotone between the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands in the south
and the Canadian Shield in the north—*

*“an area of transition containing elements from the ecosystems it borders,
but also having features that are entirely unique” (Land Between, The, n.d.d, para. 5).*

*According to The Land Between (n.d.c) charity,
the area contains the highest habitat diversity in Ontario,*

name for Pigeon Lake (p. 131). Whetung-Derrick gives the name for Sturgeon Lake as “Namesagaiken” (1976, p. 21), whereas Cristall et al. give it as “Nummey Saukyagun” (1973, p. 131), and Edwin C. Guillet (1957) gives it as “Annlequion Checom” (p. xxxvii). Whetung-Derrick notes that “Sturgeon Lake has no sturgeon. The name may be given to it from its shape” (1976, p. 21). The names “Yawbaskaokawk” for Scugog River, and “Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong” for Lake Scugog also come from Whetung-Derrick (1976, p. 21). The names for Balsam Lake, the Talbot River, and the Severn River come from Cristall et al. (1973, p. 131). And, Cristall et al. give “Wesaweutay Seebe” as a name for a “[l]ong river between Balsam & [sic] Cameron Lakes” (p. 131). Presently, the colonially named Fenelon River connects Sturgeon Lake and Cameron Lake, and the Rosedale River connects Cameron Lake and Balsam Lake, though neither of these are particularly long rivers, especially relative to the size and number of other Waterbodies in the area. The Nishnaabemowin name “Zhooniya Zaagiigan” for Lake Simcoe comes from Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018, p. 34), a late Elder from Curve Lake First Nation, while “Kitchigaming” and “Ecuniong” come from Whetung-Derrick (1976, p. 21). The Anishinaabemowin name for Lake Couchiching comes from Kory Snache (n.d., para. 3). I suspect that the spelling of many of these names may be inaccurate; especially the names coming from Leitch et al. (2008), Cristall et al., and Guillet (1957), who are not Indigenous—as far as I am aware—and who may be relying on historic colonial documents to determine these names.

*with forests, grasslands, wetlands, and
alvars—open areas of sparse vegetation atop exposed limestone bedrock—
occurring alongside the lakes and rivers (Land Between, The, n.d.e, para. 8).
Miles Ecclestone (1985) describes how “[t]he northern half of the region is underlain by
the hard and ancient igneous and metamorphic rocks of the Canadian Shield
while the southern geology is composed of younger sedimentary rocks,
primarily limestones and shales of Palaeozoic age” (p. 7)—*

*While the northern half of the region is dominated by hard crystalline rocks with little soil
cover, the younger stratified rocks in the southern half are covered by numerous fine
examples of the distinctive landforms that resulted from erosional and depositional effects
of ice and meltwaters associated with the last ice age. In particular, there are the Kawartha
Lakes themselves, more or less straddling the boundary between the two major bedrock
types . . . and, further south, one of the finest drumlin fields in the world. (Ecclestone, 1985,
p. 7)*

*A diverse number of plants, fungi, and animals call the area home,
including white pines, grey wolves, common watersnakes,
red-winged blackbirds, red and sugar maples, moose, lowbush blueberries,
common snapping turtles, ospreys, and river otters;
as well as at least fifty-nine species at risk:
western chorus frogs, five-lined skinks, and massasauga rattlesnakes;
eastern whip-poor-wills, peregrine falcons, and red-headed woodpeckers;
little brown bats; yellow-banded bumble bees, and mottled duskywing butterflies;
lake sturgeon, silver lampreys, and northern sunfish;
American ginseng, black ash, flooded jellyskins, and eastern prairie fringed-orchids,
to name just a few (Land Between, The, n.d.f, n.d.g).*

*Manoomin—wild rice²—grows on lakes
including Pimadashkodeyaang and Shebaughtickwyong,
though it spread even further historically.*

² Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams told me that “wild rice” is a misnomer, that there is no word for “wild” in Anishinaabemowin, and that manoomin translates as “good grain” (personal communication, February 26,

*Atlantic salmon and American eels
were once abundant through the Waters,
but are now extirpated.³*

*There are presently six First Nations—
predominantly Michi Saagiig and Ojibwe Nishnaabeg communities—
recognized by the settler Canadian government along the path of these Waters:
Hiawatha and Alderville First Nations
on the north and south sides of Pimadashkodeyaang, respectively;
Curve Lake First Nation
between Sheboctecon / Schebockticon / Shebaughtick
and Wabuskummug / Cheemaun / Cicibatigweyong;
Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation on Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong;
Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation on Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong;
and Chippewas of Rama First Nation on Gwajienjawjiing.
A seventh Nishnaabeg First Nation, Beausoleil First Nation,
is on islands in Waasegamaa, not far from the northwestern mouth of Matchedash.
There are also other Nishnaabeg communities,
such as Kawartha Nishnawbe,
that go unrecognized by the settler Canadian government.*

*Historically, the Haudenosaunee and Wendat
also lived in these territories (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, pp. 34-39),
with Gayogohó:no' (Cayuga) Haudenosaunee villages
at Kente and Pimadashkodeyaang in the late 1600s (Marcel, 2006, para. 35).*

2024). Elder S. Williams noted that “manoomin” is also spelt “minoomin” (personal communication, February 26, 2024). I use “manoomin” in this paper, given the prevalence of that spelling in other sources that I cite.

³ American eels are not completely extirpated from the area now colonially known as Ontario. The Land Between (n.d.a) charity is studying whether and to what degree American eels may be recovering in the ecotone where they focus their work. Though, as far as I am aware, American eels remain extirpated from the Waterbodies that my research looks at—the Waterbodies that the Trent-Severn Waterway is built onto and into.

*Tyendinaga / Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte
remains near the southeastern end of the stretch of Waters,
and Wahta Mohawk Territory is not far from the northwestern end.
There are no longer any formal Wendat communities in these territories.*

*Throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries,
a series of locks, canals, and dams was imposed upon and into these
Waters, Lands, rocks, plants, animals, and human Indigenous Nations.
This settler-colonial imposition is known as the Trent-Severn Waterway.*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Aaniin, Boozhoo, Hello, Welcome,

My name is Benjamin Joseph Kapron. I am a settler whose maternal ancestors come from Italy, arriving on Turtle Island in the 1910s and 1920s; and whose paternal ancestors come from Poland and the British Isles, arriving on Turtle Island, respectively, in the 1920s and—as far as I have been able to find—as early as the late 1700s, with that branch of my family living largely in Newfoundland for much of their time on Turtle Island.

I was born on the Nishnaabeg territory of Bawating or Baawitigong, the “place of the rapids” (Nadjiwon, 2011, War of 1812 & Our Ojibwa Ancestors section, para. 2; *Baawitigong*, n.d.), known colonially as Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada. Just before my third birthday, my family moved with me to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory of Nogojiwanong, “the place at the foot of the rapids” (L. Simpson, 2008, pp. 205, 211), known colonially as Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. In 2010, I moved to Toronto, Ontario, Canada—a colonial name I have heard is derived from a Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) or Wendat word.¹ However, what is now called “Toronto” is not a singular place and, as territory of the Nishnaabeg, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat, the Land encompassed by “Toronto” has many names, only some of which I know.

As I expand on later in this introduction, settler colonialism is a distinct form of colonialism premised on settler colonizers “making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). When calling myself a settler, I mean that I am not Indigenous to the Lands I was born and live on—Lands subjected to settler colonialism—and that I am welcomed into the settler-colonial homemaking project on these Lands. Various non-Indigenous people are excluded from settler-colonial homemaking, often along racial, religious, ethnic, cultural, or national lines: they may be allowed

¹ Timothy B. Leduc (2016) discusses the origins of the name “Toronto”:

The most common view is that *taronto* derives from the Iroquoian language, either Mohawk or Wendat, and means “trees standing in the water.” This reference is possibly to a meeting place at the narrows between Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching where Wendat and Anishinaabe drove stakes in the water to create fish weirs that were in use for four thousand years. Another suggestion is that the term derives from the Wendat *toronton*, meaning both a place of meetings and a land of plenty, which also has consistencies with the abundance of the fishing-weir meeting place. . . . [A]ccording to the oral tradition held by Mohawk Peace Chief Jacob Thomas, it was not a fishing weir made of logs but rather a fallen tree, or *dolon-do*, perhaps an old *onerahase’ko:wa* [“a great white pine” (Leduc, 2016, p. 50)], that marked this portage route close to Lake Ontario, or *Ontar:io* (*ondario*) in Mohawk, the “beautiful waters.” (pp. 53-54; Leduc’s italics)

Notably, the Gallicized “Lac (de) Taronto” was first used as a name for Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuiniong (Lake Simcoe), on French settler maps from the 1600s (Leduc, 2016, pp. 51, 53).

to live on the colonized territory, but they are not welcomed to make it their home according to their own distinct ways of living. I, however, am part of—as Chelsea Vowel (2016) puts it—“the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority” (p. 14). I write explicitly as a white settler, and how I approach some topics and ideas may be limited in how well they resonate with Indigenous Peoples *and* with people who are not Indigenous to the colonized Lands who they live on and who are also not welcomed into settler-colonial homemaking.² I hope these readers might still find some value in my research.

As noted, I have lived much of my life on Nishnaabeg territory, and the Lands that this research focuses on are also predominantly Nishnaabeg Lands. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011)—Michi Saagiig Nishnaabekwe³ and member of Alderville First Nation—explains that “*Nishnaabeg* is translated as ‘the people’ and refers to Ojibwe, Odawa (Ottawa), Potawatomi, Michi Saagiig (Mississauga), Saulteaux, Chippewa and Omámíwinini (Algonquin) people. Nishnaabeg people are also known as Nishinaabeg, Anishinaabeg, Anishinaabek, and Anishinabek, reflecting different spelling systems and differing dialects” (p. 25; Simpson’s italics). I primarily use the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg spelling of “Nishnaabeg” in this dissertation, because I have lived much of my life on Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Land. When I am identifying and citing Nishnaabeg people, I use their preferred spelling, when I know it. And writers who I cite may use alternate spellings or may refer to particular Nishnaabeg Nations.

My investigations in this research project span Nishnaabeg Lands where a variety of dialects and regional variations of the Nishnaabeg language—Anishinaabemowin—are spoken. The Anishinaabemowin terms that I include in this dissertation are inconsistent with regard to these dialects and regional variations and, even in Anishinaabemowin, there are alternate terms and spellings for many of the terms that I include.

² Jodi A. Byrd (2011) uses the term “arrivants” to refer to these people who are not Indigenous to the colonized Lands who they live on, but who are also not welcomed into settler-colonial homemaking. For a deeper discussion of “arrivants,” see Byrd’s book *The Transit of Empire*, where they examine the complexities of who is and who is not accepted as part of U.S. Empire at different times in history.

³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) outlines,

I understand the word [and suffix] *kwe* to mean woman within the spectrum of genders in Nishnaabemowin, or the Nishnaabe language. . . . It is different than the word *woman* because it recognizes a spectrum of gender expressions and it exists embedded in grounded normativity. . . . There is a fluidity to my use of the term *kwe* that gestures to the gender variance within Nishnaabemowin. *Kwe* does not conform to the rigidity of the colonial gender binary, nor is *kwe* essentialized. In my mind, *kwe* has the capacity to be inclusive of both cis and trans experiences, but this is not my decision to make, because I do not write from that positionality. (p. 29; L. Simpson’s italics)

For much of my life, I did not think much about the reality that I live on colonized lands of Indigenous Nations. However, during high school and my undergraduate studies, I became passionate about human rights internationally, particularly engaging in activism in solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians. I came to understand the Palestinians' struggle as a struggle against settler colonialism, which convinced me that I needed to interrogate what it means for me to be a settler on colonized Indigenous Lands and—as a settler—what my role might be in dismantling Canadian settler colonialism.

I began taking this interrogation seriously during my Master in Environmental Studies (2014-2016), where my studies and research came to focus on questioning how and what ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies—philosophies of understanding existence, knowledge, and the universe, respectively—undergird the political and social structures of Canadian settler colonialism, an approach that continues into this Ph.D. work. As Aaron Mills (2018) outlines, settler colonialism causes three forms of violence against Indigenous Peoples: violence against individual Indigenous persons, violence against Indigenous groups and communities, and violence against Indigenous life ways and constitutional orders. “Life ways aren’t about specific shared practices or qualities, but rather about how the world appears to us: the ontological, epistemological, and cosmological system within which a people consistently becomes itself” (Mills, 2018, p. 136). As Willie Ermine (2007) puts it, referencing feminist writer Peggy McIntosh, “the *thought world* of Western society represents . . . [a] colossal unseen dimension that influences Indigenous-Western relations” (p. 198; my italics).

I use Willie Ermine’s (2007) term “thought worlds” throughout this dissertation, as well as referring to Aaron Mills’ (2018) “life ways” at times. When using these terms, I do not want to give the impression that I am *only* concerned with the knowledge systems or philosophies of settlers and Indigenous Peoples—particularly Nishnaabeg. My inquiries are not only philosophical; they also address materialities and interactions between knowledge systems and material relationships. I examine knowledge systems and philosophies and the material realities and relationships that they allow for and tend to give rise to, as well as how material realities and relationships can shape knowledge systems and philosophies.

The discord between Indigenous and Western thought worlds is far-reaching, but I have become particularly attentive to issues that arise due to anthropocentrism being deeply embedded into the dominant settler Canadian thought world. As I expand on later in this introduction, many

Indigenous Nations recognize certain, though not necessarily all, other-than-human beings—plants, animals, fungi, Waters, rocks, et cetera—as persons, kin, and nations possessing capacities including agency, animacy, and spirit, although understandings also differ between different Indigenous Nations. The dominant settler Canadian thought world tends to view other-than-human beings as passive objects, believing that beings like plants and animals do not possess agency—at most, a limited agency compared to humans—and that beings like Waters and rocks are not alive or animate.

The list of plants, animals, fungi, Waters, and rocks is *not* an exhaustive or definitive list of other-than-human beings and is not intended to suggest an exhaustive or definitive list—nor are the other-than-human beings discussed in this dissertation a complete survey of *all* other-than-human beings impacted by the focus of my research, the Trent-Severn Waterway. Angela P. Harris (2022)—building off of a manuscript by Paola Bacchetta—contends that indeterminacy ought to be taken seriously regarding oppression for three reasons. One, relations of power and human limitations may make certain oppressions invisible. Two, in a changing world, “new identities [and, therefore, new oppressions] become possible” (Harris, 2022, p. 41). And, three, “we live in a quantum universe that is fundamentally creative, indeterminate, and not fully legible to us” (Harris, 2022, p. 41). Harris proposes to use “et cetera” or “[X],” rather than a glib “etc.,” in order to draw attention to the importance of indeterminacy. I contend that it is similarly important to take indeterminacy seriously regarding other-than-human beings—it would be both impossible and unethical to attempt to provide an exhaustive or definitive list of other-than-human beings—and I use “et cetera” to draw attention to this indeterminacy.

I contend that, in disregarding other-than-human beings’ agency, animacy, spirit and similar qualities and capacities, dominant settler Canadian understandings of other-than-human beings generate violence against these beings, in turn generating violence against Indigenous Nations who hold significant relationships, even kin relationships, with these beings. These violences and injustices against other-than-human beings must be rectified in dismantling settler colonialism, alongside rectifying the injustices faced by human Indigenous Peoples and Nations.

In this dissertation, I am focusing primarily on other-than-human personhood because, in my experience, other-than-human personhood is rarely seriously attended to in settler discussions about dismantling settler colonialism. I assert that settlers are, therein, *missing part of the picture* of what dismantling settler colonialism entails. As Graham Harvey (2017) describes, there is a

“widespread indigenous [*sic*] . . . understanding that humans share this world with a wide range of persons, *only some of whom are human*” (pp. xvii-xviii; my italics). Although my focus is largely on other-than-human personhood, I do not mean to sideline the need to support Indigenous humans, nor do I intend to extract Indigenous—particularly Nishnaabeg—knowledge for settlers’ own ends or intellectual curiosity. Instead, I perceive that lack of consideration for other-than-human personhood is a gap in settler thought and action. My intentions with this research project and dissertation are to help settlers better support Indigenous Nations—and other-than-human persons—in dismantling settler colonialism, and in that pursuit to also work towards transforming settlers’ own thought worlds and relationships. As persons and agents, other-than-human beings play a role in dismantling settler colonialism and settlers can learn from them about our roles in challenging settler colonialism.

When I discuss Nishnaabeg thought worlds and life ways, I am referring to ontologies, epistemologies, cosmologies and other philosophies and understandings that emerge out of long lineages of Nishnaabeg thought. The existence of a Nishnaabeg lineage of thought does not mean that all Nishnaabeg individuals hold these understandings—Nishnaabeg peoples are not monolithic. Furthermore, Nishnaabeg thought worlds and life ways are taught and learned—they are not innate and I do not want to perpetuate tropes of the “noble savage” or “ecological indian” when attending to Nishnaabeg thought worlds.

Similarly, Canadian settlers are not monolithic in how they view, experience, and understand the world. However, I maintain that there are certain lineages of thought that widely took hold in Europe and that continue to characterize dominant Western liberal capitalist ways of thinking and living in Europe and settler-colonial societies established by Europeans and their descendants. For example, Val Plumwood (2007) elucidates how “Rationalism and human/nature dualism have helped create ideals of culture and human identity that promote human distance from, control of and ruthlessness towards the sphere of nature as the Other, while minimising non-human claims to the earth and to elements of mind, reason and ethical consideration” (p. 4). Importantly, Plumwood notes that “[w]e should not mistake rationalism for reason – [*sic*] rather it is a cult of reason that elevates to extreme supremacy a particular narrow form of reason and correspondingly devalues the contrasted and reduced sphere of nature and embodiment” (p. 4)—“[t]his form of rationality is built on the myth of autonomous reason and autonomous man, inheriting the rationalist failure to situate the human in ecologically embedded and socially embedded ways” (p.

27). The perceived supremacy of Rationalism and ideas of human/nature dualism continuously arise in Western lineages of thought, including in the Platonic rationalism of Ancient Greece and the rationalist-empiricism of the European Enlightenment (see Plumwood, 2007, pp. 45-50). I primarily use the term “dominant settler Canadian thought world”—with “thought world” taken from Willie Ermine (2007, p. 198)—when referring to Canadian settlers’ prevailing ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies, and the political and social structures that these philosophies manifest and maintain. And when I am referring to broader Western lineages of dominant thought, rather than how they particularly manifest in settler Canada, I use the term the “dominant Western thought world.”

As I discuss later, one of my intentions in this dissertation is to explore how trying to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds may help settlers to develop their praxis towards dismantling settler colonialism. Therefore, I tend to emphasize how the dominant Western thought world differs from Nishnaabeg thought worlds. There are also ways that the dominant Western thought world converges with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, but these similarities are not my focus in this dissertation.

RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW

What follows is a combination of environmental history and autoethnography—a study flowing from a reflexive examination of my own experiences and understandings—exploring what it means and looks like for me to earnestly try to take Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood seriously, when I am not Nishnaabeg, and I live and was raised within the dominant settler Canadian thought world, not a Nishnaabeg thought world.

Later in this introduction, I discuss how my project developed from a desire to start being accountable to the Nishnaabeg Nations living along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway. Starting from a desire to build and fulfill relationships, my project is guided by Shawn Wilson’s (2001) writing on “relational accountability.” Describing an Indigenous research methodology grounded in relational accountability, S. Wilson writes:

[a]s a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship? The axiology or morals need to be an integral part of the

methodology so that when I am gaining knowledge, I am not just gaining in some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfill my end of the research relationship. (p. 177; S. Wilson's italics)

My research aims to gain knowledge in order to fulfill my relationship with these Nishnaabeg Nations, with the Waters and rocks that the Trent-Severn Waterway was built onto and into, and with the other-than-human persons living with these Waters and rocks.

Specifically, my project looks to address the questions:

1. How can settlers work to engage with Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human persons—Waters, rocks, plants, animals—in a good way, when we were not raised in Nishnaabeg communities and thought worlds, and when we are entangled in our own thought world? What does trying to engage with Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood, as a settler, reveal about the anthropocentrism of the dominant settler Canadian thought world?
2. How might settlers learn from other-than-human beings more directly, including how and what can we learn from other-than-human beings about challenging settler colonialism?

In grappling with these questions, I also examine:

- i. How does the dominant settler Canadian thought world generate violence against other-than-human persons? How does this violence against other-than-human persons factor into Canadian settler colonialism?
- ii. How are different other-than-human persons responding to, resisting, and surviving against Canadian settler colonialism?
- iii. How might engaging with Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human persons contribute to settlers' decolonial praxes? What sort of changes to the dominant settler Canadian thought world might arise or be inspired from engaging with Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human persons?

While I have broader hopes for what this project may achieve or contribute to, it is also immediately personal—though hopefully not individualistic or solipsistic. I am not trying to convince or 'prove' some heretofore 'unrealized' aspect of the world to settlers, nor am I making a case for some new program or doctrine—I am not, for example, making a case for the legal recognition of other-than human personhood.⁴ Instead, I am examining my personal experiences,

⁴ I will briefly say that I am not immediately enthusiastic about ideas of legal other-than-human personhood. I am more interested in what it means and looks like for myself and other settlers to earnestly take other-than-human

understandings, and philosophies, while exploring what it means and looks like to try, as a settler, to engage with Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood. My project is an opening, an exploration, of how I and other settlers might begin to cross-culturally and cross-philosophically engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, and what could possibly be realized through such engagement.

MOTIVATIONS AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Several concerns motivate me to undertake this research project. Primarily, although my reasoning may be somewhat tautological, I am convinced that if other-than-human beings are persons, then violence is inflicted on these beings when their personhood is denied—in the same vein that violence is inflicted on different groups of humans when their personhood is denied, whether that be women; transgender, agender, or nonbinary people; lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, or aromantic people; Black People, Indigenous People, or People of Colour; disabled people, et cetera.⁵ I feel an *ethical call* to support and promote the personhood of other-than-human beings.

Furthermore, I am convinced that if settlers are to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism, then we must also attend to our anthropocentrism, particularly when many Indigenous Nations have significant relationships—even kin relationships—with other-than-human persons. And, ultimately, I desire to help settler Canadians realize and enact new thought worlds and life ways that do not support or perpetuate settler colonialism, anthropocentrism, or other structures of oppression.

In my experience, settler academics tend not to engage very deeply with Indigenous understandings of other-than-human personhood and Land when analyzing settler colonialism and

personhood seriously in our own lives, and how coming to better understand other-than-human personhood may assist settlers in supporting Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism.

In recent years, a number of other-than-human persons, including the Whanganui River in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India, have been granted legal personhood. And while I can certainly appreciate the need to enact protections for other-than-human persons, focusing primarily on how to do so in colonial legal institutions feels like it is scapegoating these institutions, relinquishing accountability for settlers to do the hard, internal work of rethinking and redeveloping our own, lived relationships with other-than-human persons. Moreover, I am wary of how legal approaches might rely on and reify colonial legal systems, to the detriment of recognizing and promoting Indigenous legal systems. I am, however, still curious about how pushes for the legal personhood of other-than-human persons, *based in Indigenous thought worlds and legal systems*, might help to dismantle colonial legal systems, such as in the White Earth Band of Ojibwe’s recognition of the rights of manoomin (see Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights, n.d.).

⁵ Refer to the discussion on page 4 regarding the significance of using “et cetera.”

how to dismantle it. However, according to Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), land⁶ is central to Indigenous struggles against settler colonialism:

the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism . . . is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land*—a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms. (p. 13; Coulthard’s italics)

If settler academics do discuss land, I find that they tend to focus on the former aspect—the “struggle . . . *for* land in the material sense” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13; Coulthard’s italics)—while overlooking the latter aspect of “what the land . . . can teach us about living our lives . . . in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). This discrepancy is representative of what Coulthard (2014) describes as “a profound misunderstanding . . . [of] think[ing] of land or place as simply some material object of profound importance to Indigenous cultures (although it is this too)” (pp. 60-61). Coulthard asserts that “*instead*, [land] ought to be understood as a field of ‘relationships of things to each other.’ Place is a way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world and with others; and sometimes these relational practices and forms of knowledge guide forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world that threaten to erase or destroy our sense of place” (p. 61; my italics).

In undertaking this research project, I am responding to this “profound misunderstanding” (Coulthard, 2014, pp. 60-61): I am attempting to provide a settler analysis of settler colonialism that foregrounds ‘land’—hopefully an example for other settler academics and activists—both to try to better align settler analyses of settler colonialism with “the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism” (p. 13), as described by Coulthard; and to begin learning what other-than-human persons can teach me, as a settler, about my role and place in dismantling settler colonialism—“what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach [me] about living [my life] in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13; Coulthard’s italics).

While my research project carries an implicit critique of settler academics’ lack of consideration of Indigenous understandings of Land in their analyses of settler colonialism, I do

⁶ As I discuss later in this chapter, Sandra Styres (2017), a Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) scholar, capitalizes the word “Land” to “honour and respect her as a sentient and conscious being” (p. 38). Following Styres, I am capitalizing both Land and Water in this paper. However, Coulthard (2014) does not capitalize “land” and therefore, I am not capitalizing “land” when referring specifically to Coulthard’s use of this word.

not intend to suggest that settlers ought to struggle against settler colonialism in the same ways as Indigenous Peoples—especially when our relationships with settler colonialism, and the multitudinous beings impacted by settler colonialism, are vastly different. However, I do assert that if we fail to consider this wider understanding of Land and the other-than-human persons who are part of the Land, then settler efforts to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism are incompatible with Indigenous efforts. When, for many Indigenous Nations, other-than-human persons are part of shared or distinct nations, are kin, or otherwise hold meaningful relations with Indigenous Peoples and each other, then we are missing part of the picture if we do not consider these beings—we are overlooking some of the beings who are impacted by and surviving against Canadian settler colonialism. If we deny or overlook these relationships and experiences, our attempts at challenging settler colonialism may be ineffective—diverting from Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism—and may even contribute to attacks on Indigenous thought worlds and life ways, reifying settler colonialism.

I hope that my attentiveness to Indigenous understandings of Land may expand the scholarly field of Settler Colonial Studies, as well as contribute to settler activism aimed at supporting Indigenous Nations in dismantling settler colonialism.

Furthermore, I hope that engaging with Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood may *inspire* settlers to realize that it is truly possible to live according to thought worlds and life ways that are drastically different from our own,⁷ and Nishnaabeg relations to Land proffer the sort of relations that settlers might *aspire* to realize. As I develop later in this section, given the violences and injustices of settler colonialism, environmental crises, and other structures of power, it is *ethically imperative* that settlers realize new thought worlds, new life ways, and new worlds in which to live.

Willie Ermine (2007) posits that enabling Western and Indigenous thought worlds to engage with each other will “create new currents of thought that flow in different directions and overrun the old ways of thinking” (p. 203). In light of Western thought’s presumption to be universal truth, and the predominance of Western thought in Canadian settler society, Ermine asserts that it is necessary to intentionally develop space where Western and Indigenous thought

⁷ That Indigenous thought worlds may influence dominant Western thought is not an original insight. Later in this dissertation, I address how Indigenous legal practices have influenced British and Canadian practices of treaty-making. And even the United States Senate has recognized how the United States of America’s constitution was inspired by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (see Davis, 2023, para. 2).

worlds can engage with each other. He calls this space “ethical space,” taken from Roger Poole, and describes it as “a venue to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur” (Ermine, 2007, p. 202).

While thought worlds entail much more than understandings of Land and other-than-human beings, part of my intention in examining Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood is—not to suggest that settler Canadians can or ought to attempt to abandon their thought world and adopt themselves into a Nishnaabeg one, but—to see what may be realized within *new* ‘settler’ thought worlds and life ways, if similar understandings come to be dominant among settler Canadians.

Realizing new thought worlds and life ways—new “ontological, epistemological, and cosmological system[s]” (Mills, 2018, p. 136)—ought to go beyond being just an intellectual exercise or thought experiment. Thought worlds and life ways are lenses that colour and shape the world, through which we experience and understand the world. Although I continue to use the term “worldviews” relatively uncritically, I agree with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s (2015) critique of the term, given that “no world that is ready to be viewed exists—no world that would precede one’s view of it, or precede even the distinction between the visible (or thinkable) and the invisible (or presumed), which provides coordinates for this manner of thinking” (p. 17). Living according to different thought worlds and life ways can be akin to living in different worlds. Viveiros de Castro relays a story told to him by Peter Gow, where,

[a] mission teacher in [the village of] [*sic*] Santa Clara [in the Peruvian Amazon] was trying to convince a[n Indigenous] Piro woman to prepare food for her infant child with boiled water. The woman replied: “If we drink boiled water, we catch diarrhea.” The teacher, laughing in mockery at this response, explained that common infant diarrhea is caused precisely by the ingestion of unboiled water. Without being flustered the Piro woman answered: “Perhaps that is true for the people from Lima. But for us, people native to this place, boiled water gives diarrhea. Our bodies are different from your bodies.” (Gow, as cited in Viveiros de Castro, 2015, p. 34)

As explained by Viveiros de Castro,

The anecdote on different bodies raises questions as to the possible world that the Piro woman’s judgment might express. A *possible* world in which human bodies can be different in Lima and in Santa Clara—a world in which it is necessary for white and Amerindian bodies to be different. Now, to define this world we need not invent an imaginary world, a world endowed with a different physics or biology . . . What the Piro argument manifests is a *nonbiological idea of the body*, an idea in which the question of infant diarrhea cannot be treated as the object of a biological theory. The argument affirms that our respective “bodies” are different, by which we should understand that Piro and

Western *concepts* (rather than “biologies”) of the body are divergent. The Piro water anecdote does not refer to an *other* vision of the *same* body, but another concept of the body. (p. 37; Viveiros de Castro’s italics)

Bradley Bryan (2000) examines how challenging it is to engage with other philosophies—particularly ontologies—when one is immersed in their own. He outlines difficulties in trying to investigate Indigenous conceptions of property: property is conceived of in certain ways in English, and those conceptions do not disappear when asking the question ‘what is Indigenous property?’. In fact, dominant Western ontology undergirds that question—“we lose access to the true nature of Aboriginal existence once we re-describe it ‘as’ *propertied*” (Bryan, 2000, p. 6; my italics).

Bryan (2000) suggests that his examination of Indigenous conceptions of property actually serves to circle back and provide insight into dominant Western understandings of property, and dominant Western ontology more broadly: “the question ‘what is an Aboriginal legal concept of property’ bring us closer to the question ‘what does it mean to be a human being steeped in liberal understandings trying to understand cross-culturally’ rather than an answer” (p. 5). By asking Indigenous interlocutors about day-to-day life and relationships—rather than ‘property,’ explicitly—Bryan attempts to describe the conceptions of property of a number of Indigenous Nations, without subsuming those descriptions to dominant Western conceptions of property. However, he concludes that “we have comprehended our incomprehension of the Aboriginal understanding of one’s place in nature, which may be all *we* can demand of *our* reason” (Bryan, 2000, p. 29; Bryan’s italics) and “we are able to comprehend that the various kinds of social relations we have discussed *could exist*, even if we cannot comprehend what it is like to live them. Indeed, we are struck with the sheer impossibility of thinking *in that way* for us” (Bryan, 2000, p. 25; Bryan’s italics).

While heeding Bradley Bryan’s (2000) concerns about the difficulty of engaging with other ontologies when already immersed in an ontology, I assert that given the violences and injustices of settler colonialism, environmental crises, and other structures of power, it is *ethically imperative* to try to strive beyond his conclusions and realize new thought worlds, new life ways, and new worlds in which to live. Bryan recognizes that people are currently living according to thought worlds that, despite being somewhat inconceivable for people immersed in dominant Western ontologies, are indeed *possible*—echoing Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2015). My exploration of what possibilities emerge if other-than-human personhood is taken seriously is intended, in part,

to contribute to the realization of something new for settler Canadians, and to fields of study imagining what this something new might be. As Deborah McGregor et al. (2020) put it, “[m]any, if not all, Indigenous peoples across the globe already have their own intellectual and legal traditions to draw upon to generate a self-determined future that involves living well with the Earth” (p. 36). Concerning ongoing climate crises, McGregor (2012) writes that “[w]hile the tools of science, applied appropriately, can aid us, we must turn to the traditions and knowledge that did not fail us for thousands of years to find a real solution. While we face new challenges, the traditions are still as viable as they have always been” (p. 14).

Recognizing other-than-human beings to be persons is not *the answer*, but it is a contribution. A world that widely accepts other-than-human beings to be persons, and widely welcomes Indigenous thought worlds that maintain other-than-human personhood, is a much different world than our current one. I align this dissertation with Jairus Victor Grove’s (2019) assertion that “theory can be a kind of dark magic, a destroyer of worlds, an art of sensual experience. We can craft concepts like spells. We can conjure ideas from the virtual in hopes of altering the experience of reality” (p. 19).

Although this research project and this dissertation prioritize theory over action, I am mindful that taking seriously Nishnaabeg, and other Indigenous, ontologies of other-than-human personhood could falter as a mere intellectual exercise if this philosophical work is not brought into settlers’ efforts to dismantle settler colonialism. It is possible that settlers could engage with Nishnaabeg, and other Indigenous, ontologies of other-than-human personhood—possibly even arriving at new settler thought worlds and life ways—*without* rethinking and redeveloping their relationships with Indigenous Peoples, supporting the sovereignty of Indigenous Nations or the rematriation of Indigenous Lands, or working towards dismantling settler colonialism. To truly realize my goals, the theoretical and philosophical explorations of my work need to be brought into the praxis—*theory and action*—of how settlers might contribute to dismantling settler colonialism. I do not, substantially, make that move from theory to praxis in this dissertation, but it is a necessary direction for my work to take in the future.

CASE STUDY: THE TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY⁸

The Trent-Severn Waterway is a 386-kilometer-long system of locks, canals, and dams built onto Waterbodies throughout what is now colonially considered central Ontario, in order to connect Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) with Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay). The waterway was constructed throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, at first to facilitate colonial settlement and logging, and later promoted as a commercial shipping route, although in reality it has predominantly only enabled tourism and recreation. At the same time that it expanded access to central Ontario for settler Canadians, the Trent-Severn Waterway had devastating impacts on the Nishnaabeg Nations whose territory it cut through, as well as plants and animals, and the Lands, Waters, and rocks who the locks, canals, and dams were built onto and into.

My idea to examine the settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway originated in May 2016, in a course taught by Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard. I asked guest lecturer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson—Michi Saagiig Nishnaabekwe and member of Alderville First Nation—about her work with manoomin—wild rice—in the Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) area. She responded by speaking about the violence that the Trent-Severn Waterway enacts against the Nishnaabeg Nations living along the waterway’s course, and particularly the impacts of the waterway’s destruction of manoomin beds (L. B. Simpson, 2016a).

Not long before my third birthday, my family moved with me to Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), into a house only a short walk away from Odenaabe, “*the otonabee river [sic] that boils and bubbles and beats like a heart*” (L. Simpson, 2013a, p. 126; Simpson’s italics), a river that these Nishnaabeg Nations have held significant relationships with since time immemorial, and that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon. Nogojiwanong likely would not have developed in the ways that it has, if not for the Trent-Severn Waterway, meaning I likely would not have grown up in Nogojiwanong if not for the waterway. The city is known for its lift lock on Odenaabe, which is part of the Trent-Severn Waterway—formerly the tallest hydraulic lift lock in the world

⁸ The Trent-Severn Waterway is sometimes also referred to as the “Trent Canal,” as much of the early construction of the waterway focused on making Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) navigable for settler Canadian boats, in order to connect Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) with Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe). While some people foresaw that the route would eventually connect with Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay), the outlet from Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong to Waasegamaa, via Matchedash (Severn River), was a latter part of the construction of the waterway. I refer to the waterway as the “Trent-Severn Waterway” in this paper, but sources that I cite may instead refer to it as the “Trent Canal.”

and “reputed to be the largest unreinforced concrete structure in the world” (Parks Canada, n.d.i, para. 4). Seven other conventional locks, all also part of the Trent-Severn Waterway, further interrupt the flow of Odenaabe (Parks Canada, n.d.h).

Living nearly half of my life this short walk from Odenaabe, seeing Odenaabe nearly every day when growing up, on my way to and from school, I have been in a web of relationships connecting me to Odenaabe, the other Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes onto and into, the Nishnaabeg Nations living along these Waters, the other-than-human persons living with these Waters, and the Trent-Severn Waterway itself. When the waterway brought me and my family to Nogojiwanong, and the waterway was built with settlers like me in mind, my relationships to these other beings are predicated on the settler-colonial violence of the Trent-Severn Waterway—the destruction of manoomin beds discussed by L. Simpson and other violences that I describe in the following chapters. I am not merely complicit in this violence; my life is deeply entwined in it.

L. Simpson’s stirring indictment of the Trent-Severn Waterway and, if I remember correctly, desire to see the waterway destroyed, called on me to be accountable to the Nishnaabeg Nations living along the course of the waterway, and to attend to my relationships with them. Given my previously-discussed concerns about the lack of attention that settlers give Indigenous ontologies of Land and other-than-human personhood, it became clear to me that if I wanted to address the Trent-Severn Waterway as a settler-colonial imposition upon human Nishnaabeg Nations then I needed to address the Trent-Severn Waterway as a settler-colonial imposition upon other-than-human persons as well, mindful that humans are not the only members of Nishnaabeg social, legal, and political orders—plants, animals, fungi, Waters, rocks, and other other-than-human persons are also part of them. Thus, following from L. Simpson’s call, this research project is an effort to build my relational accountability towards the Nishnaabeg Nations along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, as well as Odenaabe and the other Waters that the waterway imposes upon, and all of the other-than-human persons—rocks, plants, animals, fungi, et cetera—that live in relation with these Waters and who have cared for and been cared for by them since time immemorial. This pursuit of relational accountability is not for my own gratification, but hoping that I may start to make amends and repair harms created by violences that I am part of and that were done ‘for’ me, as a settler Canadian.

Although starting from this pursuit of relational accountability, the Trent-Severn Waterway also provides an evocative example of how settler colonialism impacts other-than-human persons. The imagery of the waterway imposing locks, canals, and dams on pre-existing Waterbodies and reshaping their paths, and being built out of and into pre-existing rocks, will hopefully help readers to readily engage with my investigation into how other-than-human persons, even beings who the dominant settler Canadian thought world does not consider to be alive, are violently impacted by settler colonialism. The Trent-Severn Waterway offers an apt case study for why settlers ought to engage with Indigenous ontologies of Land and other-than-human personhood, if we are to support Indigenous Nations in dismantling settler colonialism in ways that respect the fullness of Indigenous more-than-human social, legal, and political orders.

In working to be accountable to the Indigenous Nations living along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, and to the fullness of these Nations' more-than-human social, legal, and political orders, my attention, in this research project, is particularly on Nishnaabeg Peoples and Nishnaabeg thought worlds. Michi Saagiig and Ojibwe Nishnaabeg Peoples have lived in the territories along the path of the Trent-Severn Waterway since time immemorial. At the time that construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway started in the 1830s, and continuing until today, these Nishnaabeg Peoples have been the predominant Indigenous Nation in the area. Six First Nations exist along the course of the waterway, who are recognized by the Canadian settler government: Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, and Chippewas of Rama First Nation. These First Nations are predominantly Michi Saagiig and Ojibwe Nishnaabeg, and are collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations, due to being subject to the Williams Treaties, which I discuss in "Chapter Three: The Settler-Colonial Imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway." A seventh Williams Treaties First Nation, Beausoleil First Nation, is located on Christian Island and a few smaller islands in Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay), not far from the mouth of Matchedash (Severn River), at the northwestern end of the Trent-Severn Waterway.

There are also other Nishnaabeg communities along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, such as Kawartha Nishnawbe, who go unrecognized by the Canadian settler government.

Historically, Wendat and Haudenosaunee Peoples have also lived in these territories. Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018),⁹ a late Michi Saagiig Elder from Curve Lake First Nation, explains,

the [Wendat] people from the south came around that time [800 AD] and they brought corn and they wanted to live with us, in our area. . . . A big council was held and it was agreed by all Nishnaabeg in the surrounding area . . .

The [Wendat] live[d] agriculturally inland and the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg lived along the lakes and shorelines and at the river mouths. After so many years . . . [t]hey asked again if they could move from the fields around the north shore of Lake Ontario to the area surrounding Lake Simcoe heading towards Georgian Bay. . . . They were given permission around the year 1100 AD to move into this area. (pp. 36-37)

In the late 1600s, the Gayogohó:no' (Cayuga) Haudenosaunee also had villages along where the Trent-Severn Waterway now runs, including Kentsio on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), and Kente on Gchi-Nibiish / Chi'Nibiish (Lake Ontario) (Marcel, 2006, para. 35), which the colonial name “Bay of Quinte” derives from (Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na and the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte Research Department, 2022, para. 6). Today, there are no recognized Wendat communities in the area—as far as I know—though the predominantly Haudenosaunee communities of Tyendinaga / Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and Wahta Mohawk Territory remain not far from either end of the waterway.

As discussed, it is a significant undertaking to try to engage with another ontology and, therefore, I decided to only engage with Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood in this research project. Also engaging with Wendat and Haudenosaunee ontologies would provide me a fuller picture of other-than-human personhood along the Trent-Severn Waterway, but doing so was outside of the scope of my research.

* * *

Two concepts are crucial to understanding my research project, and ought to be explained at the outset of this dissertation: (1) other-than-human personhood and (2) settler colonialism.

KEY CONCEPT: OTHER-THAN-HUMAN PERSONHOOD

I am using the term “other-than-human personhood” to acknowledge that non-human beings—plants, animals, fungi, Waters, rocks, et cetera—possess capacities, such as agency, animacy, and spirit, that are often denied to them in the dominant settler Canadian thought world.

⁹ Gidigaa Migizi-ban passed away on July 13, 2022. I have been told that “-ban” or “-ba” is included at the end of a Nishnaabe person’s name after they have passed away. I follow this practice in this paper.

Many Indigenous Nations recognize certain—though not necessarily all—other-than-human beings as possessing such capacities, although understandings also differ between different Indigenous Nations. Sandra Styres (2017), a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) scholar, capitalizes the word “Land” to “honour and respect her as a sentient and conscious being” (p. 38). Following Styres, I am capitalizing both Land and Water in this dissertation.

Vanessa Watts (2013), a Mohawk and Anishnaabe scholar, describes Land as animate and containing spirit. She defines being animate as “go[ing] beyond being alive or acting, it is to be full of thought, desire, contemplation and will” (Watts, 2013, p. 23). And she explains containing spirit as “mean[ing] that non-human beings choose how they reside, interact and develop relationships with other non-humans. So, all elements of nature possess agency, and this agency is not limited to innate action or causal relationships” (Watts, 2013, p. 23).

Nishnaabeg Creation Stories and Other-than-Human Personhood

Deborah McGregor (2012), the Anishinaabe Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Environmental Justice, describes how

[t]he Creation stories of First Nations people vary from nation to nation, although there are remarkable similarities among the concepts and messages contained in these stories. Teachings that emerge from Creation stories uphold ideas of holism and the importance of inter-relationships among all elements of Creation. The Earth is described as a living entity, bearing special responsibilities towards supporting the continuation of life. (p. 3)

Nishnaabeg Elders who I interviewed as part of this research project also emphasized the significance of Creation Stories, with regard to Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood. Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams—Ojibwe and Odawa Nishnaabekwe originally from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory,¹⁰ and one of the founders and organizers of Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those Who Walk for the Water, and the Kawartha Water Walks—made a point to share some of the Nishnaabeg Creation Story early in our conversation:

why the Land and Water and things like that are so important to us, it is that we believe that when the Creator was by himself, he wanted a friendship, so he created a human being.

First, he created the four elements of this Earth, that he wished to put on this Earth— . . . the Land, the Water, the Fire, and the Air. All those things are very important and they are sacred to us, because when he created the human being, [the Creator] blew Air into the human body so that we could live. The Water is sacred, because that's a living entity . . .

¹⁰ Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams has lived and worked in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), along Odenaabe (Otonabee River) and the Trent-Severn Waterway, since the 1980s (see Ontario Tech University, n.d., para. 3).

living Water that will help you to grow. And Fire is to keep us warm and the mystery of life. And the Fire can be harmful also, so you need to really take care of that. . . .

We learn all those things when you're growing up . . . to treat the Land in a kind way, because when the Creator gives you something, that's very precious—we respect it, we take care of it, we don't mistreat it in any way. That's why it's important, because we believe that Creator made the Land and gave us the Earth to live on, and to provide for us as human beings, so . . . we give thanks . . . for all of these things.

Elder S. Williams also noted that different parts of Creation have different roles in supporting Creation: “[t]he Creator . . . asked all of the plants and trees what they were going to do, to give to human kind, [who] were coming to this Land. So, each of the trees gave an answer [of] what they would provide: medicines, homes, many different things.”

Personhood of Water

Significant to my work on the Trent-Severn Waterway, Elder Shirley Ida Williams and Elder Dorothy Taylor—Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation and founder of the Sacred Water Circle—also spoke particularly about the place of Water in Nishnaabeg Creation Stories. In my interview with Elder D. Taylor, she described how Water “was created first. So, as a result, we believe that Water is the lifeblood of Mother Earth and it also is the dwelling place of the oldest and the most ancient spirits of the Land . . . so, whenever we go on the Water, or go in the Water, or live by the Water, it's always important to talk to that Water in love and gratitude.”

According to Elder S. Williams, Water “has a spirit; it comes alive; we use Water when we are sick; we drink [Water]; . . . we use Water to get the fevers down—so, Water has many different roles. Also, Water speaks to us.”

When speaking with Elizabeth (Liz) Osawamick—Elder S. Williams' niece, also from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory,¹¹ and a founder and organizer of Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those Who Walk for the Water, and the Kawartha Water Walks—she noted how “there's different forms of Water: . . . Rain Waters, the Snow, the Sleet, . . . the Birth Water, the Water that comes from the trees—that Sap Water; the Water that comes naturally from the ground—Spring Water.” Osawamick further shared that,

[w]e know that Water is life. We say Water is life. We know that, because Water is so powerful that it can take life. . . . So, we treat the Water with respect, with dignity, with

¹¹ Liz Osawamick now lives near to where Saagetay'achewan (Trent River) meets Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), and before that lived in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough). Osawamick (personal communication, March 16, 2022) told me, in our interview, that she has lived in these territories, along where the Trent-Severn Waterway now stretches, for “probably over 30 years.”

compassion. We love the Water. We always thank the Water. . . . [S]eventy-five or eighty-five percent, or more, [of] our bodies are Water. . . . It gives us life. . . . [If] we didn't have any Water, we wouldn't be here—we wouldn't survive without the Water. So, we continue to talk to the Water. . . . Every ceremony that we have, always Water is there: . . . we lift that Water, we hold up that Water and we give thanks to the Water for everything that the Water does for us.

Nishnaabeg Relations with Other-than-Human Persons

In these teachings, ideas of love, gratitude, and giving-thanks to other-than-human persons emerge as themes. In my interview with Elder Dorothy Taylor, she stressed the significance of love in the Nishnaabeg Creation Story, and how love ought to shape relationships, including with other-than-human persons:

our Creation Story begins with an unconditional thought of love. So, balance begins when we love not only each other, but love the Land. We're talking about love for the Land, love for the family of the Land, love for the air, love for each other, and respect. . . . [E]verything will return to peace, harmony, and well-being [with] love. . . . That is one of our main teachings. When you're talking about our relationship with the Land, it's love, gratitude, spiritual courage, ceremony—to sum it up. That's traditional environmental knowledge, right there.

Flowing from the significant role that love plays in Creation, Elder D. Taylor pushes for people—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to have “a kinship relationship, not [a] stewardship [relationship]” with other-than-human persons:

[when] we want to be ‘good stewards’ to the Land—you hear that a lot and that's a good concept—however, this word “stewardship” is based completely on colonial concepts. . . . Stewardship refers to the king and country, originally. . . . [L]ook in the dictionary for the definition of “stewardship.” It has a connotation and a definition that it's control and it's management, where TEK [Traditional Ecological Knowledge] refers to a relationship to the Land that is based on family. . . . The Earth, we refer to as our Mother; the moon [and] the sun is the Father and the Grandmother; all the trees, the animals, the insects, the birds are our sisters and brothers; and the Spirits of the Land are our Ancestors. This has a familial relationship. So, to change the concept . . . from stewardship to kinship . . . means that . . . you have a healthy, balanced relationship with your family. And what family refers to here, in this discussion, is the environment, is the Land, the Air, and everything.

Aimée Craft (2019), an Anishinaabe and Métis lawyer, further describes Anishinaabe Peoples as having legal relationships with other-than-human beings, “structured on the basis of spirit” (p. 10d): “[s]pirit and life exist beyond the indicators of breathing entities and far beyond the human realm. For example, rocks, trees and water are all beings with whom Anishinaabe are in legal relationships. Responsibilities do not begin and end with the human relationships” (p. 10d).

Craft (2019) also, specifically, presents an “understanding that *water itself has and is life*, and that it is an independent legal actor with whom we are in relationship” (p. 10b; my italics)— “[n]ot only does [water] give and take life, it is also a living being in and of itself that relies on a larger web of relationships to be well and to bring wellness to other beings” (p. 10b).

On the Term “Other-than-Human Personhood”

It is noteworthy that few of the people who I interviewed for this research project, or the Indigenous writers and scholars who I cite, use the term “other-than-human personhood.” For instance, Sandra Styres (2017) and Vanessa Watts (2013) talk of “Land” or “land;” Watts (2013) and Deborah McGregor (2015; McGregor et al., 2020) also refer to “non-humans.” Other alternate terms include more-than-human(s), place, relations, kin, or referring to particular capacities, such as discussing non-human agency.

It is also noteworthy that although non-Indigenous scholars have started to consider other-than-human agency in recent decades, with theories and concepts of “post-humanism” becoming more prevalent, Zoe Todd (2016) critically explains how such theories and concepts are indebted to Indigenous knowledge systems, with non-Indigenous thinkers becoming aware of Indigenous conceptions of other-than-human agency through colonizing anthropological accounts of Indigenous thought worlds. This indebtedness to Indigenous knowledge often goes unacknowledged and unrecognized, effectively stealing ideas of other-than-human agency from Indigenous Nations, and reinforcing the systemic and institutionalized hierarchy of dominant Western thought over Indigenous thought.

I come to the term “other-than-human persons” from such a work, where a non-Indigenous thinker is engaging with an anthropological account of Indigenous thought worlds: Graham Harvey’s (2017) examination of Irving Hallowell’s anthropological studies of the Ojibwe Nishnaabeg Nation¹²—although the Indigenous Nation is, at least, named and cited as the source of this information. Harvey identifies the Ojibwe as animists, countering disparaging notions of animism by defining animists as “people who recognise that the world is full of persons, only some

¹² Although neither Graham Harvey nor Irving Hallowell are Indigenous, Daniel Heath Justice—a member of the Cherokee Nation and an Indigenous literary scholar—describes Harvey’s (2017) book *Animism* as “a favourite of mine” (Justice, 2018, p. 243) in his own book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, which is where I first heard of Harvey’s work and book.

of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others” (p. xvii). And, according to Harvey, for the Ojibwe,

[t]o be a person does not require human-likeness, but rather humans are like other persons. Persons is the wider category, beneath which there may be listed sub-groups such as ‘human persons,’ ‘rock persons,’ ‘bear persons,’ and others. Persons are related beings constituted by their many and various interactions with others. Persons are wilful beings who gain meaning and power from their interactions. Persons are sociable beings who communicate with others. Persons need to be taught by stages (some marked by initiations) what it means to ‘act as a person.’ (p. 18)

The term “other-than-human persons” may center humans even as it talks about other beings, when humans are mentioned in the term itself and other beings are being ‘othered’ from them. However, according to Harvey (2017), Hallowell does not intend to center humans in this way. Harvey describes “other-than-human persons” as a relational term, used because “most of the intimate personal encounters that humans actively celebrate are with other humans” (p. 38). “Other-than-human persons” is meant specifically for human contexts. Based on their own intimate and celebrated relationships, rocks might speak of other-than-rock persons, and bears might speak of other-than-bear persons, for example.

My Use of “Other-than-Human Personhood”

Finding effective terminology for discussing specific nonhuman beings and collective ‘nature’ has been a struggle for me, throughout my graduate studies. I have chosen to use the language of “personhood” in this dissertation, because it helps, in my mind, to highlight the *extent* of the capacities that are being denied to other-than-human beings. Vanessa Watts (2013) discusses how, when non-Indigenous scholars discuss other-than-human beings possessing agency—for example—they often create a hierarchy where humans still retain greater agency than other beings. Watts describes Stacy Alaimo’s understanding of dirt as one where “dirt acts. It does not think necessarily, nor does it want or desire, but it is constantly fulfilling its intention . . . this type of agency is hierarchical; it is dependent on the belief that humans are different based on our ability of will and purpose. Dirt is acknowledged as an actant at best, no longer an afterthought but still limited with regard to ability” (Watts, 2013, pp. 28-29). For non-Indigenous scholars, other-than-human agency can be reduced to other-than-human beings being capable of impacting the world around them. Such an understanding differs significantly from Watts’ Mohawk and Anishnaabe thought world, where “[t]he agency that place possesses can be thought of *in a similar way that*

Western thinkers locate agency in human beings” (p. 23; my italics). I hope that my use of “other-than-human personhood” emphasizes that I am trying to understand other-than-human beings as having comparable capacities as humans, *not* reduced forms of these capacities—although these capacities may also manifest differently in other beings.

Other-than-Human Survivance

Although not a term prevalently associated with other-than-human beings, my examination of other-than-human personhood significantly emphasizes other-than-human *survivance*. I provide a more detailed explanation of survivance in “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway,” but to introduce the concept—as it has been developed by Gerald Vizenor (1998)—survivance highlights that Indigenous Peoples’ survival against settler colonialism is active and agential: “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence” (p. 15); “survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (p. 15). Indigenous Peoples are not merely passively still alive despite settler colonialism; Indigenous Peoples continuously undertake strategies to survive against and resist the violences of settler colonialism. Examinations of survivance typically focus on (Indigenous) humans, though Vizenor does touch on other-than-human survivance, including in the novel *Hiroshima Bugi* (2003), the chapter “Literary Animals” in *Fugitive Poses* (1998), and the essay “Native Transmotion” (2019).

KEY CONCEPT: SETTLER COLONIALISM

My second key concept recognizes that Canada is structured by a distinct form of colonialism known as settler colonialism, as previously mentioned. Whereas colonialism is typically theorized as a system where colonial agents remove resources from a colonized territory, in order to send those resources back to a colonizing metropole, settler colonialism is exemplified by colonial agents *settling* on the colonized territory, remaining on the territory and imposing a colonial society on the Indigenous and other-than-human persons who live there.¹³ As Eve Tuck

¹³ In reality, colonialism and settler colonialism are rarely clearcut. Many colonized territories, including Canada, have elements of both settler colonialism and more typical colonialism. Although I am examining the Trent-Severn Waterway as a *settler*-colonial imposition, it also facilitated colonial resource extraction via the logging industry and as a planned shipping route for agricultural products from the prairies. Theorizing settler colonialism as a distinct form of colonialism has arisen over the past several decades, due to scholars and activists finding that typical theories of colonialism and postcolonialism, largely developed through examinations of the colonization and twentieth-century

and K. Wayne Yang (2012) describe it, “[s]ettler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain” (p. 5). This structure of settler colonialism means that the violences of settler colonialism are not just historical; *they continue as long as the settler-colonial society remains*. Patrick Wolfe (2006) illustrates this lasting, structural quality of settler colonialism by conceptualizing that settler colonialism has “both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event . . . elimination is an organizing principal [*sic*] of settler colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence” (p. 388).

Rendering

Although he does not develop the concept at length, Jairus Victor Grove’s (2019) use of the term “rendering” helps to further illustrate how the Trent-Severn Waterway is a lasting colonial imposition on Indigenous Nations *and* other-than-human persons. Grove discusses how “rendering, in the way that fat is rendered into soap, or students are rendered pliable and obedient subjects, is the driver of our epoch” (p. 5). In my analysis of the Trent-Severn Waterway, I examine how the waterway continuously enacts violence, imposing on Waters and Lands in order to *render* them pliable and obedient to settler-colonial “expansion, extractivism, and settlement” (Grove, 2019, p. 11).

Settler Colonial Violence

Furthermore, as Aaron Mills (2018) formulates, settler colonialism causes three forms of violence against Indigenous Peoples. There is violence against Indigenous individuals, the most immediately apparent form of violence. There is violence against Indigenous Nations and communities, where Indigenous ways of living are attacked and undermined, inhibiting Indigenous Peoples’ ability to exist as distinct Peoples. And there is violence against Indigenous life ways—which I introduced earlier. Again, “[I]f life ways aren’t about specific shared practices or qualities,

decolonization of the Global South, do not offer satisfactory analysis of the ongoing realities of colonialism in places like Canada and the United States of America.

but rather about how the world appears to us: the ontological, epistemological, and cosmological system within which a people consistently becomes itself” (Mills, 2018, p. 136). Settler colonialism attempts to disavow Indigenous life ways, forcing Indigenous Peoples to take on settler ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies, including their ingrained anthropocentrism and their resulting violent relations with other-than-human beings.

* * *

These definitions and theories pertaining to settler colonialism tend to be used in relation to human Indigenous Nations, though I nevertheless use them to demonstrate how the Trent-Severn Waterway’s continued existence is a continuing violence—a settler-colonial imposition—that *also* harms other-than-human persons and nations. In order to rectify the violences and injustices of Canadian settler colonialism, the settler-colonial structure needs to be dismantled, including the Trent-Severn Waterway. Although what that dismantling means in practice—whether it is the physical removal of the locks, canals, and dams—remains to be determined by the Indigenous Nations who will enact decolonization.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The chapters that follow outline my journey of starting to rethink and redevelop my relationships with the Waters who the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon, as well as the Nishnaabeg Nations and other-than-human persons who hold significant relationships with these Waters and who have also been impacted by the Trent-Severn Waterway.

First, “Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Methods” explains the different research activities that I used to gather information for this research project: a walking methodology along parts of the Trent-Severn Waterway, and also Wonscontonach¹⁴ (Don River); interviews with Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers and settlers working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg Peoples and communities; and textual analysis of *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway 1833-1920* by James T. Angus (1988)—likely the closest there is to an ‘official’ history of the

¹⁴ I use this name for what is colonially known as the Don River, in this paper, as I am seeing it used more widely in recent years. However, I want to note that there are other Indigenous names for what is now called the Don River. Jon Johnson shares that in Anishinaabemowin, “Wonscontonach” “refers to a place that’s been burnt; a place swept by fire, and . . . that totally recalls . . . this land was . . . a place that was periodically burnt to maintain savannahs” (as cited in The IEJ Project, 2020, 00:32:40-00:32:52). However, Johnson also notes that this spelling is likely heavily anglicized compared to the traditionally-used name (as cited in The IEJ Project, 2020, 00:32:17-00:32:40). He also offers “Nichinggaakokanik”—“a good place for pines”—as another Anishinaabemowin name for the Don River, though this term is likely also heavily anglicized (Johnson, as cited in The IEJ Project, 2020, 00:21:28-00:22:23).

Trent-Severn Waterway—and historical documents from three archives—the Trent Valley Archives, Peterborough Museum and Archives, and the Trent University Archives. I also discuss some of the ways that I am attempting to mobilize my research, as I approach the end of this research project and my broader Ph.D.

“Chapter Three: The Settler-Colonial Imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway” outlines the problem that incites this research project. Examining the structures that make up the Trent-Severn Waterway, the history and motives of its construction, and the impacts that the waterway has had on Nishnaabeg Nations and other-than-human persons, I assert that the Trent-Severn Waterway is a settler-colonial imposition on Nishnaabeg Nations *and also* other-than-human persons. Analyzing and applying concepts of settler colonialism from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) and Patrick Wolfe (2006), rendering as used by Jairus Victor Grove (2019), and the three forms of settler-colonial violence outlined by Aaron Mills (2018), I demonstrate the settler-colonial violence of the Trent-Severn Waterway against other-than-human persons and the violence that extends to Nishnaabeg Nations through harming their other-than-human kin and other relations. This chapter provides the banks that my other chapters flow through, presenting my case for why it is important that settler analyses of settler colonialism are attentive to anthropocentrism and other-than-human personhood.

After outlining the settler-colonial violence of the Trent-Severn Waterway, “Chapter Four: Developing Relationships with Other-than-Human Persons Along the Trent-Severn Waterway” is a deep dive into my efforts to better understand and fulfil my relationships to other-than-human persons impacted by the waterway. This chapter is a thorough examination of my walking methodology and how it serves to redevelop my relationships with other-than-human persons: my reasons for undertaking a walking methodology, how my practice evolved, my reflections on undertaking a walking methodology, and what I learned from it. I reflect on my process in conversation with my interview participants, and what they shared about how settlers might engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds and learn from other-than-human persons in a good way.

Having reviewed my own emerging process for redeveloping my relationships with other-than-human persons, “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway” speculates on how acknowledging other-than-human personhood changes the story of the Trent-Severn Waterway. This chapter explores other-than-human survivance, speculating about different ways that other-than-human persons actively and

agentially survive against and resist the waterway, using themes of resistance, refusal, resentment, and resurgence. I also consider what other-than-human survivance means for my and other settlers' developing praxis for how we might contribute to dismantling settler colonialism.

My dissertation closes with “Chapter Six: Conclusion: Directions for Research; Inspirations and Aspirations for Settler Thought Worlds.” In this conclusion, I summarize the trajectory of this dissertation and how my research contributes to developing ethical relationships with other-than-human persons, better aligning settlers with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism, and realizing new ethical, just, and non-violent thought worlds for settlers. I also discuss possible directions for future research, based on questions that emerge out of this research project. I close the dissertation by returning to my walking methodology, to share insights on how other-than-human persons and Nishnaabeg thought worlds can provide inspirations and aspirations for settlers striving to realize new thought worlds.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my methodological approach to my research project, which combines environmental history and autoethnography. I present and account for limitations and shortfalls that I experienced in carrying out this project. I describe the three research methods that I used to gather information for the project—a walking methodology, semi-structured interviews with Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers and settlers working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg communities along the Trent-Severn Waterway, and textual analysis of contemporary writing and archival documents. And I outline my plans for research mobilization: how I might best share my research with individuals, organizations, and communities who may be interested in it and who it is relevant to.

As outlined, my research project focuses on my efforts to learn across cultures and across philosophies, about what it means and looks like to earnestly take Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood seriously, when I am a settler, not raised or immersed in any Nishnaabeg or other Indigenous community, culture, or thought world. Striving to base my research in relational accountability, as outlined by Shawn Wilson (2001), I am undertaking this project in an effort to gain knowledge about fulfilling my relationship with the Nishnaabeg Nations living along the course of where the Trent-Severn Waterway now spans—on whose Land I was raised—Odenaabe (Otonabee River) and the other Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway has been built onto and into, and other other-than-human persons living with these Waters. As S. Wilson calls for, I am trying to answer “to *all [my] relations* when [I am] doing research. [I am] not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead [I] should be fulfilling [my] relationships with the world around [me]” (p. 177; S. Wilson’s italics).

Aspects of this dissertation are representative of environmental history, described by Robert Wilson (2016) as “the study of the relationship between society and the environment over time”: “[w]hat distinguishes . . . environmental history . . . is an emphasis on historical context and how social divisions such as class, race, and gender affect people’s relationship with and use of the nonhuman world” (para. 1).

The personal, self-reflective approach to research, where my *efforts* to learn across cultures and across philosophies *are the research*, is illustrative of autoethnography, described by Christopher N. Poulos (2021) as “an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and

analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights” (p. 4). Tony E. Adams et al. (2014) outline that autoethnography:

- Uses a researcher’s personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences.
- Acknowledges and values a researcher’s relationships with others.
- Uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as ‘reflexivity’—to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political.
- Shows “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles.”
- Balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity.
- Strives for social justice and to make life better. (p. 1-2)

As part of the self-reflective character of autoethnography, it is important that I acknowledge limitations in my engagement with Nishnaabeg thought worlds in this research project. As I discussed in my introduction, via Bradley Bryan (2000), it is difficult to engage with another ontology when you are already immersed in one. Entering this work with my own presumptions about the nature of reality—presumptions that are so immediate that they can be difficult to be aware of—there are ripe opportunities for misunderstanding and misinterpreting Nishnaabeg ideas and understandings as if they exist within my settler ontology. For example, regarding his investigation into Indigenous conceptions of property, Bryan explains how “we lose access to the true nature of Aboriginal existence once we re-describe it ‘as’ *propertied*” (p. 6; my italics).

My capacity to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds is further limited by, for instance, my lack of knowledge of Anishinaabemowin, the Nishnaabeg language, which makes use of and showcases a Nishnaabeg thought world. As Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) describes the Anishinaabemowin word “puhpowee”—which translates to “the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight” (p. 49): “[i]n the three syllables of this new word I could see an entire process of close observation in the damp morning woods, the formulation of a theory for which English has no equivalent. The makers of this word understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything” (p. 49). Several of the people who I interviewed similarly noted the significance of Anishinaabemowin for understanding Nishnaabeg thought worlds. For Chief Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation—a Nishnaabeg First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), along the Trent-Severn Waterway—

employing the Ojibwe language and delving down into some of the terminology would be hugely beneficial in gaining a better understanding of our perspective . . . Because, it's like night and day between . . . historically, our People's worldview and the settler worldview— . . . two worlds, separate worlds.

Where that granite outcropping was an impediment to the movement of trade or to the movement of settlers, it might have been a cultural ceremonial place along the [Nishnaabeg trade] system. And so, in the minds of settlers, they may want to blow it up and move it, where in our People's minds, we wouldn't think that way . . . And I'm not a fluent speaker, but to describe a thunderstorm in the non-Indigenous mind is one thing. To describe it in the Ojibwe or Anishinaabe [mind] is a totally different thing altogether. So, that's something that I think would be critical for people to gain a better understanding of what the natural environment means and what its function is.

I do not want to speak definitively, because that presumes limitations for Nishnaabeg thought worlds that are outside of my purview; but it may be difficult, maybe even impossible, to communicate aspects of Nishnaabeg thought worlds in English.

Similarly, my main point of entry into Nishnaabeg thought worlds was not in Nishnaabeg culture or ceremony, but through reading, again in English. I interviewed Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers, took inspiration from Nishnaabeg ways of gathering knowledge through my walking methodology, and made efforts to listen to Nishnaabeg speakers and attend events based in Nishnaabeg knowledge when I was able to. Yet, my main point of entry into Nishnaabeg thought worlds was through reading, and reading might not be the most appropriate or adequate avenue for learning about aspects of Nishnaabeg thought worlds.

There are also protocols that need to be followed in order to learn certain aspects of Nishnaabeg thought worlds, which I did not incorporate into my research—and that might not be my place to learn, regardless. And, as with other fields of knowledge, engaging with Nishnaabeg thought worlds requires knowledge accumulated from different sources, over time. In my interview with Nishnaabekwe Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams, one of the founders and organizers of Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those Who Walk for the Water, and the Kawartha Water Walks, she noted that the information about Nishnaabeg thought worlds that she was, explicitly, telling me was “missing a lot of things”: “[t]here are some certain things that I can't talk about [directly], but I can talk about as part of a teaching.” I likely missed a lot of what Elder S. Williams was telling me in the teachings that she shared, when I am not immersed in Nishnaabeg thought worlds and ways of knowing.

Nonetheless, in order to support Indigenous Nations in dismantling settler colonialism, I contend that it is important to consider whether and how settlers might engage with Indigenous

thought worlds—in this case, Nishnaabeg thought worlds. However, these limitations reinforce that it is important to understand and frame my research project as exploratory, an opening to further investigations, and *speculative*. My use of speculation is inspired by “trickster logic,” as used and described by Melissa K. Nelson (2013), an Anishinaabe, Cree, Métis, and Norwegian scholar and activist. Nelson describes “trickster logic” as “a tool of liberation from any form of linear, monologic style, and universalizing theory” (Pulitano, 2003, p. 164, as cited in Nelson, 2013, p. 214).¹ Using trickster logic, she analyzes an Ojibwe hydromythic² figure from two contradictory positions: one, where the figure is presented to be “a victim of climate change” (Nelson, 2013, p. 214); and another, where the same figure is presented “as a *creator* of climate change” (Nelson, 2013, p. 214; Nelson’s italics). She explains the value of engaging with these two contradictory approaches but not reaching a conclusion of which one is ‘correct,’ saying that, “[j]ust as many Native stories and oral cycles have no definitive beginnings or endings or ‘closure,’ this analysis examines contradictory points in the interpretation of the Anishinaabeg . . . hydromyth and invites readers to enter the watershed of Ojibwe imagination” (Nelson, 2013, p. 214). I do *not* employ trickster logic in this research project—I do not have the knowledge or experience of trickster stories, Ojibwe imagination, or Nishnaabeg thought worlds to employ trickster logic. Nevertheless, Nelson’s trickster logic encourages research that is open-ended and exploratory, particularly when engaging with Nishnaabeg thought worlds.

Given my lack of immersion into the Nishnaabeg thought worlds that undergird Nelson’s trickster logic, I turn instead to Jairus Victor Grove’s (2019) description of speculation, which might be considered a parallel undertaking:

Ideas matter even if they cannot save us. Stories, explanations, and philosophical adventures are, in my estimation, the best of what the human estate has to offer. No matter how desperate things get, someone will still ask why this is happening, and we will share in that question the possibility of thinking together. . . . This is a renewed sense of adventure and creativity. (Grove, 2019, p. 11)

My use of speculation is most prominent in “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway,” where I investigate how other-than-human persons survive and resist against the Trent-Severn Waterway. Nelson’s (2013) use of trickster

¹ See also Kimberly Blaeser, 2012, p. 195.

² There are protocols around speaking this figure’s name aloud. Although Nelson (2013) does write the figure’s name, I am opting to exclude their name in my writing—except for when referencing Nelson’s chapter in my Works Cited—as I am not aware of what protocols there may be in regards to writing their name, nor discussions that may be happening regarding the naming of “mythic” figures in writing.

logic inspires me to view this examination not as a new, ‘truer’ history of the waterway, but as an exploration of the sort of histories that settlers may begin to realize if we work to engage with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous conceptions of other-than-human personhood. My examination of other-than-human survivance is adventurous, creative, and imaginative, rather than definitive history.

* * *

I used three methods to gather data for my research project. I undertook a walking methodology as a key method for my autoethnographic practice. And I conducted interviews and textual analysis to learn more about Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood, how to engage with such understandings in a good way, the Trent-Severn Waterway, and human and other-than-human survivance against the waterway.

WALKING METHODOLOGY

Rethinking and redeveloping my relationships with Waters and Lands necessitates, at least in my mind, spending time with those Waters and Lands. Hoping to challenge the anthropocentrism of settler colonialism in both the content and the method of my research project, I had to contend with understanding that if other-than-human beings *are* persons, then they carry and might share knowledge, and likely have a lot to offer my research. However, given our different ways of communicating, I am unable to readily interview other-than-human persons in the same way that I can interview (English-speaking) humans. Instead, I spent time with and learned from other-than-human persons via a “walking methodology”—although my practice often entailed staying in a specific location outdoors, rather than actively *walking*. As I discuss later, I use the term “walking methodology” via Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman (2018), though my walking methodology practice was inspired by environmental education, Haudenosaunee, and Nishnaabeg practices and philosophies of learning from Land. Moreover, my walking methodology was an iterative process, an attempt at learning through doing, and I continuously reflected on and reconsidered my practice of spending time with Waters and Lands.

Throughout the course of my research, I drove along the entire course of the Trent-Severn Waterway once, and visited specific locations along the waterway sixteen times, between September 2020 and the time of writing. As the waterway is 386 kilometers long, I visited different locations on different visits, and my destinations included locks on Saagetay’achewan (Trent

River), Odenaabe (Otonabee River), Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes), and Matchedash (Severn River), as well as the Newmarket Canal—a failed extension of the waterway. My visits also included a tourist cruise on Odenaabe—which traversed the lift lock in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough)—canoeing Odenaabe from the southern end of Nogojiwanong down to Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake) in two legs, and canoeing Matchedash from Severn Falls to the waterway’s Lock 43 at Swift Rapids, since this lock is only accessible by Water.

During my visits to these different locations, I spent varying amounts of time, though often a couple hours, walking along stretches of the Waterbodies or sitting and staying in certain locations along them. I paid attention to the human and other-than-human persons present around me, reflected on my research questions and my broader project, and recorded my thoughts, feelings, and experiences by speaking into a handheld audio recorder and taking pictures on a tablet computer. I later transcribed and coded my audio recordings, to bring insights from these visits into my dissertation.

Moreover, since I live and work in Toronto—which is not on the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway—I also visited Wonscontonach (Don River) more than twenty-four times between September 2021 and the time of writing, to practice and hone my walking methodology, particularly for building relationships with Waterbodies and their surrounding relations. During these visits, I focused on my efforts to ‘learn through doing’ and experimented with my approach to learn from Land and Waters. I nearly always spent two hours—although sometimes the time was cut short due to the weather or because I was feeling unwell—on the same patch of sand on the edge of Wonscontonach, not far south of the Prince Edward Viaduct, which connects Bloor Street and Danforth Avenue. I generally walked the same path to arrive at this stretch of sand, though my route also evolved over time—I came to stop by more and more specific trees after I ‘met’ them, as my visits to Wonscontonach progressed. However, what I did once I was at this stretch of sand changed from visit to visit. Sometimes I tried to just be in the place, without recording my thoughts, feelings, or experiences at the time, but reflecting on them afterwards; other times I let my mouth run, and recorded my thoughts, feelings, and experiences—on a handheld audio recorder—for nearly the full two hours I was out. Most of the time, I tried to just be present in the space for fifteen to twenty minutes, and then took time to record, followed by another period of being ‘present’ for fifteen to twenty minutes, and another recording, and so on. Other than a couple times when I forgot to bring my tablet, I nearly always took pictures during

my visits, to help keep track of changes in Water levels, foliage, and other aspects of the place I was visiting.

My walking methodology is informed and inspired by a variety of theory. Again, although my “walking methodology” did not always involve active walking, I use Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman’s (2018) term for this type of research. Springgay and Truman relay how walking methodologies have traditionally produced knowledge according to four key themes: place, sensory inquiry, embodiment, and rhythm. “Walking becomes a way of inhabiting *place* through the lived experience of movement. Walking is a way of becoming responsive to *place*; it activates modes of participation that are situated and relational” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p. 4; my italics); “[w]alking researchers interested in *sensory inquiry* . . . consider the ways that the walking body is immersed in a *sensory experience* of place, such as the texture of feet touching the ground, air brushing against cheeks, or the smells of city streets” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p.4; my italics); “[w]alking methodologies privilege an *embodied* way of knowing where movement connects mind, body, and environment. Walking scholars typically describe *embodiment* as relational, social, and convivial” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p.4; my italics); and “[r]*hythm* is described through embodied accounts of moving and sensory expressions of feet, limbs, and breath. In other instances, *rhythm* pertains to the pulse of the city, such as traffic, crowds, music, and other environmental phenomena that press on a walker” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p.5; my italics).

Springgay and Truman (2018) go on to “extend these four themes through more-than-human theories that are accountable to critical race, feminist, Indigenous, trans, queer, and critical disability theories . . . propos[ing] four additional concepts: *Land and geos*, *affect*, *transmaterial*, and *movement*” (p. 5; Springgay and Truman’s italics; original bold removed). In their conceptualization of “Land and geos,” Springgay and Truman assert that “walking methodologies must take account of the ways that place-based research is entrenched in ongoing settler colonization” (p. 5) and therefore, “walking research needs to attend to Indigenous theories that centre Land, and posthuman understandings of the geologic that insist on a different ethical relationship to geology, where human and nonhuman are imbricated and entwined. Land and geos . . . are attentive to situated knowledges that disrupt humancentrism” (p. 5). Springgay and Truman’s “affect” focuses on “ ‘affecting subjectivities’ bring[ing] intersectional theories to bear on affect theories, emphasizing the ways that subjectivity is produced as intensive flows and

assemblages between bodies” (p. 5-6). Transmateriality “disrupt[s] the notion of an embodied, coherent self. Trans theories emphasize viral, tentacular, and transversal conceptualizations of difference” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p. 6). And Springgay and Truman “understand *movement* as inherent in all matter, endlessly differentiating. Movement as force and vibration resist capture. This understanding of movement is indeterminate, dynamic, and immanent” (p. 6; my italics).

Although I use Springgay and Truman’s (2018) term, I was first introduced to what I now call a “walking methodology” by Timothy B. Leduc (2016), and the nature journal that he assigned in an environmental education course I took during my Master in Environmental Studies. Leduc’s understanding of learning from Land weaves John Livingston’s ecology of mind together with the Haudenosaunee Good Mind tradition, which Leduc learned about from Mohawk William Woodworth Raweno:kwas, who had—in turn—learned from “the former Cayuga Peace Chief Hadajigrenhta (he makes the clouds descend) Jacob Ezra Thomas, who died in 1998” (Leduc, 2016, p. 14). According to Leduc, “[i]n the history of environmental thought, there is . . . a long tradition of engaging nature as a source of inspiration” (pp. 8-9); “[w]ildlife conservation and environmental studies were for [Livingston] not necessarily activities but ‘state(s) of mind’ [Livingston, 2007, p. 12, as cited in Leduc, 2016, p. 10]. From the marshy flight of a heron to immersion in a ravine forest, relations with the beings in our presence and their ecological contexts can transform our minds” (p. 10). Moreover, the Haudenosaunee Good Mind tradition “teaches that people should be humble in recognizing that ‘real intelligence isn’t the property of an individual – [sic] the real intelligence is the property of the universe’ ” (Mohawk, 2010, p. 277, as cited in Leduc 14).

Leduc also introduced me to Joe Sheridan and Roronhiakewen “He Clears the Sky” Dan Longboat’s (2006) writing on the Haudenosaunee Imagination, which has significantly impacted my own burgeoning understanding that *knowledge might be shared by Land*, constituted of other-than-human persons—limited as that understanding may be, when I continue to live immersed in a dominant settler Canadian thought world. As explained by Sheridan and Longboat, “[a]s the last beings . . . created,³ humans are and remain dependent on all other beings, and whether those beings offer their lives for our nutrition or their sentience for our thinking and imagining, ancient reciprocities continue” (p. 366).

³ For more information on the Haudenosaunee Creation Story, see Brian Rice, 2013.

Onkwehonwe (unassimilated, traditional Haudenosaunee) . . . regard any assumption concerning the existence of autonomous, anthropogenic minds to be aberrations that violate the unity, interrelation, and reciprocity between language and psychology, landscape and mind. The ecology of traditional Haudenosaunee territory *possesses sentience that is manifest in the consciousness of that territory, and that same consciousness is formalized in and as Haudenosaunee consciousness*. Of course, other beings manifest that consciousness in their literature of tracks, chirrups, and loon calls. (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 366; my italics)

My understanding of learning from Land—which my walking methodology emerges out of—further developed through Anishinaabe professor Deborah McGregor encouraging students to spend time outside, reflecting on course materials, in a course on Indigenous research methods; a nature journaling assignment in an environmental education course taught by Traci Warkentin; and scholarship by Indigenous thinkers, such as John Borrows (2010), Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), and Vanessa Watts (2013), and non-Indigenous environmental educators and philosophers, including Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston (1999), David Jardine (1997, 1998), and David A. Greenwood (2019).⁴ The value of spending time with Land was also mentioned by a number of the Indigenous knowledge keepers who I interviewed—I share some of their insights in “Chapter Four: Developing Relationships with Other-than-Human Persons Along the Trent-Severn Waterway.”

According to John Borrows (2010),

Indigenous peoples . . . find and develop law from observations of the physical world around them. When considering laws from this source, it is often necessary to understand how the earth maintains functions that benefit us and all other beings. . . . Indigenous peoples who practise this form of law might watch how a plant interacts with an insect, and draw legal principles from that experience. Others may study how an insect interrelates with a bird, and take legal guidance from that encounter. (p. 28)

Deborah McGregor concurs, writing that “[t]hrough Anishinaabek interactions and experiences with the natural world, we derive a great deal of knowledge. As Cecil King states, ‘We gained our knowledge by living on this land’ ” (C. King, 2013, p. 5, as cited in McGregor, 2015, p. 71), and elsewhere, “[p]eople obtained . . . instruction or knowledge from many sources, including Creation

⁴ As previously mentioned, Zoe Todd (2016) outlines how theories and concepts of “post-humanism”—and I would include environmental education and environmental philosophy scholarship, even if it does not fall directly into the field of “post-humanism”—are indebted to Indigenous understandings of other-than-human persons. However, this indebtedness often goes unrecognized and unacknowledged. Some of the scholars who I discuss, in this section, do cite Indigenous thinkers and writers. Nevertheless, it feels important to emphasize the Indigenous intellectual foundations that their theories and concepts likely follow from, regardless of whether scholars cite or are even aware of these origins.

itself . . . Many stories and teachings are obtained from animals, plants, the moon, the stars, water, wind, and the spirit world” (McGregor, 2012, p. 3). As discussed earlier, in Glen Sean Coulthard’s (2014) *Yellowknives Dene thought world*, “the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (p. 13; Coulthard’s italics). And Vanessa Watts (2013) explains that “[h]uman thought and action are . . . derived from a literal expression of particular places and historical events in Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe cosmologies” (p. 23).

From an environmental education perspective, Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston (1999) contend that the best way to get to know what qualities animals possess—and, I add, other other-than-human persons—is by spending time with them: “we will have no idea of what other animals are actually capable — we will not readily understand them — until we *already* have approached them ethically — that is, until we have offered them the space and time, the occasion, and the acknowledgement necessary to enter into relationship” (p. 118; Cheney & Weston’s italics). David Jardine (1998) writes about walking with friends through a forest he feels connected with and “realiz[ing] how the creatures of this place can become like great teachers [Jardine, 1997] with great patience . . . It is no longer necessary to contain or hoard or become overly consumptive in knowing . . . this place itself will patiently hold some of the remembrances required” (Jardine, 1998, p. 94). And David A. Greenwood (2019) uses a mnemonic for the song of the red-eyed vireo—“Here I am! Where are you?”—as a call for mindfulness and being attentive to the more-than-human world.

INTERVIEWS

To research how I might engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds in a good way, as well as histories and settler-colonial impacts of the Trent-Severn Waterway, I also conducted interviews with Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers and with settlers working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg Peoples and communities. In total, I conducted seventeen interviews with sixteen interview participants, interviewing five Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers and eleven settlers—I interviewed one Nishnaabeg knowledge keeper twice, leading to the extra interview. I, additionally, contacted another eleven Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers and four settlers to try to arrange interviews, but was unable to do so.

My interviews with Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers focused on learning more about Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood; how to engage with these understandings in a good way, avoiding cultural appropriation, including methods for learning from Land; and how the Trent-Severn Waterway has impacted Indigenous communities and other-than-human persons. My intention with my interviews with other settlers was to gather and reflect on the thoughts and actions of people from a similar position as me, with similar concerns as me. I asked these settlers about if and how they were working to engage with Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human persons in a good way; their approaches to learning from both Nishnaabeg People and other-than-human persons; and their efforts to take this knowledge seriously in their own lives.

My interviews lasted between one-hour and ninety-minutes, and were semi-structured, changing with the flow of the discussion, but often following a set of questions that evolved over the course of the interviews. I conducted my interviews between summer 2021 and fall 2022, when the COVID-19 pandemic was well underway and, therefore, I conducted most of my interviews online via Zoom, or over the phone. At the request of the interview participants, I did conduct two interviews in person in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) in late summer and fall 2022. After getting consent from my participants, I recorded the audio of our interviews and I later transcribed and coded the interviews, focusing on content analysis.

I gathered participants for my interviews using snowball sampling. I started by reaching out to potential participants who I knew or knew of, and also potential participants who I could find information about online, by searching for events and initiatives focused on Nishnaabeg knowledge or solidarity with Nishnaabeg people in the Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) area. Then, at the end of each interview I conducted, I asked the participant whether they knew of anyone else who I ought to interview for my research project. This approach caused me to interview numerous people from certain ‘pockets,’ especially in terms of settlers acting in solidarity with Nishnaabeg peoples. Although my research did not have a religious focus, I interviewed three people from the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough, given the Fellowship’s Indigenous Allies Working Group and broader involvement in the Indigenous Allies Forum—a coalition of groups working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in the Nogojiwanong area, who meet several times a year to collaborate and coordinate different events and initiatives. I also interviewed numerous people involved in groups and events such as the Sacred Water Circle, Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those

Who Walk for the Water, Community Voices for Manoomin, and the Great Lakes Water Walk. Many of my interview participants were also connected to Trent University, as students, alumni, professors, or instructors, given the university's location in Nogojiwanong and prominent Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Science programs.

Despite the length of the Trent-Severn Waterway, all of my interview participants live, work, or have lived in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) or the surrounding area. Several of the Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers who I interviewed are not from communities along the Trent-Severn Waterway, but they have lived along the Trent-Severn Waterway for considerable amounts of time, have been welcomed by people living along the Trent-Severn Waterway, and have been meaningfully engaged with the Land along the Trent-Severn Waterway. I hoped to interview more Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers from along the Trent-Severn Waterway, and Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers from other parts of the Trent-Severn Waterway; but, as mentioned, I was unable to arrange interviews with eleven Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers who I contacted, with the COVID-19 pandemic likely being a factor in my lack of success in arranging interviews.

My interviews with both Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers and settlers included people from a variety of genders, and all of my interview participants were adults, though from a wide variety of ages—I did not have any criteria regarding the gender or age of the people I interviewed, and did not ask my participants to share this information about themselves.

Prior to each interview and again at the start of each interview, when I asked participants for their consent to be interviewed, I also asked participants what, if anything, they would like me to do before, during, or after the interview to better ensure that it would happen in a good way. As most of my interviews happened remotely, I was unable to immediately offer my participants semaa (tobacco), following Nishnaabeg customs, or gifts. However, I offered to send semaa to my participants or to put down semaa outside as examples of what I could do to ensure the interview would happen in a good way. I followed the requests of my participants, including putting down semaa outside prior to a number of my interviews. I also, later, delivered or mailed gifts to all of my interview participants.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

My textual analysis entailed two main research activities: one, a deep reading of *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway 1833-1920* by James T. Angus (1988);

and two, a study of relevant historical documents at three archives—the Trent Valley Archives, the Peterborough Museum and Archives, and the Trent University Archives.

Angus' (1988) book might be the closest there is to an 'official' account of the history of the Trent-Severn Waterway—at least that I have been able to find in my research. Angus explains the aim of his book by saying “I was less concerned with how the canal was built than why” (p. xi-xii); “my primary interest has been with the participants themselves, who included some of Canada's greatest leaders” (p. xii). Although Angus states “the most important participants were the countless little-known Canadians who, for one reason or another, promoted the scheme and doggedly pushed it to a conclusion” (p. xii), I contend that his book largely falls into 'Great Man' history, telling the story of the waterway via 'powerful' white men who were involved in high-level decision-making and organizing around the construction of the waterway. There are a few mentions of women involved in organizing for the waterway, and some discussion of discrimination experienced by people of Bulgarian, Italian, and Romanian descent while they worked to build the waterway, but I do not recall any discussion of Black People or other People of Colour. Particularly significant to my work, there are only passing mentions of Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and presences; and, when Indigenous Peoples are mentioned, they are generally removed to the past, even before the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway—presented as if they *had* lived in the areas where the waterway was being constructed, but were gone by the time construction began. Nevertheless, the thorough and detailed account⁵ presented in *A Respectable Ditch* does make it a helpful resource for understanding the history of the construction of the waterway—the motivations, locations, timeline, progress, and details of the construction—albeit from a dominant cultural perspective.

While I undertook a deep-reading of *A Respectable Ditch* to learn about the history of the Trent-Severn Waterway, I was also interested in where other-than-human personhood might be written between the lines. Angus (1988) does not pay much attention to other-than-human persons; they are not subjects in his writing—let alone agents or persons—but they are constant background presences, especially the Waters and rocks who the Trent-Severn Waterway was built on and into. Perhaps unbeknownst to Angus, other-than-human persons *are* constantly present agents in his

⁵ Angus (1988) describes his process of compiling the book by saying, “I searched through hundreds of government records, letters, and newspaper stories. I examined private papers. I read all the Commons debates on the Trent Canal from 1874 on, the year debates were first published. I studied all the public accounts from 1832 to 1923” (p. xii).

narrative. For example, on numerous occasions, floods destroy and wash away parts of the waterway while they are under construction. Therefore, my deep reading of *A Respectable Ditch* was especially valuable for uncovering the stories that illuminate “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway,” which looks at events in the history of the Trent-Severn Waterway that showcase the survivance of other-than-human persons.

Unfortunately, given his lack of attention to other-than-human beings, Angus’ (1988) accounts of many of these events are underdeveloped. The aforementioned floods are often discussed in only one or two sentences. Therefore, I also used Angus’ book as a starting point for conducting research at three archives: the Trent Valley Archives, the Peterborough Museum and Archives, and the Trent University Archives.

My primary intention when visiting these archives was to discover more information and accounts about events that showcase the survivance of other-than-human persons against the waterway—the focus of “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway”—but I ended up finding information pertinent to other aspects of my research project as well. I was able to access a bevy of historic newspaper clippings, photographs, maps, and blueprints related to the construction and history of the waterway, as well as government and academic reports, and secondary accounts pertaining to aspects of the waterway, the Waters and Lands who it was built into and onto, and Indigenous Nations and communities living with these Waters and Lands.⁶

RESEARCH MOBILIZATION

At the time of writing, as I near the completion of this research project, dissertation, and my Ph.D. program more broadly, I am also considering how I might best share my research with individuals, organizations, and communities who may be interested in it and who it is relevant to. For academic audiences, I will be presenting my research at academic conferences and have plans to adapt my research for publication in academic journals and, possibly, books. But, perhaps more importantly, I am also exploring how I might best reach non-academic organizations and communities along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, and especially organizations and

⁶ A number of the accounts that I found treated Indigenous history as prehistory, and did not necessarily recognize historic Indigenous presences as continuant with the Indigenous Nations who live in the area today.

communities that my interview participants are members of. I am, therefore, in conversation with a number of my interview participants about ways of mobilizing my research.

Presently, I have been invited by Elder Dorothy Taylor—Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation—to become a member of and share my research with the Sacred Water Circle, a group which she founded. The Sacred Water Circle is a not-for-profit initiative for “Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work together for the benefit of water” (Sacred Water Circle, n.d., para. 2), “lead[ing] with spirituality but also recogniz[ing] the necessity of working with science and policy to promote positive change in how we live with water” (Sacred Water Circle, n.d., para. 2). I have also been invited by Leora Berman—a settler, and founder of The Land Between charity and Turtle Guardians—to attend “[a] regional series [of talking circles] to share knowledge, identify needs, and find solutions for spaces and species at risk and common but disappearing wildlife” (Land Between, The, n.d.b) in the Lands where The Land Between charity focuses their work; to share my research at one of these talking circles, focusing on fishes, swimmers, lakes, and wetlands; and to create a video related to my research that will be shared on The Land Between charity’s website. Other interview participants suggested that I may be able to adapt and publish parts of my research in regional and community newsletters and newspapers along the Trent-Severn Waterway. And I continue to be in touch with my interview participants to explore other ways of sharing my research with them and relevant organizations and communities.

* * *

Altogether, my research project combines environmental history and autoethnography, in order to explore what it means and looks like for me to earnestly try to take Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood seriously, when I am not Nishnaabeg, and I live and was raised within the dominant settler Canadian thought world, so that I might better fulfill my relationships with the other-than-human persons and Nishnaabeg Nations who the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon. My research methods, in tandem, offer me different perspectives to learn about the personhood of other-than-human beings impacted by the Trent-Severn Waterway. Through my walking methodology, I worked to learn directly from these other-than-human persons and to build relationships with them. Through my interviews, I learned about the Nishnaabeg Nations living along the waterway, their understandings of other-than-human personhood, and how other settler allies are working to engage with these understandings. And through my textual analysis and archival research, I delved into the history of the Trent-Severn

Waterway and the construction of this settler colonial imposition. I am now—at the time of writing—considering how I might best share my research with individuals, organizations, and communities who may be interested in it and who it is relevant to. Some notable opportunities have arisen through generous invitations and conversations with my interview participants, and I continue to pursue further possibilities.

**CHAPTER THREE:
THE SETTLER-COLONIAL IMPOSITION
OF THE TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY**

i. it is with great regret that we are writing on behalf of the michi saagiig anishinaabeg to inform you that you will not be permitted to build your lift locks, canals and hydro dams here because this is the place where we come to sit and talk with our aanikoobijiganag.

ii. it is with great regret that we are writing on behalf of the michi saagiig anishinaabeg to inform you that you will not be permitted to build your lift locks, canals and hydro dams here because these are the rivers we use to travel from chi'nibiish to waasegamaa. these routes are vital to the health and well-being of our relatives, pimiziwag and maajaamegosag.

iii. it is with great regret that we are writing on behalf of the michi saagiig anishinaabeg that you will not be permitted to build your lift locks, canals and hydro dams because we cannot permit concrete shackles on our mother, she needs to be free to move around in order to cleanse and give birth,

-Leanne Betasamosake Simpson
(2013b, pp. 113-114)

My desire to redevelop my relationships not only with the Nishnaabeg Nations who live along the Waters where the Trent-Severn Waterway was constructed, but the Waters that the waterway was built into and onto, themselves, and other-than-human persons living with these Waters springs from my convictions that settler colonialism inflicts violence against Indigenous Peoples *and* other-than-human persons, that part of the violence inflicted on Indigenous Peoples stems from the violence inflicted on their other-than-human kin and other relations and, therefore, that settlers ought to attend to anthropocentrism in our analyses of settler colonialism and our efforts to dismantle settler colonialism.

In this chapter, I examine the Trent-Severn Waterway as a case study for demonstrating these convictions. As I have discussed, the Trent-Severn Waterway was built with people like me—settlers—in mind, and I likely only grew up in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) because the Trent-Severn Waterway was built there. I understand that I am not merely complicit in the settler-colonial violence of the Trent-Severn Waterway; my life is deeply entwined with it. And, while I strive to support the dismantling of settler colonialism everywhere it exists, I feel an amplified call to dismantle settler colonialism in places where I have lived and, therefore, I feel an amplified call to dismantle the settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway.

My aim, in this chapter, is to develop my assertion that settlers ought to attend to the violence that settler colonialism inflicts on other-than-human persons, if we—settlers—wish to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism. First, I describe the various structures that constitute the Trent-Severn Waterway, to give readers a better sense of the material existence of the waterway and to help inform my discussions, later in this chapter and throughout the rest of my dissertation, of how the waterway impacts Waters, rocks, and other other-than-human persons. Second, I outline the history of the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway, examining the motives for the waterway and providing a timeline for how the imposition of the waterway progressed. In this section, I also relay some of the history of the Nishnaabeg First Nations communities along the course of the waterway and the dispossession of their Lands. I have found nothing that indicates that there was an explicit connection between the dispossession of Nishnaabeg Lands and the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway—Nishnaabeg Peoples were not dispossessed of their Lands with the explicit goal of acquiring Lands where the Trent-Severn Waterway could then be built; and the Trent-Severn Waterway was not built with the explicit intention that it would aid in the dispossession of Nishnaabeg Lands. The Trent-Severn Waterway is, nevertheless, a part of settler-colonial expansion into Nishnaabeg Lands that are now, colonially, considered Central Ontario, and the timelines of the construction of the waterway and the dispossession of Nishnaabeg Lands along its route are oddly parallel, with significant events occurring at similar times. Third, I outline impacts of the Trent-Severn Waterway on the Nishnaabeg communities along its route, impacts on their other-than-human relations, and impacts on other-than-human persons in their own right. Finally, I close the chapter by considering these impacts in the contexts of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s (2012) and Patrick Wolfe’s (2006) conceptualizations of settler colonialism, Jairus Victor Grove’s (2019) idea of rendering, and Aaron Mills’ (2018) formulation of the three kinds of violence that settler colonialism inflicts. Through this analysis, I demonstrate that the Trent-Severn Waterway is a settler-colonial imposition on both Nishnaabeg Nations and other-than-human persons and nations living along its route, leading into my efforts to redevelop my relations with these persons in the following chapters.

SETTLER-COLONIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

While I examine the motives for the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway later, most straightforwardly, the waterway was constructed in order to make the Waters and Lands who it

was built onto and into navigable by settler Canadian boats. Several factors made it so that settler Canadian boats had significant trouble travelling through the areas where the waterway now stretches. The Water level of many of the Waterbodies was too low for many settler Canadian boats; for example, the average depth of Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake) may have only been around 1-2 m.¹ Water levels also fluctuated throughout the year, making navigability inconsistent, with meltwater particularly raising Water levels in the spring (Angus, 1988, p. 117). In some places, there simply was not Water where settlers wanted to go: there were some Waterbodies between Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe), but not enough to provide a passage for boats (Angus, 1988, pp. 240-242). And, in other places, rapids and changing elevations made it near impossible for boats to travel along their desired routes: for instance, Nicol Hugh Baird's² 1833 survey of Saagetay'achewan (Trent River) notes how the first 9 miles (~14.5 km) of the river, starting at its mouth into Gchi-Nbiish / Chi'Nibiish (Lake Ontario), were "a continued succession of rapids, cascades, chutes and shallows" (Baird, as cited in Guillet, 1957, pp. 153-154).

Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Peoples had been travelling through these Waters and Lands since time immemorial, using lighter-weight canoes that sit higher in the Water, and portaging to bypass the most significant obstacles. When I interviewed Chief Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation—a Nishnaabeg First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), along the Trent-Severn Waterway—he noted the significance of portage routes and carrying places, which "got one around certain points in the system": "because of the rapids . . . you had to get around one way or the other, and so [these carrying places] created a whole different existence amongst the [Nishnaabeg] People . . . [The carrying places] are a part of the system, in essence . . . And, of course, with the Trent-Severn Waterway . . . it caused . . . the disuse of these carrying places."

For larger settler Canadian boats, such as steamboats, portaging was not a viable option. Instead, various structures were built and augmentations made to the Waters and Lands so that these boats could navigate these Waters. Waterbodies were dredged and flooded in order to make

¹ One of my interview participants mentioned that the Water level of Pimadashkodeyaang was around 3 ft (1 m) prior to the Trent-Severn Waterway being constructed. I am not sure how accurate this measurement is, when it was given off the cuff during an interview. According to Zicheng Yu and John H. McAndrews (1994), the Water level of Pimadashkodeyaang was raised by 1.8m in 1838, and today the average depth of the lake is only 4 m (p. 142), making me estimate that the average depth was around 2 m prior to the Water level being raised.

² Some sources spell Baird's first name as "Nichol."

them deep enough for settler boats. Canals were dug in order to create Water passages where there previously were none. And locks, one of the most notable aspects of the Trent-Severn Waterway, were built to traverse changing elevations, avoid rapids, and control Water levels throughout the year. This series of structures and augmentations constitute the Trent-Severn Waterway.

Conventional Locks

A conventional lock consists of a chamber built into a narrow Waterbody, such as a river or a canal, with watertight gates on either end (see Figure 2). Locks are built where there is a change in elevation in a Waterbody, which often creates rapids or waterfalls. The watertight gates serve to separate the Water on either side of the chamber, keeping the Water on one end at the level of the lower elevation and the Water at the other end at the level of the higher elevation (Angus, 1988, pp. 14-15) (see Figure 3). For a boat to move from the lower elevation to the higher elevation, it enters the chamber through the gates on the lower end, which close behind the boat. Valves or sluices that are part of the gate on the higher end then open, allowing Water to flow into the chamber, gradually filling the chamber with Water and raising the boat. Once the Water and the boat are raised to the level of the higher elevation, the valves close, and the gate on the higher end opens, allowing the boat to continue on its way, now at the higher elevation. For a boat to move down from the higher elevation to the lower elevation, the opposite occurs: the boat enters the chamber through the gate on the higher side, when the chamber is full of Water. Again, the gate closes behind it, and valves on the lower-end gate open, allowing the Water inside the chamber to flow out slowly and gradually, lowering the Water level within the chamber—and the boat along with it—until it is on par with the Water at the lower elevation. The valves then close, and the gate on the lower end opens, allowing the boat to continue on its way (Angus, 1988, pp. 14-15).

The Trent-Severn Waterway makes use of forty-one conventional locks, as well as two hydraulic lift locks and one marine railway (Parks Canada, n.d.h).³ The greatest change in elevation in an individual conventional lock along the Trent-Severn Waterway is 14.3 m, at Swift Rapids, Lock 43 (Parks Canada, n.d.g, Navigational Data section) (see Figure 4); though, in two locations—Ranney Falls, Locks 11 and 12, and Healey Falls, Locks 16 and 17—two locks are

³ The locks are numbered one to forty-five, including the hydraulic lift locks and marine railway; however, there is no longer a Lock 29 on the Trent-Severn Waterway, after two locks were combined at Burleigh Falls—where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake) meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake)—in 1968 (Parks Canada, n.d.e, History section, para. 1).

used in a series in order to traverse a greater difference in elevation (see Figure 5). This arrangement is known as a “flight lock.” At 14.6 m, the change in elevation at the Ranney Falls flight lock is greater than the change in elevation at the Swift Rapids lock (Parks Canada, n.d.b, Navigational Data section; Parks Canada, n.d.c, Navigational Data section).

Hydraulic Lift Locks

The two hydraulic lift locks are Lock 21—found in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), on a canal alongside Odenaabe (Otonabee River) (see Figure 6)—and Lock 36—in Kirkfield, on a canal connecting Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) with Nummaibene Seebe (Talbot River) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Eacuniong (Lake Simcoe) (see Figure 7). At the time of their construction, the Peterborough lift lock was the highest hydraulic lift lock in the world, with a change in elevation of 19.8 m (Parks Canada, n.d.i, Existing plaque section, para. 2; Heritage Value section, para. 1); and the Kirkfield lift lock was the second highest, with a change in elevation of 14.9 m (Parks Canada, n.d.f).⁴ The Peterborough lift lock was also “reputed to be the largest unreinforced concrete structure in the world” (Parks Canada, n.d.i, para. 4).

Whereas the chamber in a conventional lock never moves, it only fills with and empties of Water, the chambers of a hydraulic lift lock do move vertically, functioning somewhat similarly to elevators. Two chambers, with watertight gates on either end, are built side-by-side on the same Waterbody—a river or canal—where, again, there is a change in elevation in the Waterbody. When not immediately in operation, one chamber rests at the same level as the higher elevation of the Waterbody and the other chamber rests at the same level as the lower elevation of the Waterbody. Each chamber sits atop a hydraulic cylinder, acting as a counterweight to the other chamber. The higher chamber contains more Water than the lower chamber, and therefore more weight. In the case of the Peterborough lift lock, there is 1 ft (~30.5 cm) more Water in the higher chamber, resulting in an extra 130.6 metric tonnes of Water (Castillo, n.d., table). When the chambers are unlocked from their resting positions, that extra weight causes the higher chamber to move down

⁴ These records have been broken (see Boat lift, 2023, Notable lift locks — ordered by size table); however, Parks Canada webpages still refer to these lift locks as the highest and second-highest in the world, respectively (Parks Canada, n.d.i, Existing plaque section, para. 2; Heritage Value section, para. 1; Parks Canada, n.d.f). It may be that the Peterborough and Kirkfield lift locks are technically still the highest and second-highest of some particular type of lift lock.

upon its hydraulic cylinder, forcing hydraulic fluid—Water,⁵ in the case of the Trent-Severn Waterway—out of that cylinder and into the cylinder beneath the parallel chamber, which causes that chamber to rise (Angus, 1988, pp. 229-230). As the chamber that had been higher comes to rest at the base of the structure, now at the level of the Water at the lower elevation, the other chamber is raised—in the case of the lift locks on the Trent-Severn Waterway—to 1 ft (~30.5 cm) *lower* than the Water at the higher elevation. The chambers are then locked into place, and the upper chamber is filled with the extra foot of Water using valves or sluices, like in the functioning of a conventional lock. The extra foot of Water, which had caused the previously-higher chamber to lower, is carried downstream when the gate opens on the now-lower chamber, meaning that the newly-higher chamber is primed to move, given—for the Peterborough lift lock—the extra 130.6 metric tonnes of Water that it now holds.

Boats are able to travel from the lower to the higher elevation at the same time that other boats travel from the higher to the lower elevation. When one chamber is at the height of the lower elevation, and the other is at the height of the higher elevation, the gates open, allowing boats to enter both chambers. Once the boats are inside, the gates close, and the chambers are unlocked from their positions, causing the heavier higher chamber to lower and the lower chamber to rise without the use of electricity—lift locks function through gravity, hydraulics, and counterweights. Once the previously-higher chamber reaches the level of the lower elevation—and the previously-lower chamber reaches the level of the higher elevation—the gates on the chambers open, and the boats are able to continue at their new elevations. The chambers then fill with another set of boats, and the cycle continues when ready (Angus, 1988, pp. 229-230).

Marine Railway

The Big Chute Marine Railway—Lock 44—on Matchedash (Severn River) is essentially a large trolley cart, 24.4 m long, 10.9 m wide, and 9.7 m high (Parks Canada, n.d.a) (see Figure 8), on a track over Land (see Figure 9). Winches pull the cart along the track, via cables connected to the cart. At either end, the track extends far enough underwater so that the cart is largely submerged when it gets to the end. When the cart is submerged, boats drive into place above it. The cart then

⁵ Oil is used in other hydraulic systems that are part of the Peterborough and Kirkfield lift locks, but Water is used in the presses and rams beneath the chambers (M. B., General Inquiries Administrator for Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site, personal communication, April 27, 2023).

slowly rises along the track and catches the boats on slings, which hold the boats in the air as the cart travels along the track, over the Land, carrying the boats with it from the lower to higher elevation, or vice versa. When the cart arrives at the other end of the track, it submerges deep enough into the Water that the boats begin to float again, rather than being held aloft by the slings, and the boats can drive away, now at the new elevation. The cart then fills with boats heading in the opposite direction, and starts its journey back along the track (see Angus, 1988, pp. 393-394).

Canals and Dams

In order for locks to function, Water levels need to be controlled (Angus, 1988, p. 14), in varying and sometimes conflicting ways. Therefore, combinations of canals, dams, and spillways are typically used alongside locks—including hydraulic lift locks.⁶ These structures can store Water to ensure that there is enough for the locks to fill and function in transporting boats; and they can also allow Water to bypass the watertight gates of the locks, to ensure that Water is not overly backed up throughout the system when the locks are not immediately in use.

Canals dug alongside naturally-occurring Waterbodies allow for Waters to be stored or diverted by a dam or spillway in one place, without interfering with the functioning of a lock in another place. Often, the locks are built onto these canals, allowing for better control over the change in elevation, while the dams and spillways are built onto and into the existing rapids or waterfalls (see Figures 10 & 11). Sometimes, the canals are quite long, creating an entirely separate stretch of Water akin to a river, which eventually reconnects with the naturally-occurring Waterbody (see Figure 12)—for example, the canal that accommodates the Peterborough lift lock, running alongside Odenaabe (Otonabee River) in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), is roughly 4 miles long (~6.5 km) (Angus, 1988, p. 226). Other times, locks, dams, and short canals are built in an array across the Waterbody, where the lock and canal exist more as channels of the dam (see Figure 13).

Along with being used to control Water levels, allowing for the functioning of locks, dams are also used along the Trent-Severn Waterway to intentionally impede the flow of Water and raise Water levels upstream from them, flooding over rapids and shallow areas so that they are no longer impediments to settler boats. For instance, James T. Angus (1988) notes that dams were built that

⁶ There is also a dam and spillway alongside the Big Chute Marine Railway providing passage for the flow of Matchedash (Severn River). The marine railway itself is built over Land.

“would raise the water in the Burleigh River by seven feet [~ 2 m] at the main dam, and would taper-off to zero at the foot of Lovesick Lake a half-mile upstream, drowning out a succession of rapids that lay in between” (p. 175).

Paul Baines—a settler currently working on how settlers can re-member kinship with place and Indigenous Peoples through a new cultural initiative called Kinadian, who previously worked as the manager for the Sisters of St. Joseph Blue Community program, was a coordinator for the Great Lakes Commons, and was the founder of the Great Lakes Commons Map—canoed from Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) down Odenaabe (Otonabee River), Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), and Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) in the summer of 2021. When interviewing Baines, he described the route as “not really a river. [It is] a series of plateaued or terraced lakes in many ways” due to the raised and controlled Water levels created by the dams of the Trent-Severn Waterway.

Of course, when Water levels rise, the Water needs somewhere to go, often flooding over the banks of the naturally-occurring Waterbody. The dams along the Trent-Severn Waterway caused significant flooding. An 1877 letter by James Ferris, a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, estimates that 20,000 to 25,000 acres [~ 81 – 101 km²] of land could be reclaimed if *one* dam on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River), at Chisholm’s Rapids—now Lock 7, at Glen Ross—was removed (Angus, 1988, p. 145).

In addition to the dams built to control Water levels at locks and the dams built to flood over obstacles, the Trent-Severn Waterway also makes use of dams on forty-four Waterbodies who are not on the direct route of the waterway, in order to provide additional Water to the system (Jaakson, 1973, p. 1225). As discussed, the waterway requires consistent Water levels in order to function. Given that natural Water levels fluctuate at different times of the year and between years, dams on these ‘reservoir’ lakes allow authorities to divert Water into the Trent-Severn Waterway, ensuring that there is almost always the necessary Water for the waterway to operate. A number of these dams predate the Trent-Severn Waterway, originally being used to facilitate logging in the area, and later being retrofitted to support the waterway. Overall, the Trent-Severn Waterway makes use of at least 162 dams (Parks Canada, 2022, table 39).

Figure 2

Buckhorn lock, Lock 31, at Sheboctecon / Schebockticon / Shebaughtick (Buckhorn, where Lower Buckhorn Lake meets Buckhorn Lake)



Note. Photo taken by author, September 27, 2020.

Figure 3

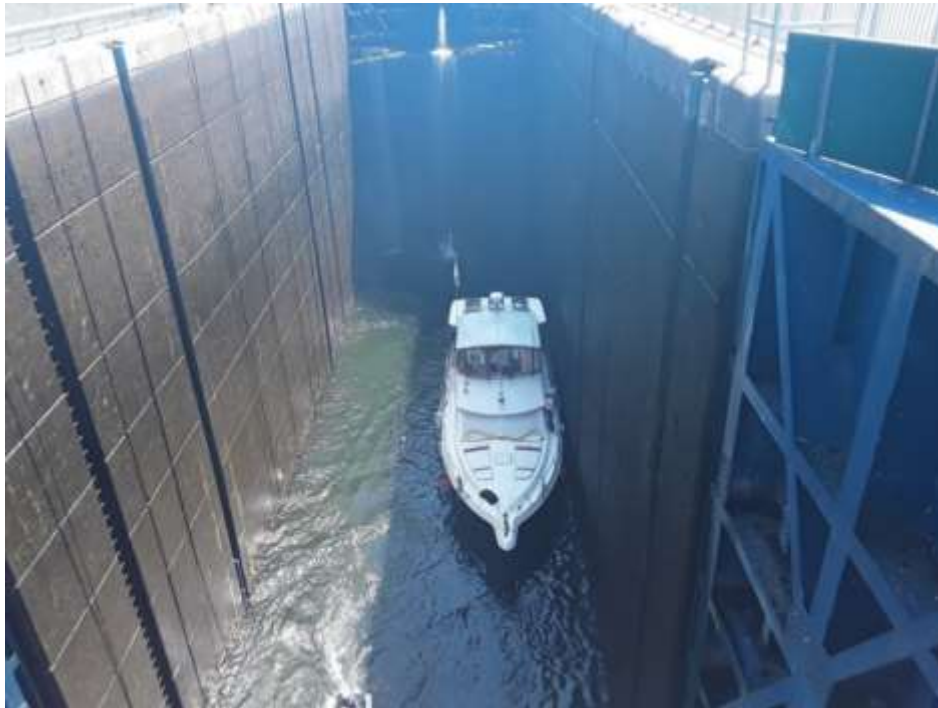
Hastings lock, Lock 18, on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River)



Note. Notice higher Water level on left side of image compared to right side of image. Photo taken by author, October 10, 2021.

Figure 4

Swift Rapids lock, Lock 43, on Matchedash (Severn River), at low Water level



Note. Photo taken by author, August 27, 2022.

Figure 5

Healey Falls flight lock, Locks 16 and 17, on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River)



Note. Foreground shows one lock at low Water level; background shows gates that open into a second lock. Photo taken by author, October 10, 2021.

Figure 6

Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21, on a canal alongside Odenaabe (Otonabee River)



Note. Photo taken by Joseph Kapron, May 28, 2023.

Figure 7

Kirkfield lift lock, Lock 36, on a canal connecting Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) with Nummaibene Seebe (Talbot River) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe)



Note. Photo taken by author, September 27, 2020.

Figure 8

Cart of the Big Chute Marine Railway, Lock 44, emerging from Water on upper side of track, on Matchedash (Severn River)



Note. Photo taken by author, July 23, 2021.

Figure 9

Track of Big Chute Marine Railway, Lock 44, on Matchedash (Severn River)



Note. Cart is visible in background Photo taken by author, September 27, 2020.

Figure 10

Dam at Burleigh Falls lock, Lock 28, where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake) meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake)



Note. Photo taken by author, September 27, 2020.

Figure 11

Dam at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22, on Odenaabe (Otonabee River)



Note. Photo taken by author, May 28, 2021.

Figure 12

Section of canal between Nummaibene Seebe (Talbot River) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe), close to Gamebridge lock, Lock 41



Note. Photo taken by author, September 27, 2020.

Figure 13

Short canal leading to Hastings lock, Lock 18, on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River)



Note. Canal is on right side of image. Dam is visible in background, on left side of image. Photo taken by author, October 10, 2021.

Describing the total extent of Water that the waterway utilizes, Edwin C. Guillet (1957) writes:

The chief headwaters of the Trent system lie in the central part of Haliburton County and consist of some 130,000 acres (~526 km²) of water surface; and another 100,000 acres (~405 km²) are added by nine other basins, comprising, in order of size, the Gull River, the Burnt River, the Mississauga, Jack’s Creek, Eels Creek, Deer Bay Creek, Nogies Creek, Buckhorn Creek, and [Maskwaa] River.⁷ The total water area of the Trent Canal and its feeders is estimated at nearly three hundred square miles (~777 km²). (p. xxix)

Starting in the first decade of the 1900s, many of the dams along the course of the waterway and the ‘reservoir lakes’ were constructed—or modified after they had been constructed—to also generate hydroelectricity (see Angus, 1988, pp. 302-306). Hydroelectric power makes use of the existing rapids or waterfalls, directing the swiftly flowing Water to rotate a turbine, similar to a water wheel (opgvideos, 2019, 0:16-0:34). There are presently at least twenty hydroelectric stations along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway.⁸

* * *

While today the Trent-Severn Waterway may seem to be a name for a collection of Waterbodies—similar to the Great Lakes or Muskokas—the waterway is, in fact, a system of edifices—locks, canals, and dams—that alter the shape and course of Waters and Lands using a variety of strategies. Together, these structures have extensively transformed Waters, Lands, and their interrelated systems throughout Nishnaabeg territory in what is now colonially considered Central Ontario, all in pursuit of making this territory more accessible to settlers.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WATERWAY AND THE DISPOSSESSION OF NISHNAABEG NATIONS

Given the vast extent of the Trent-Severn Waterway and the ways that it is now promoted, it would not be surprising to think that the waterway was constructed with a grand nationalistic vision in mind. However, in reality, construction of the waterway was, to quote Edwin C. Guillet (1957), “a long-term, spasmodic, and controversial project” (p. xxvii),

⁷ Edwin C. Guillet (1957) uses a former name for this river that is derogatory towards Indigenous People (p. xxix). Minwaajmod Winston Taylor-ban states that “that’s what the white people called it. *It wasn’t until recently that a fuss was made over that, and it was changed back to what it was always called—Maskwaa River*” (as cited in Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 112; Gidigaa Migizi’s italics).

⁸ I am able to find information about eleven Ontario Power Generation stations (Ontario Power Generation, n.d., map); five Peterborough Utilities Group stations (Peterborough Utilities Group, n.d.); two Orillia Power Generation stations (Orillia Power Generation, n.d.); and two Innergex stations (Innergex, n.d.).

“developed in a slow and irrational fashion” (p. xxix). There was never much unified support for constructing the waterway. The reasons that were given for building it shifted throughout its long construction, and were minimally realized once it was complete. Nevertheless, examining the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway exposes it as an infrastructure of violent, Canadian settler-colonial homemaking.

Note that much of the history of the Trent-Severn Waterway that I present in this chapter comes from James T. Angus’ (1988) book, *A Respectable Ditch*. As previously discussed, Angus’ book might be the closest there is to an ‘official’ account of the history of the Trent-Severn Waterway—at least that I have been able to find in my research. However, I would characterize Angus’ book as largely ‘Great Man’ history, written from an uncritical dominant settler-colonial thought world. Little attention or respect is paid to other-than-human persons, Indigenous Peoples, or other marginalized groups, including women, Black People, and People of Colour. When Indigenous Peoples are mentioned, they are often removed to the past—presented as if they *had* lived in the areas where the waterway was constructed, but were gone by the time that construction began. The history that I present regarding Nishnaabeg communities, First Nations, and treaties comes from other sources.

Upper Canada Land Surrenders

The Water route that would eventually become the Trent-Severn Waterway was initially surveyed in the late 1700s, as colonial authorities in British North America looked to find a way for ships to safely travel between the Great Lakes if armed conflict broke out with the United States of America—a prediction that was realized in the War of 1812 (Angus, 1988, pp. 361-363). Edwin C. Guillet (1957) notes that a letter by fur trader Benjamin Frobisher makes evident how little settlers knew of the Waterbodies who would eventually comprise the waterway in 1785 (p. 131); however, Frobisher’s letter might point to his own ignorance rather than a general lack of knowledge amongst settlers.⁹ When discussing the possibility of a navigable Water route between

⁹ Ferne Cristall et al. (1973) note that “[Frobisher’s] report asks more questions than it answers. Why had he so little information about the Trent system? He must have known every important trader and many voyageurs. However, he only spoke to one man who gave him a very poor account of the journey at that” (p. 73). Moreover, “[i]n 1785 Frobisher drew a map of the Ottawa, Trent, and Toronto routes to Lake Huron. None of these three different trade routes are drawn accurately at all” (Cristall et al., 1973, p. 104).

Odawa Zaagigan / Zaagiigan (Lake Huron)¹⁰ and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe),¹¹ Frobisher does mention “the Natives between the Two Lakes, who are Mississagues [*sic*] and some Tribes of Chippawas [*sic*], from whom I conceive there will be no difficulty in *making a purchase*, more especially as I believe their best hunting Lands are at some distance from the Tract that would be chosen for the purpose of establishing an entercourse [*sic*] of Transport between the two Lakes” (as cited in Guillet, 1957, p. 136; my italics).

In the late 1700s and the 1800s, the settler governments of the Province of Quebec, and later the Province of Upper Canada, were ‘purchasing’ Land from the Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, in what are collectively known as the Upper Canada Land Surrenders. I have not found evidence that these land surrenders included any particular consideration of the Trent-Severn Waterway, despite Benjamin Frobisher’s comment, and given the spotty construction and wavering support for the waterway, I doubt it was on the negotiators’ minds. Nevertheless, over the next several decades, Upper Canada would come to see itself as ‘purchasing’ much of the Land along the course of where the Trent-Severn Waterway would be constructed. While the Indigenous Nations living along the route often understood that they were agreeing to share their Land with settlers, they did not necessarily understand that they were selling it.

First, through the Crawford Purchase of 1783, the British came to understand themselves as acquiring Lands between the Toniata or Onagara River (Jones Creek)¹²—near present-day Brockville in eastern Ontario—and Saagetay’achewan (Trent River), stretching north from Gchi-Nbiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) “as far as a man can travel in a day” (Crawford qtd. in Boileau, 2020, October 19, para. 6). The influx of British loyalist settlers into these Lands, following the American War of Independence, saw many Nishnaabeg Peoples moved from the area, with a particular group moving first to Grape Island on Gchi-Nbiish / Chi’Nibiish, and later

¹⁰ Ojibwe and Odawa Nishnaabekwe Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams told me that the Anishinaabemowin name for Lake Huron is “Odawa Zaagigan” (personal communication, February 26, 2024), whereas Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018) writes it as “Odawa Zaagiigan” (p. 34).

¹¹ Benjamin Frobisher refers to Lake LaClie, an old albeit still colonial name for Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe). In this part of his letter, he is only discussing a Water route between Odawa Zaagigan / Zaagiigan (Lake Huron) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong, not one all the way to Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario). Frobisher argued for a route between Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong and Chi’Nibiish via the Toronto Carrying Place trail over Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) and Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) (see Cristall et al., 1973, p. 73).

¹² These Indigenous names for Jones Creek—I am not sure in what Indigenous language—come from Captain William Redford Crawford’s report from October 9, 1783, as cited in. in Boileau, 2020, October 19, para. 6.

becoming Alderville First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake) (Alderville First Nation, n.d., para. 1-2).

Through the 1788 Johnson-Butler Purchase, the British understood themselves as extending their Lands across the north side of Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario), from Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) to Adoobiikaag (Etobicoke Creek),¹³ purportedly as far north as a person could hear the gunshot if a gun was fired from the edge of Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish—giving this treaty the moniker, the “Gunshot Treaty” (Boileau, 2020, October 21, para. 1). In terms of the eventual route of the waterway, the British understood that they had acquired the Lands up to Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake) through this treaty. And in Treaty 20, the 1818 Rice Lake Purchase, the British understood themselves as acquiring a significant area of Land north of the Johnson-Butler Purchase, including Odenaabe (Otonabee River) and as far north as to cover Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) (Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, n.d.).

At the other end of the waterway, through the 1785 John Collins’ Purchase, the British Crown understood that they acquired Lands *in between* Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe) and Matchedash Bay on Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay)—though not along Matchedash (Severn River) itself (Boileau, 2020, August 20, para 1). Land along Matchedash was not ‘purchased’ by the British Crown until 1850, as part of the Robinson-Huron Treaty (Hele, 2020, para. 10); and other Nishnaabeg Lands along the course of the waterway were not ‘purchased’ until 1923, in the Williams Treaties (Wallace, 2020, para. 5), which I discuss later.

The Nishnaabeg who would come to live along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway were also particularly impacted by Treaty 5, the 1798 Penetanguishene Purchase; Treaty 16, the 1815 Lake Simcoe Purchase; and Treaty 27 ¼, the 1819 Rideau Purchase—although these treaties do not directly cover Lands along the course of the waterway. The Penetanguishene Purchase covers Lands around present-day Penetanguishene on Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay), across the Water from the end of Matchedash (Severn River) at present-day Port Severn (Boileau, 2022, para. 1). The Lake Simcoe Purchase covers Lands stretching from the northwest side of Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe), up towards Penetanguishene and Waasegamaa (Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, n.d.). And the Rideau Purchase covers

¹³ This Michi Saagiig Nishnaabemowin name for Etobicoke Creek comes from Talking Treaties Collective (n.d.a, Mississauga Place Names in the Toronto Area section).

Lands to the east of Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes), curving up to Gichi-ziibi (Ottawa River)¹⁴ (Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, n.d.).

Notably, prior to the Upper Canada Land Surrenders, most treaties made between Indigenous Nations and colonial authorities—in what would become Canada—were created more through Indigenous legal systems than settler ones. Controversies surrounding the Upper Canada Land Surrenders ought to be understood in this context of earlier treaty-making.

Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark (2017), an Anishinaabe professor of Indigenous Governance, outlines how within Anishinaabe law, treaty-making practices are considered part of “sacred law,” a “component of Anishinaabe law . . . [that] stem[s] from the Creator, creation stories, ancient teachings, and spiritual principles” (p. 254). Significantly, when Anishinaabe Nations made treaties with settler authorities, “they not only brought the Creator and their pre-existing responsibilities and obligations to creation into their relationships with . . . the [British] Crown” (Stark, 2017, p. 254); but, by extending these treaties to settler authorities, “the Anishinaabe were simultaneously recognizing their sovereignty (and thus responsibilities to their lands) as being derived from the Creator and . . . *bringing the newcomers into these pre-existing relationships*” (Stark, 2017, p. 257; my italics).

In this context of treaties being a sacred relationship with Creator and creation, the fact that the British understood that they were *purchasing* Land via the Upper Canada Land Surrenders—that Nishnaabeg Nations were ceding their sovereignty over and claims to Lands, and the British were receiving exclusive sovereignty over said Lands—was likely unfathomable to Nishnaabeg treaty negotiators.

Furthermore, believing that they could use treaties to purchase Land represented a unilateral shift in British treaty-making practices, away from their prior participation in Anishinaabe and other Indigenous treaty-making practices. Anishinaabe law professor John Borrows (1997) radically outlines how even the legal precedent for British presence in what is now considered Canada is derived from Indigenous treaty-making practices. Although the Royal Proclamation of 1763 is often alleged to be the legal precedent for British control of what is now Canada, the proclamation was a unilateral declaration from the British Crown, pronouncing that the Crown had title to Indigenous Lands. Indigenous Nations were not part of any discussions leading to the Royal Proclamation, nor did they agree to what it outlined. However, soon after the

¹⁴ This Anishinaabemowin name for the Ottawa River comes from Charles Lippert and Jordan Engel (2015).

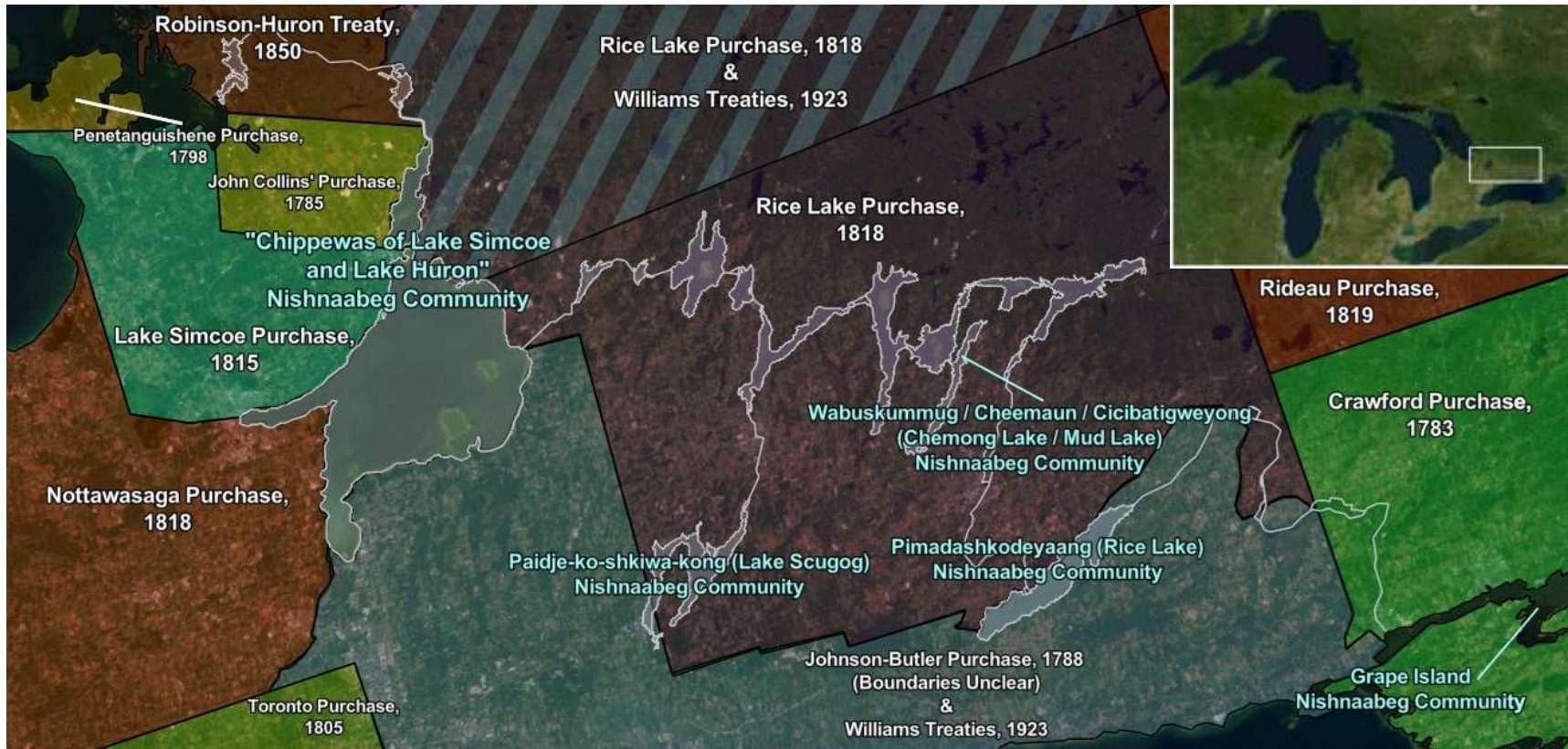
Royal Proclamation was issued, Indigenous Nations were called to meet with British representatives at Niagara “to negotiate and formalize the principles upon which” Indigenous Peoples’ relationship with the British Crown “would be based” (Borrows, 1997, p. 162). According to Borrows (1997), during these negotiations, the British Crown and the Indigenous Nations present *agreed* that “permission or consent [was] needed for settlement of First Nations territory” (p.169), and made promises regarding “respect for the sovereignty of First Nations, the creation of an alliance . . . free and open trade and passage between the Crown and First Nations . . . English provision of presents to First Nations, mutual peace, friendship, and respect” (p. 169). These negotiations effectively ratified Indigenous Peoples’ relationship with the British Crown and the nature of British presence on Turtle Island, and the relationship *that was agreed to* became codified in the 1764 Treaty of Niagara and in two wampum belts *created by the British* and *given to* the assembled Indigenous Nations, the 1764 Great Covenant Chain Wampum Belt and the 24 Nations Wampum Belt (see Talking Treaties Collective, n.d.b, The 1764 Great Covenant Chain Wampum Belt section, The 24 Nations Wampum Belt section).

The fact that the first Upper Canada Land Surrenders were made mere decades after the Treaty of Niagara reinforces that these land purchases demonstrated a unilateral shift in British treaty-making practices—which was likely not explained to or agreed to by Nishnaabeg negotiators—significantly calling into question the legitimacy of the Upper Canada Land Surrenders as any sort of consensual agreement, when the parties to the land surrenders had fundamentally different understandings of what the negotiations were about (see Miller, 2007, p. 79).

On top of the issues created by the British unilaterally changing their treaty-making practices, a number of the treaties covering the Lands along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway are also marred by their own specific controversies. What land was surrendered in several treaties was not well documented, including the 1783 Crawford Purchase (Boileau, 2020, October 19, para. 8-9), the 1785 John Collins’ Purchase (Boileau, 2020, August 20, para. 8-12), and the 1788 Johnson-Butler Purchase (Boileau, 2020, October 21, para. 7-8). No formal treaty was signed as part of the Crawford Purchase, nor was a deed for the transfer ever found; and one of the chiefs who negotiated the treaty had no jurisdiction over Lands that he ‘sold’ (Boileau, 2020, October 19, para. 11). No formal documents exist concerning the John Collins’ Purchase either (Boileau, 2020, August 20, para. 8).

Figure 14

Map depicting the Upper Canada Land Surrenders and subsequent treaties, and the location of Nishnaabeg communities along the eventual route of the Trent-Severn Waterway, circa 1810



Note. The treaty boundaries are based on data taken from the Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Affairs (n.d.) and may not reflect Indigenous Nations' understandings of what Lands were subject to these treaties. Also, the size and position of Waterbodies are based on data from the present day, *after* flooding caused by the Trent-Severn Waterway; the size and position of Waterbodies is not accurate to the 1810s.

Map created using ArcGIS Online; "World Imagery" basemap from Esri (2023).

What documents do exist, regarding the Upper Canada Land Surrenders, largely favour the settler side of negotiations, ignoring Indigenous voices. Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018), a late Michi Saagiig Elder from Curve Lake First Nation, describes how, regarding the 1818 Rice Lake Purchase,

the older ones remember what they kept in terms of maintaining their sustenance. They wanted to keep the islands, all through the system because they knew they needed to have somewhere to pitch their wigwamin. They also requested that all of the river mouths on Lake Ontario be kept for them because this is the place they would catch the salmon they depended a lot on. They also wanted to keep the maple bushes of the women so that they could collect maple sap and make maple sugar. They also wanted to keep the rice beds, so they could pick rice. They wanted to keep wetlands for medicines and beaver houses, because they needed the beaver. . . . They also thought that they could hunt along every shore, camp if need be on every shore in their territory and that the farmer would only stick to the fields. (pp. 64-65)

The inclusion of these terms suggests that Nishnaabeg negotiators to the 1818 Rice Lake Purchase were likely still understanding treaty-making according to sacred Anishinaabe law. Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark (2017) recounts an episode when the British Crown was working “to establish a treaty with the Lake of the Woods Anishinaabe in 1873” (p. 256), where Anishinaabe chief Aish-ke-bah-ge-ko-zhay (Flat Mouth) expected similar terms as those relayed by Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban, stating:

My Father, Your children are willing to let you have their lands, but they wish to reserve the privilege of making sugar from the trees and getting their living from the Lakes and Rivers, as they have done heretofore, and of remaining in their country. It is hard to give up the lands. They will remain and cannot be destroyed – but you may cut down the trees, and others will grow up. You know we cannot live deprived of our Lakes and Rivers. There is some game on the lands yet; and that that reason also, we wish to remain upon them, to get a living. Sometimes we scrape the trees and eat the bark. The Great Spirit above, made the Earth and causes it to produce, which enables us to live. (Aish-ke-bah-ge-ko-zhay, as cited in Stark, 2017, p. 258)

Analyzing these expectations, Stark describes how “the Anishinaabe brought their pre-existing relationships with the land, animals, and flora into the treaty. In doing so, Anishinaabe not only reserved the rights to hunt, fish, and gather in shared territories, but also, importantly, reserved the ability to regulate these rights according to Anishinaabe legal traditions” (p. 258).

Regarding the aforementioned terms of the 1818 Rice Lake Purchase, Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018) notes that “the government did not include any of those things in the treaty, except to save the islands” (p. 65); and, the British Crown would later ‘purchase’ the remaining Nishnaabeg islands in the bay of Kente (Bay of Quinte), Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), and

Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) through the 1856 Islands Treaties, Treaty 77 and 78 (M. J. M. Simpson, n.d. para. 2, 9).

Given the many issues with the Upper Canada Land Surrenders, the settler government would later use the 1923 Williams Treaties to perpetuate their control over these Nishnaabeg Lands (Wallace, 2020, para. 6, 7). I discuss the particular injustices of the Williams Treaties later in this section.

Despite all of the issues with these treaties, by the end of the 1810s Britain lay claim to most of the Nishnaabeg Land in the area of where the Trent-Severn Waterway now stretches, and the Nishnaabeg of the area were largely divided into communities on Grape Island in Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario), Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), Wabuskummug / Cheemaun / Cicibatigweyong (Chemong Lake, at the time Mud Lake) (see Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, pp. 69; 70), Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong (Lake Scugog) (see Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, n.d., para. 1, 4-8), and the Chippewas of Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron living around Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe), Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching), and Lands to the west (see Chippewas of Rama First Nation, n.d., para. 1; Innisfil ideaLAB & Library, 2024, para. 1-4, 9) (see Figure 14).

Early Construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway

Around the same time that the Nishnaabeg in the region were being dispossessed onto smaller centralized lands, the War of 1812 increased colonial British desires for an inland Water route that could help defend against the Americans in future conflicts. However, it was economic interests and the—as Jairus Victor Grove (2019) puts it—“Euro-American circuit of expansion, extractivism, and settlement” (p. 11) that started development of what would become the Trent-Severn Waterway in the following decades.

Construction on what would become the first lock of the Trent-Severn Waterway—now Lock 32—started in 1833, at the rapids between Namesagaiken / Nummey Saukyagun / Annlequion Checom (Sturgeon Lake) and Shebaughtickwyong (Pigeon Lake), known as Paub-boo-kaije-wenum / Bob-cajewon-unk (Bobcaygeon)¹⁵ (Angus, 1988, p. 7). The project was

¹⁵ Edwin C. Guillet (1957) writes that Bobcaygeon is “a corruption of Bob-cajewon-unk” (p. xxxvi), though I suspect that Bob-cajewon-unk is itself a corruption and misspelling of the original Nishnaabemowin name. Mae Whetung-Derrick (1976) gives the name as Paub-boo-kaije-wenum (p. 21).

spearheaded by James Gray Bethune. He did not intend for this lock to be the first in a series that would connect Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) and Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay); instead, he was simply interested in expanding his own growing shipping business. He already had a route of steamships and stagecoaches transporting people and goods between Cobourg, on Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish, and Nogojiwanong (Peterborough); and this lock at Paub-boo-kaije-wenum / Bob-cajewon-unk would allow him to expand his shipping further into Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) (Angus, 1988, p. 9).

At this time—the first-half of the nineteenth-century—the Family Compact ruled Upper Canada, with a small group of men controlling much of the government, judiciary, economy, and church. The men who had the power to make decisions about the eventual Trent-Severn Waterway, and the means to fund its construction, were many of the same men who owned Land along its route—Land that would see considerable increase in value if settlers moved onto it (see Angus, 1988, pp. 4-7; 11). Following Bethune’s construction of the Bobcaygeon lock—which was initially a failure, which I discuss in “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway”—these landowners began undertaking other localized projects on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River), Odenaabe (Otonabee River), and Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) under the auspices of bringing settlers into the area—lining their own pockets in the process—and supporting businesses, including the logging and mining industries (Angus, 1988, p. 33). From the outset, construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway was driven by desires to settle colonized territories and extract resources.

However, insufficient funds caused by financial mismanagement and exacerbated by the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837 resulted in many of these initial projects going unfinished (see Angus, 1988, pp. 40-41). And those that were finished were left to languish without maintenance or proper use. As James T. Angus (1988) puts it, by the 1840s, “[t]he much-hoped-for line of navigation from the Bay of Quinte through Lake Simcoe to Lake Huron, that would raise the district from obscurity to world prominence, had become a river of sunken dreams laden with leaking dams, flooded marshes, crumbling masonry, and abandoned homesteads” (p. 69).

Further Nishnaabeg Dispossession and Origins of First Nations Reserves

While what would eventually become the Trent-Severn Waterway was left to decay, the Nishnaabeg Nations in the region were seeing a new phase of settler-colonial dispossession in the

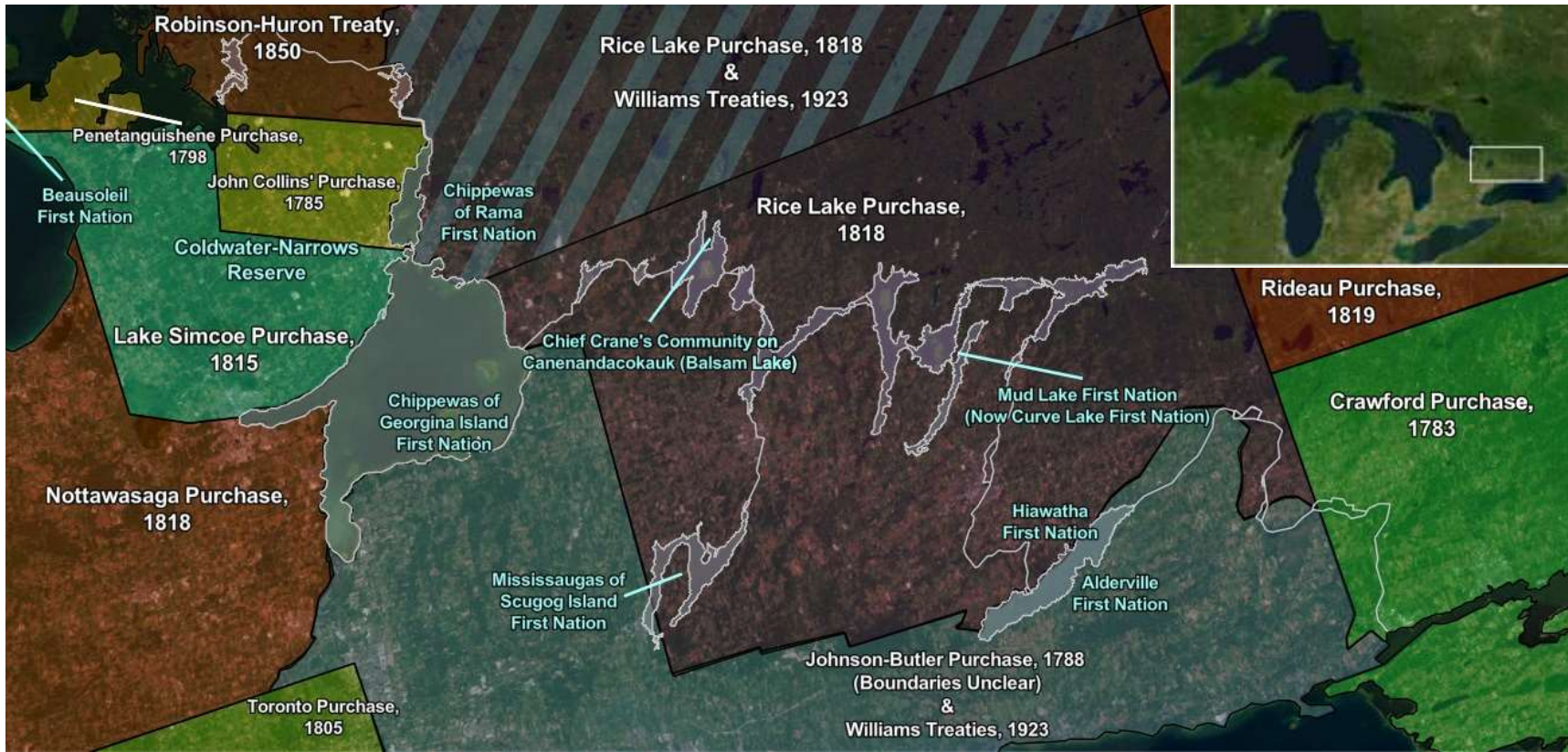
1820s to 1840s. In order to open Land for settlers, colonial authorities—sometimes working with the New England Company—continued to forcibly relocate Nishnaabeg communities onto centralized Lands, leading to many of the First Nation reserves that still exist today (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 69). Colonial authorities also hoped that pushing the Nishnaabeg Peoples to farm on these lands would facilitate their colonization, but many Nishnaabeg—even some who did take up farming—never stopped living according to their thought worlds and life ways.

By the 1830s, many of the Nishnaabeg living east of Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) had already been moved onto Grape Island in Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario). There, many of them converted to Christianity, specifically Methodism, although there was always also resistance to Christianization (Alderville First Nation, n.d., para. 2-4). In the 1830s, this community moved along with the Methodist mission to the south side of Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), where they would become Alderville First Nation (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 70). The Nishnaabeg already living around Pimadashkodeyaang were centralized into the Rice Lake Reserve on the north side of Pimadashkodeyaang, which would eventually become Hiawatha First Nation (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, pp. 69; 70). And the Nishnaabeg living around Wabuskummug / Cheemaun / Cicibatigweyong (Chemong Lake, formerly Mud Lake) were similarly centralized into the Mud Lake Reserve, at the north end of Wabuskummug / Cheemaun / Cicibatigweyong, which would eventually become Curve Lake First Nation (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, pp. 69; 70).

In 1830, the Chippewas of Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron were given a reserve on a stretch of Land between Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay)—near the present-day village of Coldwater, Ontario—and the narrows where Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe) meets Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching) (Innisfil ideaLAB & Library, 2024, para. 9). Describing this move as an attempt to colonize them, Chippewas of Georgina Island (n.d.) refer to it as the “Coldwater Experiment” (para. 3). However, in 1836, the leaders of the Chippewas of Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron were made to sign a document that they believed would give them title to their Land in the Coldwater-Narrows Reserve. Instead, the document actually ceded the reserve Lands (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation Coldwater Trust, n.d.; Innisfil ideaLAB & Library, 2024, para. 19). After six years at Coldwater-Narrows, the Chippewas of Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron lost their Land there and split into three groups: Chief Snake brought a group to Snake Island and eventually Georgina Island, in Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong, originating the Chippewas of Georgina Island (Chippewas of Georgina Island, n.d.,

Figure 15

Map depicting the Upper Canada Land Surrenders and subsequent treaties, and the location of Nishnaabeg communities along the eventual route of the Trent-Severn Waterway, circa the 1830s



Note. The treaty boundaries are based on data taken from the Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Affairs (n.d.) and may not reflect Indigenous Nations' understandings of what Lands were subject to these treaties. Notably, the boundaries of the 1788 Johnson-Butler Purchase are conflated with the boundaries of the southern portion of the 1923 Williams Treaties and, therefore, this map does not accurately depict Land around Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong (Lake Scugog) that was not subject to a treaty during the 1830s (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, n.d., para. 6-7). Also, the size and position of Waterbodies are based on data from the present day, *after* flooding caused by the Trent-Severn Waterway; the size and position of Waterbodies is not accurate to the 1830s.

Map created using ArcGIS Online; "World Imagery" basemap from Esri (2023).

para. 2-3); Musquakie returned to Gwajienjawjiing, originating the Chippewas of Rama (Chippewas of Rama First Nation, n.d., para. 1); and Chief Aisance brought a group to Christian Island in Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay), originating Beausoleil First Nation (Innisfil ideaLAB & Library, 2024, para. 20-24).

In the early 1830s, the Nishnaabeg living at Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong (Lake Scugog) were forced from their Lands by encroaching settlers and flooding caused by a dam that preceded the Trent-Severn Waterway, built onto Yawbaskkaokawk (Scugog River) (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, n.d., para. 7). Some of the Nishnaabeg from Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong joined with the Chippewas of Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron, moving with them to the Coldwater-Narrows Reserve. Others, including Chief John Crane, moved to Wabuskummug / Cheemaun / Cicibatigweyong (Chemong Lake, formerly Mud Lake) and the Mud Lake Reserve (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, n.d., para. 7-10). However, Chief Crane did not like the Mud Lake Reserve and so, in 1836, he moved with his people to a peninsula on the north side of Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake), which was given to him as reserve Land. That Land was unsuitable for farming and, as described by Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018), a late Michi Saagiig Elder from Curve Lake First Nation, “[w]hen [Chief Crane and his group of Nishnaabeg] moved to Balsam Lake, the government agent promised houses. The government agent hired a white man to build the houses. The white man embezzled the money and the houses were never built. Eventually, another man built the houses, but they were not accepted by the community” (p. 71). So, in 1844, Chief Crane returned to Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong with his group of Nishnaabeg, buying a parcel of Land on Scugog Island, despite the fact that much of their Land around Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong had been stolen without even a land purchase treaty (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, n.d., para. 6-7)—as problematic as those treaties usually were. That community eventually became Mississaugas of Scugog Island (see Figure 15).

As previously mentioned, Land along Matchedash (Severn River)—the northernmost part of the Trent-Severn Waterway—was not ‘purchased’ by the British Crown until 1850, in the Robinson-Huron Treaty. The Robinson-Huron Treaty, along with the Robinson-Superior Treaty, demonstrate another shift in British treaty-making practices, where the treaties themselves note that Lands would be set aside for Indigenous reserves—although the size of these reserves was not specified in the treaties—as well as ensuring hunting and fishing rights on the Lands covered by the treaties “until the lands were taken up for settlement or development” (Hele, 2020, para. 9),

and covering a much more expansive area than many of the previous treaties, with negotiations happening with many Indigenous Nations (Hele, 2020). The Land covered in the Robinson-Huron Treaty stretched “from Penetanguishine to Sault Ste. Maire [*sic*] and thence to Batchewanaung [*sic*] Bay, on the Northern Shore of Lake Superior; together with the Islands in the said Lakes, opposite to the Shores thereof, and inland to the Height of land” (treaty, as cited in in Hele, 2020, para. 10).

The Trent-Severn Waterway and the Logging Industry

Although the Nishnaabeg in the area were being relocated onto reserves, neglect of the Trent-Severn Waterway continued for the next several decades. Throughout the 1840s, Nicol Hugh Baird, an early promoter of the waterway whose surveys and plans for the route would eventually be used to complete the waterway, was able to finish the construction of the dams and locks that had already begun (Angus, 1988, p. 85). He also built several timber slides to support the area’s logging industry, which was gradually moving further away from Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario)—and the shipping route down Kitchi Ziibi (St. Lawrence River)¹⁶ to Montreal and Quebec City—after consuming the forests closer to these Waterbodies. With logging moving further inland, there was a need “[t]o facilitate the passage of timber over the falls and rapids and to speed up delivery before the spring freshets receded” (Angus, 1988, p. 89). The timber slides were “[d]esigned to accommodate whole rafts of timber rather than individual pieces” (Angus, 1988, p. 89), speeding up the transport of timber.

I have heard it said that the Trent-Severn Waterway was built in order to support the logging industry but, according to James T. Angus (1988), the two often came into conflict. The locks of the waterway often hindered the cut logs that were floated down the rivers, which had previously made use of the rapids and general flow of Water. Angus notes that loggers “cut holes in the dams when it suited them” (p. 107); and “a series of dams and locks was considered no longer safe or suitable after the construction of the timber slides, as it was thought that the immense quantity of timber descending the river might damage the locks, or that one of the dams upon which the locks would depend might give way in a spring flood, causing destruction of the whole

¹⁶ This Nishnaabemowin name for the St. Lawrence River comes from Gidigaa Migizi-ban, 2018, p. 34.

system” (p. 106). Indeed, in the late 1840s and early 1850s, “[t]he only public works in the district that were being used extensively were the roads and the timber slides” (Angus, 1988, p. 99).

As for the locks and dams that had already been built, “for 30 years [the government of Canada] practically ignored them, hoping no doubt that they would simply disappear because of almost total neglect” (Angus, 1988, p. 95).

Revival of the Trent-Severn Waterway

Nominal support for the waterway eventually re-emerged in the late 1870s. By the 1860s, many groups supported the removal of the structures that formed the waterway at that time. The locks were not in use and the dams were “a hindrance to the lumber trade” (Angus, 1988, p. 144), flooding lands that would be more valuable as farmland, and creating stagnant water that local residents believed was “responsible for the severe sickness that had prevailed in the summers of 1846 and 1847” (Angus, 1988, p. 145). An 1865 petition to remove the Chisholm’s Rapids dam—now Lock 7, at Glen Ross—illustrates sentiments towards the waterway at the time: “hundreds of acres of valuable land was totally destroyed ... [*sic*] making it appear to immigration and others like one great sea of water also spreading disease and death over the country by the stench and stagnant waters caused by said dam” (as cited in Angus, 1988, p. 145).

Following Canadian Confederation in 1867, the Conservative federal government under John A. Macdonald sought to hand over responsibility for what existed of the waterway to the new provincial Ontario government. Ontario had jurisdiction over its logging industry, the management of its rivers and streams, and its railroads, and so it made sense that it would control the waterway as well (Angus, 1988, p. 132). However, the Public Works Act stipulated that if control of public works was transferred from the federal government to a province, the province was required to maintain the works. Ontario was unwilling to take on the financial responsibility of *maintaining* what existed of the waterway, and so a planned transfer fell through in 1873 (Angus, 1988, p. 132-133).

It took until the summer of 1878, but a Liberal federal government eventually assured a Liberal Ontario provincial government that because the structures on the waterbodies “were no longer needed [they] could, if necessary, be removed without repercussion” (Angus, 1988, p. 146). The Ontario Liberals saw the removal of the structures as politically valuable: the dams were currently flooding land that would be very valuable as farmland, and if the Ontario Liberals were

the ones to remove those dams, opening the farmland, they expected that they would receive boosted support in the upcoming 1879 provincial election (Angus, 1988, p. 146). Thus, an agreement was made to transfer control of what existed of the waterway from the federal government to the Ontario provincial government; however, this agreement was made in secret, three weeks *after* the federal Liberals had lost the 1878 election, but before power had been transferred to the new Conservative government (Angus, 1988, pp. 143-144). When Conservative Member of Parliament Joseph Keeler discovered the transfer in 1879, he deduced that “there had been collusion between the two Liberal governments and that the transfer had been ‘accomplished for some secret purpose or motive, and that it was in some way mixed up with politics, and connected with the approaching local elections in Ontario’ ” (as cited in Angus, 1988, p. 144). Keeler did not want the Ontario Liberals to gain an advantage in the provincial election, and so he sought to stop the transfer of what existed of the waterway.

Other Conservatives supported Keeler—not because they wanted the waterway to be maintained, but because they did not want the Liberals to gain any political advantages by removing the structures that existed—and so, in an April 1879 parliamentary debate, they lambasted the planned transfer of the structures of the waterway (Angus, 1988, pp. 146-150) from the federal Canadian government to the provincial Ontarian government. John A. Macdonald, who was again Prime Minister and who had himself prepared to transfer the works to Ontario in 1872-1873, went as far as “allowing his anger to rise, preventing him from finding the proper words to express his indignation and disgust, [and] stammered: . . . ‘this [transfer] was . . . one of the most inexcusable acts ever perpetrated by any government’ ” (as cited in Angus, 1988, p. 150).

By mid-June 1879, the transfer had been revoked, but the federal Conservative government still had no desire to actually maintain or expand the waterway. Nevertheless, those people who desired that the waterway be built—namely, steamboat operators and other business people along the Waterbodies where the waterway would exist—now had an opportunity to make a case for the completion of the waterway. Their argument now shifted away from supporting immediate local “expansion, extractivism, and settlement” (Grove, 2019, p. 11), to the waterway supporting colonial development and resource extraction in the Canadian prairies. Products from the prairies—mainly agricultural products, such as wheat—could be shipped across Anishinaabewi-gichigami / Ojibwewi-gichigami (Lake Superior)¹⁷ and Odawa Zaagigan /

¹⁷ These Anishinaabemowin names for Lake Superior come from Charles Lippert and Jordan Engel (2015).

Zaagiigan (Lake Huron) to the planned terminus of the waterway in Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay). Steamboats would then tow these products, on barges, down the waterway to Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) (Angus, 1988, p. 158). The completed Trent-Severn Waterway “would reduce the shipping distance from the upper Great Lakes to tidewater by at least 400 miles [~644 km] over the Lake Erie – Welland Canal route” (Angus, 1988, p. 157). “Captains reckoned that the steamers could pull up to 15 or 20 barges, each holding 25,000 bushels of wheat. A train of barges could accommodate 30 or 40 boxcars of grain” (Angus, 1988, p. 158).

John A. Macdonald sat on whether or not to pursue the waterway but eventually, just before the 1882 election, decided to support construction of certain works that would be immediately useful, while carefully not committing to the construction of the entire waterway (Angus, 1988, p. 166). He still did not support the waterway—he actually sought advice on transferring the waterway to Ontario once again, but he was persuaded not to, given the hypocrisy that would be apparent after his hard stance against the previous Liberal government’s effort to transfer the waterway to Ontario (Angus, 1988, pp. 163-164). Nevertheless, Macdonald opted to support the waterway, without committing to its completion, on the basis that it would win him votes in the election, and maintain friendships and allyships. He had his own goals for Canadian settler-colonial development, and he needed to remain in power to achieve them.

Completion of the Waterway

Using the Trent-Severn Waterway as an election issue then became a tactic for both the Conservatives and the Liberals, up until the completion of the waterway. Neither party strongly supported the waterway, but many residents did in the areas where it would pass, believing it would benefit them and their livelihoods. In election periods, both parties would commit to some extensions of the waterway in order to win votes in those areas. Whoever was elected would then drag out actual work on the waterway, but would do enough that they would not be seen as outright lying. Often, they would increase work before the next election, so the fact they had done *something* was fresh in voter’s minds, and so they could raise fears about a loss of momentum if the other party was elected.

Construction of the waterway continued in this spotty fashion until 1920, when it was completed.¹⁸ However, the vision of the Trent-Severn Waterway being a shipping route was never realized. The Trent-Severn Waterway never supplanted the Erie Canal and Welland Canal as a route to ship goods from the Canadian prairies. As mentioned, starting in the first decade of the 1900s, many of the dams built on the waterway started being used to generate hydroelectricity (see Angus, 1988, pp. 302-306). These hydroelectric stations continue to be a significant aspect of the waterway, with at least twenty stations currently operating along its course. However, otherwise, the waterway has been predominantly used only by pleasure craft for recreation and tourism:

[t]he discontinuous series of events originating with the construction of a lock at Bobcaygeon would comprise the longest-lasting public enterprise ever undertaken in Canada, which in the end would create a canal extending from Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay and costing \$24 million¹⁹ but which, when finished in 1920, would be used in its entirety by few except some wealthy American yachtsmen [*sic*] and a few adventurous Canadian canoemen [*sic*]. (Angus, 1988, p. 3)

I suspect that few of the settlers who now live or cottage along the Trent-Severn Waterway realize that it failed to achieve its purpose or—especially when it is now touted as some grand national achievement—that it was constructed largely as a ploy to win votes. I can dream that if more settlers knew about this history, they would get on board with dismantling the waterway, recognizing it as the settler-colonial imposition that it is. But I suspect those dreams are naïve. The Trent-Severn Waterway did allow for settlers to move into the area, and especially when settler and Nishnaabeg interests continue to clash along the waterway—particularly regarding manoomin—it seems like the waterway entrenched callous settler-colonial entitlement that puts Indigenous life ways up for debate when they inconvenience settler recreation.

¹⁸ The span and course of the Trent-Severn Waterway has not changed since 1920, though many of the locks have been rebuilt, expanded, and repaired since the waterway was ‘completed.’ In 1919, rather than a lock, a marine railway had been built at Swift Rapids—Lock 43—on Matchedash (Severn River), as a temporary measure to save money during World War I. This temporary marine railway was not replaced by a conventional lock until 1965 (Angus, 1988, p. 389). And, in 1968, two locks were combined at Burleigh Falls—where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake) meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake) (Parks Canada, n.d.e, History section, para. 1). Historically, some people contended that the Trent-Severn Waterway was never completed, because of the marine railways on Matchedash and the final lock, Lock 45 at Port Severn, being too small to accommodate many boats. For example, in 1950, Robert Hatton reported that “the Georgian Bay end of the waterways [*sic*] was never completed, and the project withered like a rootless plant” (p. 5).

¹⁹ I am unsure when this dollar amount is accurate to, considering inflation. Angus’ book was published in 1988; and he notes that “[t]he dollar figures quoted are the figures reported to Parliament by successive auditors-general. Sterling has been converted to decimal currency using the exchange rate of five dollars to the pound” (p. xii).

The Williams Treaties and Continued Nishnaabeg Dispossession

Nishnaabeg dispossession was further cemented in 1923, just a few years after construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway was completed, when the Williams Treaties were imposed upon the Nishnaabeg Nations along the course of the waterway. The Williams Treaties came about due to poor documentation of the Upper Canada Land Surrenders, particularly the Johnson-Butler Purchase of 1788 or Gunshot Treaty, which led to colonial authorities claiming Indigenous Nations had ceded more Land than what had been agreed to (Wallace, 2020, para. 5-6)—on top of these Nations *never* necessarily agreeing that the treaties entailed the cession of any Lands. Settlers were also moving into Nishnaabeg Lands that were not covered by any treaty, including Lands around Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong (Lake Scugog). Nishnaabeg communities petitioned the government over these injustices, leading to a government investigation in 1916 that ended up supporting the Nishnaabeg’s claims. A subsequent commission in 1923, jointly created by the provincial Ontarian and federal Canadian governments, once again affirmed the Nishnaabeg’s claims (Wallace, 2020, para. 6).²⁰

Thus, the Williams Treaties were created, not to redress Nishnaabeg concerns, but to preempt any challenges to the Upper Canada Land Surrenders and to re-entrench settler Canadian control over Nishnaabeg Lands, including Lands that had never previously been ‘purchased.’ While the Upper Canada Land Surrenders were by no means fair negotiations, the Williams Treaties included no negotiations at all; “[i]nstead, government officials dictated the terms that Canada and Ontario had decided earlier that year to the First Nations signatories” (Wallace, 2020, para. 7). Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018), a late Michi Saagiig Elder from Curve Lake First Nation, notes that “Chief of Curve Lake, Dan Whetung was not even allowed to bring his lawyer into the interview [with the Williams Commission]. The commissioners made his lawyer wait outside in the parking lot” (p. 81). Sarah Isabel Wallace (2020) relays that the Nishnaabeg “may have been ready to take their grievances to the League of Nations and to British officials . . . in that same year [1923], perhaps prompting the federal government to move quickly with the treaties” (para. 7). I imagine that the federal government also *wanted* to dictate the terms of the treaties, and the lack of negotiations was not just out of expediency; the negotiations would have been a façade even if they did occur.

²⁰ The commission and ensuing treaties were named for Angus S. Williams, the Chair and provincial representative on the three-person commission (see Wallace, 2020, para. 6).

Many of the Nishnaabeg communities were under added duress when the Williams Treaties were brought to them. They were already facing many of the violent impacts of the Trent-Severn Waterway that I discuss in the next section: the dams of the waterway had flooded their Lands and devastated their food relations including manoomin, salmon, and eels. As a result of these hardships, Chief Dan Whetung “[a]ll through his interview [with the Williams Commission] . . . stress[ed] that it was critical for his people to maintain their hunting and fishing rights” (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 80); however, unlike previous treaties, the Williams Treaties did not include any provisions for Nishnaabeg harvesting rights, to hunt, trap, or fish outside of their reserves (L. B. Simpson, 2017, p. 106).

Typically, rights guaranteed in treaties are carried over to any future treaties made on the same territories; however, the Williams Treaties contained the basket clause, described by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) as “a legal clause added *after* the treaty was negotiated that *negated all other treaties* Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg had signed with the Crown. It is our belief that this clause was added after negotiations were complete without the knowledge of our leaders” (p. 274 n. 37; my italics). Despite provisions for hunting, trapping, and fishing existing in previous treaties, including the 1818 Rice Lake Purchase, for almost one hundred years, the settler Canadian and Ontarian governments used the blanket clause to deny Nishnaabeg harvesting rights. L. B. Simpson’s “grandmother grew up eating squirrel and groundhogs because if her parents were caught hunting deer or fishing, they were criminalized” (p. 5). And Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018) shares stories from his grandmother’s brother Madden, whose father was a signatory to the Williams Treaties:

He [Madden’s father] only believed they were giving up the trapping rights north of Haliburton. They did not believe they were giving up their rights anywhere else. That is why they continued to hunt and trap and fish as they had always done after the treaty was signed. It was not until the Game Wardens showed up and began harassing them that there was a problem. This was a big surprise to our people. They had no understanding they were giving up their treaty rights. They would have never given up their ability to feed themselves. (p. 78)

The Williams Treaties caused serious harm to the Nishnaabeg Nations along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway; however, the Nishnaabeg never stopped hunting, trapping, fishing, and otherwise living according to their life ways. That these practices were now illegal gave them added significance as expressions of Nishnaabeg resistance, survivance, and sovereignty. After nearly a century of resisting the Williams Treaties, the Williams Treaties First Nations—Alderville

First Nation, Beausoleil First Nation, Chippewas of Georgina Island, Chippewas of Rama First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, and Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation²¹—filed a lawsuit in 1992, seeking compensation for the loss of rights and Lands under the Williams Treaties (Wallace, 2020, para. 17). In 2012, Canada and Ontario recognized the harvesting rights contained in previous treaties, such as the 1818 Rice Lake Purchase. And in 2018, an agreement was reached between the Williams Treaties First Nations and the Governments of Ontario and Canada for a formal apology, further recognition of harvesting rights, financial compensation, and the ability for these First Nations to buy Lands and apply to have them added to their reserves (Wallace, 2020, para. 19).

The settlement of the Williams Treaties was a victory for the Nishnaabeg, but Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) also outlines her perspective that it was a limited victory:

I am now able to hunt and fish in my territory without worrying that constant settler surveillance will lead to my criminalization for violating provincial fish and gaming regulations. But there is also a problem. It seems like the state is recognizing our hunting and fishing rights, on one hand, because we legally forced them to do so (using their legal system), and on the other hand, because our hunting and fishing rights no longer pose a threat to the state and to settler society. They pose no threat to cottage life in the Kawarthas, to either the family farms or the industrialized farming in the southern part of our territory, or to the cabin cruisers on the Trent-Severn Waterway. . . . Dispossession in our territory is now so complete that there is almost no place to hunt. The recognition of these rights seemingly poses no economic or political threat to settlers. (p. 40)

The Trent-Severn Waterway facilitated and, in some cases, outright caused the dispossession of Nishnaabeg Lands that L. B. Simpson is discussing. That the Trent-Severn Waterway is a colonial imposition on not only Nishnaabeg Nations, but also other-than-human persons, is further demonstrated by examining how it has impacted Nishnaabeg Nations, their other-than-human relations, and other-than-human persons themselves.

THE VIOLENCE OF THE WATERWAY

Even though the goal of a barge shipping route through Central Ontario was never realized, the Trent-Severn Waterway did make the area more navigable to settler Canadians. In exchange for settlers being able to better access these Nishnaabeg Lands, the Trent-Severn Waterway led to devastating consequences for Nishnaabeg Nations who live along the Waters that the waterway

²¹ All of these First Nations are along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, except for Beausoleil First Nation, which is on islands in Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay), not far from the mouth of Matchedash (Severn River).

now imposes upon, Nishnaabeg relations with other-than-human persons in and along these Waters, and other-than-human persons themselves.

Discussing the overall impacts of the waterway, Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018), a late Michi Saagiig Elder from Curve Lake First Nation, writes:

[t]he Trent Severn [*sic*] really opened our homeland up to settlers though. They came in droves, built cottages, put their sewage in the lake increasing nutrient levels . . . Then they also sprayed chemicals in the lake to kill the aquatic plants so they could have nice areas to swim. Farmers also put nutrients and chemicals on their fields and this would run off into the lake . . .

The nutrients caused big algae blooms. The muskrat population crashed. The big flocks of Passenger pigeons disappeared in the late 1800s. Makoons born in 1875 remembers them, but Madden, born in 1895 didn't. Makoons also remembered seeing eagles. Neither of them had any memory of caribou, but they both remembered elk. (p. 83)

In my interview with Taylor Wilkes—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, who was a facilitator and program coordinator with Our Living Waters at the time of our interview—she described how, as a navigable Water project, the Trent-Severn Waterway “not only . . . change[d] the Water course, and the Water quality, and the quality of habitats for beings. It also enabled a lot of the destruction that happened to the Land, [including by] the lumber industry, and gave access to settlers to go further into the territory and steal more. So, it has had some real dire implications on the landscape.”

Violence Against Nishnaabeg Ways of Life

When interviewing Chief Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation—a Nishnaabeg First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), along the Trent-Severn Waterway—we discussed the bitter irony that a failed settler shipping route interrupted a trade route that had been used by Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. Chief Mowat shared a story that demonstrates the significance of the route where the Trent-Severn Waterway now stretches, for Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Peoples:

I reinterred an old ancestor . . . on an island in Rice Lake . . . [who] was estimated to be upwards of 3500 years old. He actually eroded out of the side of a sandbar on an island in Rice Lake and . . . he had been buried there with his spear and, of course, the shaft disintegrated, but the spearhead was made of copper.

And where were they mining copper traditionally? Up on the top end of Lake Superior, up somewhere around Keweenaw Bay, or somewhere up in Upper Michigan peninsula . . . And that copper was making its way all down through here and being traded.

And, of course, the Serpent Mounds [on Rice Lake] and various archaeological assessments and digs have unearthed a lot of trade goods that were coming up from the

Gulf of Mexico to here, and coming from Northern Ontario down through this system. So, [the route of] the Trent-Severn Waterway system has been hugely important for thousands of years.

The construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway created barriers for Nishnaabeg peoples who may have wanted to continue using this trade route, including—as previously mentioned—the carrying places and portage routes along its course.

Ian Attridge—a settler environmental and land trust lawyer and instructor at Trent University in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), and a member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough’s Indigenous Allies Working Group, the Indigenous Allies Forum, and other ally groups—shared in an interview that “[canoeing] down the Trent-Severn”—in a multi-leg journey organized by Paul Baines, another of my interview participants—“one of the things that struck me [was that] the original ways of traveling on the Trent-Severn Waterway was by canoe, for humans, and [the waterway] is [now]—in many cases—unfriendly to even that way of travel. We did it and had trouble at certain spots . . . it no longer accommodates the human form of travel.” In my own experience, the wake created by larger and faster boats makes it difficult and dangerous to canoe along parts of the waterway.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) describes how the Trent-Severn Waterway has also led to the privatization of Lands along the Waterbodies that the waterway imposes upon, further limiting Nishnaabeg access to these Waters: “[t]he shores of every one of our lakes and rivers have cottages or homes on them, making it nearly impossible for us to launch a canoe” (p. 4). In my interview with Elder Dorothy Taylor, Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation and founder of the Sacred Water Circle, she expressed concern over how, on top of privatizing Land along the Trent-Severn Waterway, settler cottages are also eroding the shoreline:

when you go on any lakes within the Kawarthas, on the Trent-Severn, every inch of shoreline has been taken up by cottagers . . . [and] they want to have pristine lawns—leaving things natural is not socially acceptable—so as a result the shorelines are eroded.

I worked as the Economic Development Coordinator for Curve Lake for five years and I was responsible to do shoreline studies . . . and Curve Lake was the only shoreline in both Upper Buckhorn and Upper Chemong Lake, in the whole territory, that was original.

Violence of Flooding

I have already mentioned flooding caused by the waterway, including the estimate, from 1877, that 20,000 to 25,000 acres [$\sim 81\text{--}101\text{ km}^2$] of land could be reclaimed if *one dam*, at Chisholm’s Rapids—now Lock 7, at Glen Ross—was removed (Angus, 1988, p. 145).

Flooding caused by the Trent-Severn Waterway significantly impacted the land base of Nishnaabeg communities, which was already decimated through the imposition of the reserve system. Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018), a late Michi Saagiig Elder from Curve Lake First Nation—between Sheboctecon / Schebockticon / Shebaughtick (Buckhorn Lake) and Wabuskummug / Cheemaun / Cicibatigweyong (Chemong Lake, formerly Mud Lake)—describes the flooding at Curve Lake First Nation and how Chief Dan Whetung’s testimony to the Williams Commission in 1923 emphasized the impacts that this flooding was having on the community:

we lost a lot of land during the flooding from the construction of the Trent Severn Waterway [*sic*] in 1844 and 1908. He [Chief Dan Whetung] talked about how Curve Lake reserve was originally 1,800 acres [$\sim 7 \text{ km}^2$], and we lost 600 [$\sim 2.5 \text{ km}^2$] acres to flooding. He told the commissioners that of the 1,200 remaining acres [$\sim 5 \text{ km}^2$] only about 400 acres [$\sim 1.5 \text{ km}^2$] were suitable for cultivating . . . He told them that before the flooding the game was out on the shore in the marshes. After the flood, the game was pushed inland onto private property and the marshes were then very deep. This made life for the people very difficult. All the land around the reserve was leased and placarded up—there was no place to hunt or trap. There was no place to go. (p. 80)

The flooding also created controversy regarding what Lands the Nishnaabeg still had sovereignty over, following the 1818 Rice Lake Purchase. The Nishnaabeg retained sovereignty over islands in this treaty, but “[t]here was a later drowning of lands by dams, which eliminated islands and created islands, which later the government said they weren’t original islands—so they were not included in the treaty” (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 65). And although the settler government would later assume control of the remaining Nishnaabeg islands in the bay of Kente (Bay of Quinte), Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), and Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) through the 1856 Islands Treaties, Treaty 77 and 78 (M. J. M. Simpson, n.d. para. 2, 9), questions over jurisdiction, created by the Trent Severn Waterway’s flooding of Nishnaabeg Lands, continue to have ramifications for First Nations communities today. In my interview with Chief Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation—a Nishnaabeg First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), along the Trent-Severn Waterway—he discussed that “we have a shoreline community and reserve lands down on . . . the south side of Rice Lake. It’s called Vimy Ridge. And . . . the original boundary of Vimy is way out in the Water. So that’s an issue for us, because who has authority over that area? Trent-Severn Waterway figures they do. But that’s a contentious issue related to our original boundary, which is drowned now.”

Beyond the loss of an already limited reserve land base, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2008) relays that the Lands flooded by the Trent-Severn Waterway included “cemeteries and

sacred sites” (p. 206). Outer parts of Chief Island, on Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching), were significantly flooded (Chippewas of Rama First Nation, n.d., para. 5). Chippewas of Rama First Nation (n.d.) describes “[t]he Island [as] a sacred place for our people with a number of unmarked graves on the island as well as headstones. These graves include those of warriors who died in a great battle on and around the island between the Ojibwe and the Mohawks after the Huron-Wendat were decimated by war and disease. Many warriors died on the island” (para. 3) Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018) describes the extent of what was lost in the flooding by saying: “[w]e lost so many graves—I still find cultural evidence of these graves around here. We were lucky that Nishnaabeg bury their dead inland a bit or it would have been much worse. We lost so many sacred spots—fasting spots and camp sites. We lost so much land and so many island to the flooding” (p. 82). In my interview with Chief Dave Mowat, he also mentioned that “there are [ancient] paleo-sites on the western end of Rice Lake that are underwater . . . that are drowned.”

And flooding caused by the Trent-Severn Waterway had harmful consequences beyond even the loss of remaining Nishnaabeg Lands, and the particular loss of important cultural and sacred sites. Even before the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway, a man named William Purdy built a dam on Yawbaskkaokawk (Scugog River), in order to operate a mill there. According to James T. Angus (1988), because “[t]he top of the dam [had] a higher elevation than Lake Scugog, the source of the river, the water was backed up all the way to the head of the lake, creating an immense mill pond” (p. 48). “[T]he extent of flooding on Lake Scugog [was] variously estimated at between 11,000 and 60,000 acres [$\sim 44.5\text{--}243\text{ km}^2$]” (Angus, 1988, p. 48). This flooding caused a significant loss of plant life, as “[h]ay meadows and cleared land . . . had been covered to a depth of nine feet [$\sim 2.7\text{ m}$] . . . [I]ow, shore-line flats had become deep bays filled with stands of rotting hemlock and tamarack . . . and large pieces of bog floated from swamps to drift around the lake as islands” (Angus, 1988, p. 48). Subsequently, “[s]chools of fish . . . were destroyed by the noxious gases released from decaying vegetation” (Angus, 1988, p. 48).

Furthermore, the stagnant Waters created by Purdy’s dam reportedly created conditions that “resulted in epidemics of fever and ague” (Angus, 1988, p. 48). In 1838, “an epidemic of typhus killed about one-third of the population in the vicinity of Purdy’s ‘pond’ ” (Angus, 1988, p. 49).

It was this dam, along with the encroachment of settlers onto unceded Lands, that forced the Nishnaabeg living at Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong (Lake Scugog) to leave their Lands in the early

1830s (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, n.d., para. 7). I have not found accounts of whether these disease outbreaks impacted Nishnaabeg communities, but I am not sure that they would have been able to avoid them.

Violence Against Manoomin and Other Plants

Flooding killed plants not only around Purdy's dam, Yawbaskkaokawk (Scugog River), and Paidje-ko-shkiwa-kong (Lake Scugog), but along the entire waterway.

There was no Watercourse between Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe) that was suitably navigable by settler boats, and so forests were flooded and new lakes were created to connect these two Waterbodies. "Mitchell and Canal lakes [are] no more than flooded forests. The steam[boats] followed a watery pathway carved out through depressing acres of dead and dying trees standing motionless, their roots suffocating under six feet of murky water, their limbs stretched stark and stiff in the hot air" (Angus, 1988, p. 254).

The loss of trees caused by extensive logging—facilitated by the waterway—and settlers subsequently moving into the deforested areas and starting farms also depleted what capacity the Lands along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway have to hold Water. Therefore, now, when natural flooding occurs, it is greater and more damaging than it was previously (see Angus, 1988, pp. 103–104).

The loss of manoomin (*Zizania palustris*)—wild rice—had particular impacts for the Nishnaabeg. Although manoomin is an aquatic plant, it "grows abundantly only in flowing or agitated shallow water, around 50 cm depth" (Yu & McAndrews, 1994, p. 150), and is adapted to grow according to seasonal variations in Water depth (Yu & McAndrews, 1994, p. 149). By increasing Water levels, the Trent-Severn Waterway drowned out manoomin and impacted the growth of surviving plants by restraining the flow of Water and imposing human control over seasonal variations in Water levels.

Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018) describes how prior to the Trent-Severn Waterway, "Chemong Lake used to be all wild rice. It was so thick across the whole lake. We had a path up the middle of the lake to canoe, otherwise it was all rice" (pp. 82-83); however, "[b]y the 1960s the rice was really set back" (p. 83). In my interview with Kelly King—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous folks in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and

former Education Director with TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—she recounted similarly

hear[ing] from [Gidigaa Migizi-ban] Doug Williams and Dave Mowat that . . . Rice Lake . . . before the Trent-Severn . . . [was the] perfect depth for manoomin. . . . It’s pretty much the same topography throughout the lake. . . . [And] they’ve spoken [about] how there used to only be one or two paths through the Water, that just a canoe could fit through, [and] otherwise it was just full of manoomin. Every direction you looked was manoomin, and the amount of food that would come out of that Waterbody was just astounding.

In my interview with Chief Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation—a Nishnaabeg First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), along the Trent-Severn Waterway—he described how manoomin “was a hugely important economic boon in the Peterborough area, and the bounty that came out of Rice Lake was hugely important, for not only our own people—as far as a dietary staple—but also economically . . . it was also important for settlers, that they have access to the wild rice bounty.” When I interviewed Heidi Burns²²—a manoomin-harvester, scholar researching connections between manoomin gathering and intergenerational relationships, and activist with Community Voices for Manoomin—she noted how manoomin “was a really important food source that settlers traded [for] to get them through winters.”

Beyond the loss of a staple food source, the loss of manoomin was *also* the loss of a significant cultural and spiritual relation. Manoomin plays a crucial role in the Nishnaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy and Migration Story, foundational stories of Nishnaabeg history and spirituality. In *The Mishomis Book*, the late Ojibway Elder Edward Benton-Banai-ban (1988) shares versions of the Seven Fires Prophecy and Migration Story, writing,

[t]he accounts of our life that have been handed down to us by our Ojibway elders tell us that many years ago, seven major nee-gawn-na-kayg’ (prophets) came to the Anishinabe. They came at a time when the people were living a full and peaceful life on the northeastern coast of North America. These prophets left the people with seven predictions of what the future would bring. Each of these prophecies was called a Fire and each Fire referred to a particular era of time that would come in the future. Thus, the teachings of the seven prophets are now called the Neesh-wa swi’ ish-ko-day-kawn’ (Seven Fires) of the Ojibway.

The first prophet said to the people, “In the time of the First Fire, the Anishinabe nation will rise up and follow the Sacred Shell of the Midewiwin Lodge. The Midewiwin Lodge will serve as a rallying point for the people and its traditional ways will be the source of much strength. The Sacred Megis will lead the way to the chosen ground of the Anishinabe. You are to look for a turtle-shaped island that is linked to the purification of

²² Heidi Burns noted that she has Scottish, Irish, Ojibwe, and British ancestry. Her Ojibwe ancestors “come from what we know today as Southern Ontario, along the southern shore of Lake Huron . . . but I grew up in the [Greater Toronto Area], grew up in Mississauga.” Burns has lived in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory, near to Odenaabe (Otonabee River) and the Trent-Severn Waterway, since 2012.

the Earth. You will find such an island at the beginning and end of your journey. There will be seven stopping places along the way. You will know that the chosen ground has been reached when you come to a land where food grows on water. If you do not move, you will be destroyed.” (p. 89)

Over several centuries, the Nishnaabeg moved to live around the Great Lakes of Turtle Island, following the Sacred Megis shell and the prophecies of the Seven Fires. Eventually, reaching an island that “today is referred to as Spirit Island at the west end of Lake Superior . . . the Anishinabe found ‘the food that grows on water.’ Here they found Ma-no’-min (wild rice)” (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 101).

The profound relationship that the Nishnaabeg have with manoomin is further illustrated by Chief Emily Whetung (n.d.) and the Curve Lake Council’s *Declaration Regarding Manoomin*, which explains that

Michi Saagig Manoomin (Wild Rice) is a sacred plant found only in the Great Lakes and Boreal Forest regions of Turtle Island (North America). Michi Saagig have over 10,000 years of history with Manoomin in our traditional territory. This sacred plant has sustained the Michi Saagig since time immemorial and continues to be recognized and honoured as a significant food source. (para. 1)

And Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2008) describes how manoomin “sustained our community; it was the grain that provided balanced nutrition through our traditional foodways. It was the sacred rice that held our fall ceremonies, dances, and songs, and our traditional ways of governance” (p. 207).

In my interview with Nishnaabekwe Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams—one of the founders and organizers of Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those Who Walk for the Water, and the Kawartha Water Walks—she shared another traditional story related to manoomin, where,

[a] long time ago, the Nishnaabeg were [in a] famine, there was famine, there was no food. And so it is a hunter who went out on the lake to go and hunt. He didn’t catch any fish, but he was going through by boat. And then he went by the rocks. The rocks behind him told him, a voice told him, to continue and told him where to camp. And during that camp he was waiting for something. . . . [T]he spirit told him or the voice told him that there will be something revealed to him if he prayed, and so he prayed that night and he camped that night at the lake. And when he camped that night and he fell asleep, the spirit came to him and told him about the rice. He says . . . “this is what the plant looks like”—in his dream he saw the plant. And when he was going through [by boat], he went through that plant, some of those plants, that were growing this way and that. So, he was told what to do, he was told how to plant and what to do, how to cook it, in that vision that he had. He was so excited that he went back home. He didn’t have any fish, he didn’t have any meat or animal or nothing. But, he went home and he told his people, his Elders, and village what he saw, what he heard, what he was told in the dream. He said, if we do this, if we celebrate for

this food that grows in the water, we will never be hungry, if we treat it right. So, to this day, that sacred food, that manoomin, is still very much [a] very staple food of the sacred foods that we use when we do ceremonies.

In my interview with Chief Dave Mowat, he described the role that manoomin played in Nishnaabeg life along where the Trent-Severn Waterway now stretches, and the loss of community that occurred alongside the loss of manoomin:

At Alderville, at one time, our people would camp on Sugar Island, which is a 100-acre island that's reserve land . . . in Rice Lake. . . . [O]ver a hundred years ago, our people would camp on the island: they'd have picnics, the steam[boats] that used to run around Rice Lake would come over to Sugar Island, and non-native people would come and have picnics, play baseball, there'd be concerts. It was just a great celebration of the harvest, of the bounty. . . .

[Manoomin] was important not only locally, as far as a traditional economy is concerned, but . . . it was critically important for people. . . . [I]t had so many facets attached to . . . its value, that it would have been devastating when it was lost in Rice Lake.

That's something I think about: what that actually did to families that were reliant on it. . . . [When] it started to be lost in [Rice Lake], . . . that's when our people would have to find it, go to Ardoch or . . . to other areas to harvest wild rice. So, here's a relatively poor people, living on the reserve, with no access to transportation. . . . [I]n the 1930s, there might be one car or two cars in the reserve. . . . [so] once people lost access to that resource on Rice Lake, they're almost disenfranchised from that activity, because they couldn't get to Ardoch—which is a hundred-mile drive from Alderville, for instance. There's no way they could get to Ardoch anymore. And so, culturally, the impact of that—it's never really been studied, it's never really been analyzed to any great degree, what the actual impact of that would have been. . . . There's a people whose families would go to Sugar Island and camp. And you might hear about the Cree communities in James Bay or Hudson Bay [where] basically the schools shut down when the geese hunt is on, and it's a complete communal event. Well, the wild rice harvest . . . —at that time, 100 plus years ago—that was a communal event. And then to lose access to that must have been very devastating on a number of different fronts: . . . spiritually . . . physically—it's a very physical activity—and then on a dietary level. . . . I think [the loss of manoomin had] a very profound effect on the community and upon families, that is probably not well known. I can only imagine what the impact would have been.

Chief Mowat summarized the harm of the loss of manoomin, and the violence of the settler thought world behind the Trent-Severn Waterway, by saying

these human-sponsored impacts . . . had a strong impact on our people's ability to harvest wild rice—[that] is one example. And [because of] this lack of understanding of the importance of that natural resource balance, that balance was upset. And I don't think that the government or settlers ever really understood how detrimental that was to our communities. This mindset of “progress, progress, progress”—it overran our people's ability to stay on the Land, or to stay at certain harvesting sites, and all for the “betterment of society.” [And] where are we now?

Fortunately, manoomin beds along the Trent-Severn Waterway have been returning over the past several decades, including on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), due to the efforts of Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous caretakers. Kelly King noted that, interestingly, the places that are the best depths for manoomin to grow are now often areas that were above Water before the Trent-Severn Waterway flooded them—I discuss the significance of this development further in “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway.”

However, manoomin also continues to be targeted today. Chief Dave Mowat shared a story from 2015, when he had to stop a combine on Shebaughtickwyong (Pigeon Lake) that was destroying the manoomin there: “a certain residential group or a certain cottagers association, I’m not exactly sure, put in a permit to remove aquatic vegetation. There is an aquatic vegetation removal permitting process that occurs every year, but in that particular year, Parks Canada—in its ignorance—permitted the removal of wild rice.” Settlers living along the Trent-Severn Waterway frequently seek to destroy manoomin, viewing it as an eyesore and a nuisance that prevents them from sufficiently enjoying swimming and boating at their cottages and homes. As Chief Mowat explains, ongoing attacks on manoomin are “an example of how we’ve been pitted against recreation, been pitted against the non-Indigenous economy, and again how First Nations People and their worldviews have been undermined. And we’ve had to go back to protect that [manoomin] and it’s been an ongoing battle, and it continues to be an ongoing battle.”

The Nishnaabeg communities living along the path of the Trent-Severn Waterway experience hardship from the destruction of manoomin, but not only because the loss of a staple food source impacts health and nutrition. The return of manoomin is important not only because it is the return of an important food source, or because it allows Nishnaabeg to practice traditional harvesting. Manoomin is an other-than-human *relation* of the Nishnaabeg, which they are cut off from when it is removed and destroyed. Part of the violence that Nishnaabeg Peoples face, via the Trent-Severn Waterway, is violence to their other-than-human relations. Violence against other-than-human relations is settler-colonial violence against Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, and settlers ought to attend to these aspects of settler colonialism when we analyze and work to dismantle settler colonialism.

Violence Against Salmon and Eels

Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) and American eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) are two other relations and food sources who were significantly impacted by the Trent-Severn Waterway. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) discusses learning from Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban that “Michi Saagiig Nishinaabeg are salmon people . . . Chi’Niibish had its own resident population of salmon that migrated all the way to Stoney Lake to spawn . . . There was a large population of eels that also migrated to Stoney Lake each year from the Atlantic Ocean” (p. 3). In my interview with Kelly King—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous folks in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former Education Director with TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—she talked about learning that “eels and salmon were constantly swimming up river and down river and . . . the People of the territory would follow these migrations . . . The salmon and the eel would be the guides: in many ways they would actually be leading people north in the spring . . . into summer grounds, and then . . . moving back south to the mouths of rivers into Lake Ontario in the fall.”

However, as mentioned by Ian Attridge—a settler environmental and land trust lawyer and instructor at Trent University in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), and a member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough’s Indigenous Allies Working Group, the Indigenous Allies Forum, and other ally groups, who I interviewed as part of this research project—“there were not fish ladders [built] on the [Trent-Severn Waterway] for the salmon, eels, and others who need to travel up and down the waterway, and who are essential to Anishinaabeg identity, sustenance, and culture” (personal communication, January 11, 2024). Without any means to bypass the dams and locks, salmon and eels were unable to continue their migrations following the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway and were cut off from their spawning sites. Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018) mentions that “[a] few [salmon] got locked in Stoney Lake and I remember them as a kid, but they too eventually died out” (p. 82). Salmon and eels are now extirpated, locally extinct, along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway.²³

Learning that these other-than-human relations were so significant that the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg are considered to be “salmon people” (L. B. Simpson, 2017, p. 3) is bewildering, given

²³ I previously provided this information in footnote 3, page xi. American eels are not completely extirpated from the area now colonially known as Ontario. The Land Between (n.d.a) charity is studying whether and to what degree American eels may be recovering in the ecotone where they focus their work. Though, as far as I am aware, American eels remain extirpated from the Waterbodies that the Trent-Severn Waterway is built onto and into.

how extensively these relations have been removed from the territory. Ian Attridge further mentioned how the “Michi Saagiig talk about themselves as . . . people of the salmon, and it’s gone. And . . . eels, which again [were] the livelihood of so many people, settlers included, but certainly Indigenous folks throughout the Atlantic seaboard Watersheds, and they’re gone. They’re largely gone. They’re not exactly gone, but they might as well be because they’re no longer part of the tradition here.” And Leora Berman—a settler, and founder of The Land Between charity and Turtle Guardians—lamented how

in scientific terms, the largest biomass in this region was fish. And to not know that fish [the American eel] is such an enormous loss, I can’t fathom it. . . . it was so abundant, and many people have never even heard of this fish, so I don’t even have a word for how horrible that is. It’s cumulative; it’s other dams; it’s further south. But the Trent-Severn [Waterway] certainly had an impact on that fish. And that fish fed—from what I [have] read—all the first settlers. And imagine how it fed the Indigenous Nations . . . I can’t fathom that loss. I can’t even follow the magnitude of that loss.

Even James T. Angus (1988), who so rarely discusses other-than-human persons in *Respectable Ditch*, mentions how “Atlantic salmon, once abundant, were totally obliterated from the streams” (p. 119). According to Angus’ account, it was primarily refuse from sawmills that killed off thousands of salmon and other fish in the mid-1800s: “[t]ons of sawdust, slabs, board edgings, bark, and wood chips were dumped . . . every day. The waste drifted downstream and settled in rotting layers on the bottom of quiet bays, promising to convert the lovely chain of Kawartha Lakes into an oozy morass of decaying wood fibres” (p. 118).

Angus (1988) also describes how sturgeons no longer spawn in Matchedash (Severn River), via a horrific account of the construction of Lock 45, on Matchedash, at Port Severn. Temporary dams were built to hold back the Water of Matchedash from either side of where the lock would be constructed—a common practice when building locks, because they are necessarily built in places that would otherwise be underwater. When the Water between these temporary dams was subsequently pumped out, so that construction could begin,

[t]he exposed bottom [of Matchedash], littered with decades of accumulated mill refuse, looked like the suburbs of hell . . . an immense quantity of waterlogged material had collected: timber, trees, roots, slabs, bark, chips, hulls of discarded batteaux and scows, and numerous pieces of scrap iron. The bottom beneath this jumbled mass of slimy material was covered with several inches of black oozy sawdust that had accumulated from the mill. As the lowering water contracted into pools, hundreds of trapped fish flapped and gasped among the logs and branches, adding an element of the macabre to an already grotesque spectacle that seemed to rise out of the water before the eyes of the astonished residents of Port Severn, who lined the shore to watch the unwatering of the pool.

Partly as a concession to conservation, but mainly to prevent the inevitable stench of rotting fish, the contractors hired young boys to save the larger fish . . . One 145-pound female sturgeon, its belly distended with several pounds of roe, was too heavy for the boys to toss over the dam . . . Never again after the construction of the dam and lock at Port Severn would spawning sturgeon, once a common sight, be seen in the Severn River. (Angus, 1988, p. 380)

At Mnjikaning—narrows between Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe) and Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching)—there is an important fishing weir used by the Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2008) outlines how,

[t]wice a year for thousands of years, those Fish Nations [the fish themselves] have met at Mnjikaning . . . to talk, to tend to their treaty relationships, as the Gizhe-mnido [Creator or Great Spirit] had instructed them. The people came as well, to fish, to talk, to meet with the Fish Nations. Indigenous Peoples tended those complex fish weirs at Mnjikaning for thousands of years, but we were forced to stop about 100 years ago. (p. 208)

I imagine that the Trent-Severn Waterway and the harm that it caused to those Fish Nations contributed to the cessation of these meetings.

And the Trent-Severn Waterway continues to impact fish today. In my interview with Alix Taylor, a settler who is a founding member of the Sacred Water Circle in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), she mentioned how,

the natural flow of Water has been disrupted and there is a long history of harmful discharge flowing downstream . . . which impacts the health of the Water . . . as well as the fish. So, if you talk to people from Hiawatha [First Nation, on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake)] who fish, I have been told that fish have changed. They have seen an increase in feminized fish, and illnesses, and a decline in fish populations.

Elder Dorothy Taylor, Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation and founder of the Sacred Water Circle, told me that “in the last five years, we have been advised by Chief and Council that we have to be very careful about our consumption of fish out of our lakes, because of mercury poisoning, so that’s really upsetting.”

Violence Against Other Animals

Additionally, in my interview with Heidi Burns—a manoomin-harvester, scholar researching connections between manoomin gathering and intergenerational relationships, and activist with Community Voices for Manoomin—she described how “the Trent-Severn Waterway has killed a lot of the animals . . . that once lived and thrived on the waterway”:

I made a note, the other day, to go check out the Hiawatha [First Nation, on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake)] trapping records, [to see] what the flooding of Rice Lake

has [done to] the muskrat and the beaver population there. These are also food sources for Nishnaabeg, right? So, the whole food system has been completely devastated by the construction of the [Trent-Severn Waterway].

Elder Dorothy Taylor mentioned concerns about how fish beds—fish spawning sites—can be left dry when Water levels throughout the Trent-Severn Waterway are lowered, preventing fish eggs from hatching. Changing Water levels along the Trent-Severn Waterway, at the discretion of Parks Canada, have been shown to harm other other-than-human persons as well. In 2022, a loon’s nest is reported to have been washed away after the Water of Odenaabe (Otonabee River) “rose at an ‘alarming’ rate” (Burke, 2022, para. 5), because of dams opening upstream on the Trent-Severn Waterway. The nest is said to have contained an egg that was possibly only hours away from hatching. While this case was documented, it is likely that the changing Water levels along the waterway destroy the nests of many other birds and other animals. Brendan Burke (2022) relays that “Parks Canada says tracking individual loon or waterfowl nests is ‘not possible’ due to the large size of the waterway, which is 386 kilometres in length” (para. 12). A birdwatcher who had been paying attention to the loon’s nest is noted to have “observed Parks Canada employees checking for turtle nests in the same area” (Burke, 2022, para. 11); however, I doubt that there is any significant monitoring or care for turtle nests, for the same reasons that waterfowl nests are not monitored or cared for.

Furthermore, wake from boats is known to disturb the nests of loons and other waterfowl, potentially leading the waterfowl to abandon their nests (Crawford, 2021). While canoeing on Odenaabe, between Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), I noticed turtles frequently moving from or being washed off of logs, due to the wake created by motor boats. Apart from Parks Canada’s control of Water levels along the Trent-Severn Waterway, other-than-human persons face additional harms because the waterway enables larger boats to travel through the Waterbodies who it was built upon.

Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban (2018) also addresses the loss of bullfrogs along the Trent-Severn Waterway, saying their “sounds have now disappeared in the Kawarthas. Buckhorn and Chemong Lakes were the first to lose them” (p. 87). In 1977, when he was Chief of Curve Lake First Nation, Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban and Wayne Taylor were taken to court for catching bullfrogs. As part of the trial, the prosecution argued that it was Indigenous harvesting that was causing the frogs to disappear. However, “[i]t was all the changes to the lakes through the Trent Severn [*sic*], the pollution and the virus that killed the bullfrogs, not Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg

harvesting them” (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 87). Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban and Taylor won the case by demonstrating that they had harvesting rights guaranteed by the Rice Lake Purchase of 1818, regardless of the blanket clause in the 1923 Williams Treaties (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, pp. 87-90).

Violence Against Waters

I hope that these examples have adequately illustrated the settler-colonial violence that the Trent-Severn Waterway inflicts upon Nishnaabeg Peoples along its route, and their other-than-human relations. Moreover, I want to remind readers that for the Nishnaabeg living along the Trent-Severn Waterway, many of the other-than-human beings who are impacted by the waterway are also persons (see Harvey, 2017, p. 18). The Trent-Severn Waterway should absolutely be recognized as causing profound violence to Nishnaabeg Nations, including in how it disrupts their relations with other-than-human persons, but—considering Nishnaabeg thought worlds and life ways—it should *also* be recognized as causing profound violence to other-than-human persons directly, including the plants and animals who I have already discussed, and the Waters and Lands themselves.

Deborah McGregor (2015) describes learning, as an Anishinaabe-kwe, that it is unjust when “the actions of people have disrupted the ability of the waters to fulfil their responsibilities around giving and supporting life” (p. 73): “Water justice, in Anishinaabek understanding, considers not only the trauma experienced by people and other life due to water contamination, etc., but values the waters themselves as sentient beings in need of healing from historical traumas. Only when the waters are well and able to fulfil their duties to all of Creation is water justice achieved” (p. 72).

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2008) outlines some of the responsibilities of Water, saying, “[i]n our bodies, water acts as a purifier, cleansing us and protecting us from disease. Similarly, water is the lifeblood of ecosystems, purifying the land through melting, through rain and natural flooding. The waters bring forth new life each spring, cleansing the land” (p. 206).

L. Simpson (2008) also explains how the Trent-Severn Waterway has disrupted the Water’s ability to fulfil these responsibilities, along its route:

[t]oday, the lift locks act like a system of dams constricting and constraining and controlling what the river can do. The lift locks block and disrupt the power of that flowing water with handcuffs and shackles, interfering with the cleansing, with bringing forth new life, and with the river’s responsibility of sustaining the territory. When the construction of

the lift locks colonized an ancient travel route, it also colonized the life-blood of our first mother. (pp. 206-207)

During my time spent along the Waterbodies who the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon, I often reflected on how rapids are a particular relationship formed between Waters and rocks over very long periods of time—I discuss this thought further in “Chapter Four: Developing Relationships with Other-than-Human Persons Along the Trent-Severn Waterway.” I believe it was the charisma of rapids that drew me to them, but rapids also stand out to me in Nishnaabeg thought worlds, when I was born and raised in places whose Anishinaabemowin names reference rapids: Bawating or Baawitigong, the “place of the rapids” (Nadjiwon, 2011, War of 1812 & Our Ojibwa Ancestors section, para. 2; *Baawitigong*, n.d.) and Nogojiwanong, “the place at the foot of the rapids” (L. Simpson, 2008, pp. 205, 211).

In my interview with Taylor Wilkes—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, who was a facilitator and program coordinator with Our Living Waters at the time of our interview—she directed me to a book chapter where Renée Elizabeth Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bédard (2008) discusses rapids, in conversation with Nishnaabekwe Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams:

[L]ike a washing machine, the rapids pull water into its grip and cause it to bubble and froth with oxygen, as if to clean the water and breathe life into it again. Then out goes the water, back into the river.

Similarly, the rapids are also like the heart and lungs of the human body. A heart pumps blood in; the lungs fill the blood with oxygen and cleanse the blood. Next, the heart sends that blood back out through the body, delivering essential elements to the body, while working also to remove harmful wastes. The rapids work in a similar fashion, both cleansing and feeding the river. (Bédard, 2008, p. 93)

Bédard (2008) goes on to discuss how pollution is limiting the Water’s ability to fulfil these responsibilities along the French River, where Bédard is from. I suspect that pollution along the Trent-Severn Waterway is similarly impacting the Waters along its route; and, moreover, the ways that rapids have been destroyed and co-opted by being turned into hydroelectric dams and locks is additionally interfering with Waters’—and specifically rapids’—abilities to fulfil their responsibilities.

When I interviewed Elder S. Williams, she discussed the role of wetlands, and plants living in and near the Water, in similar terms:

the plants . . . in the swamp area, they all have the same role: . . . to clean the Water. . . . [T]hat swamp is called biitooshkibiise in our language, [which] means that Water and Land that’s in between, in layers. And that is exactly what the swamp does—it’s in layers, which

cleans the Water. . . . [W]e need to really pay attention to what we are doing to the swampy areas. A lot of people . . . they're not thinking about [how they are] destroying . . . the plant species that are there, and . . . what's going to happen to those species.

Elder S. Williams noted that “[i]n the Trent River, there were certain plants that grew right along there, and because the Water was overflowed, they destroyed some of those plants—they are no longer there. Those plants that clean the Water are no longer there.”

In my interview with Elder Dorothy Taylor, Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation and founder of the Sacred Water Circle, she also shared that her

focus is now starting to be . . . on wetlands. My understanding is that 80 percent of all wetlands . . . [in] Ontario are gone, so there's only 20 percent . . . to be preserved. And, because of that . . . the Water is starting to become more polluted. . . . My father's generation, and my mother as well, they were able to drink the Water right from the lake. . . . This is not possible now. And, as a result of the contamination [and the] loss of wetlands, our groundwater is also being contaminated, so we have been under a boil Water advisory, here in Curve Lake, for going on 15 years.

*Violence Against Rocks*²⁴

As a final point in this section, I want to discuss rocks. While the Trent-Severn Waterway may appear to be primarily a rerouting of Water, it was through the reshaping of rocks that this rerouting occurred. Rocks, stones, and earth were blown apart with explosives, excavated, and dredged from Waterbodies in order to redirect the flow of Waters.

Graham Harvey (2017) outlines that in Ojibwe ontologies—as described by Irving Hollowell—some stones are persons but not all of them are (pp. 34-36): “Ojibwe certainly distinguish between animate and inanimate stones” (p. 36), “[t]hey . . . speak with (talking and listening to) animate stone persons. They [also] speak about stones moving and metamorphosing, evidencing volition” (p. 36). Harvey recounts, via Hollowell, a story where an Ojibwe man named John Duck, “spoke to [a] boulder in a low voice, inquiring whether it had ever been in his pavilion. According to John the stone replied in the negative” (p. 35). Harvey contends that “[s]peaking *with* stones shows that they—these particular stones—are treated as persons” (p. 35; my italics): “Duck spoke *with* one, i.e. he listened to it, easily, naturally, without hesitation or any sense that this is an abnormal act” (p. 35; Harvey's italics). Harvey also mentions, via Terri Smith, that “[o]ne

²⁴ As far as I understand, technically, ‘stones’ are small, individual pieces of rock more akin to pebbles, whereas ‘rocks’ are large, landscape-forming structures. When “stones” and “rocks” are used interchangeably in everyday English, I imagine that many of my sources do not make this distinction.

animate kind of stone was the type which could be found at the bottom of a tree that had been struck by lightning,” (p. 35) and that “the Bell Rocks near Manitoulin . . . are not merely treated *as if* they are persons, they are treated *as* persons” (p. 35; Harvey’s italics).

In my interview with Nishnaabekwe Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams—one of the founders and organizers of Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those Who Walk for the Water, and the Kawartha Water Walks—she told me that

there are special rocks that we . . . bring into the sweat lodge. They’re inanimate outside of that, if they’re not blessed, but once they’re blessed and brought into the sweat, then there’s a spirit in them. And sometimes, [when] the rock that’s being brought [in] is put into the fire, the rock can be really red, and that means that the spirit is already in there. So, when you bring it, you greet it as a human being, as a spirit, as a spirit entity.

In my interview with Elder Dorothy Taylor, Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation and founder of the Sacred Water Circle, she shared that “we talk about the Ancestors of the Land, the Grandfathers of the Land—which are the rocks. Rocks speak to you. How can the spirit of the Land speak to you? What do they look like? How can you hear them? It’s an act of faith and courage that you lead with prayer and ceremony.”

And Ojibway Elder Basil Johnston-ban (1976/2008) writes that “rock [is] strong and enduring. Plant beings, animal beings, and [human beings] come to an end, but the earth lives on. Mother Earth continues to be be [*sic*] bountiful, sustaining all beings. All else changes; earth remains unchanging and continues to give life. It is a promise to the future, to those yet to be born” (p. 25); and that

[p]erhaps [the] motherhood of Earth emanated from its elemental substance, rock. As such, it seemed to remain unchanged, enduring winds, winter and summer. It appeared immune to change that [humans] could see immediately, unmoving as it were, so as to live on in order to give life. The same kind of character and quality was expected of motherhood whose foundation was love. If children were to grow into [adulthood], they had to have confidence in the abiding nature of the love of motherhood, otherwise they would be wanting in trust in themselves and in others. But the constancy of the earth in life giving and in the bounty of her giving was more assumed than that of human motherhood. (p. 23)

Kinomaagewapkong / Kinomaage Waapkong, the Teaching Rocks—often referred to as “the petroglyphs” or “the Peterborough Petroglyphs”—is a notable sacred site near Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake)—one of the Waterbodies who the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon (see Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, pp. 24–25). Discussing Kinomaage Waapkong, Anne Taylor (MaangKwan) (2019) of Curve Lake First Nation shares,

[i]n Anishinaabe culture, we call rocks our grandfather, M’Shoomisnaan. This is because those rocks have been witness to the passage of time and all that has occurred in that time. Those histories are held within the rock and tell of our relationship with the land, water and the beings with whom we share space. The teachings held within the rock help us to build that strong foundation needed to live life in a good way. . . .

The knowledge held within the rock and the knowledge that has been drawn out of the rock in the form of petroglyphs is precious. Our Ancestors felt that this knowledge was so important to us as spiritual beings that they felt compelled to carve it into stone. As with all things sacred, there was ceremony. The very fact that ceremony was done in this area causes this land, this place, to be held in the highest regard, honoured and respected by many generations, many Nations. (para. 9-10)

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2015) also offers accounts of the significant things that rocks do from a non-Indigenous perspective, in his book *Stone*, including similar ideas to Ojibway Elder Basil Johnston-ban: “[r]elations do not create things like rocks and mountains; things like rocks and mountains are what enable relations to flourish” (Cohen, 2015, p. 3). In my interview with Christy Caudill—a settler and space and Earth scientist who has been developing her relationships with Land over the past several years—she similarly described her connection with rocks as being “the ultimate grounding. They are ground. They are things from which ground comes. And . . . especially here on the Canadian Shield, I mean, you lay on a rock and you’re just being held by billions of years, it has existed in that form—and it’s unfathomable— . . . but you’re lucky enough to be able to be held by that.”²⁵

As well as being reshaped to direct the flow of Water, rocks, stones, and earth were used in the construction of the edifices that now constitute the Trent-Severn Waterway. Throughout *A Respectable Ditch*, James T. Angus (1988) mentions numerous places where rock was quarried to be used in construction of the waterway, including Warsaw (pp. 43-44); a place near Belleville (p. 58); the south shore of Bessikakoon / Atigmeg Zaageguneen (Clear Lake) (p. 138); south of Burleigh Falls (p. 175); and Beausoleil Island in Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay) (p. 381)—traditional Land of Beausoleil First Nation. Angus even mentions how, in July 1914, “a barge full of gravel was caught in high winds on Georgian Bay, swamped and sunk” (p. 381).²⁶

²⁵ See Cohen (2015) for a particularly gripping passage comparing the longevity of humans to the longevity of rocks: “every one of your continents conveys rocks of at least 3.5 billion years. A fortunate animal endures perhaps seventy. Do the math: it is inhuman. These ubiquitous boulders, not even the eldest of the earth, possess the lifespan of millions upon millions upon millions of fortunate animals. They will persist into a future so distant that no human will witness their return to liquids and powders” (p. 30; Cohen’s italics).

²⁶ Angus (1988) notes how this event demonstrates “the hazardous conditions grain barges would have encountered had the barge canal idea been carried through” (p. 381).

As Barbara Herring—a settler researcher and consultant specializing in equity and diversity, and member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough’s Indigenous Allies Working Group and the Indigenous Allies Forum—described when I interviewed her, “cement is rock too . . . It channels Water and is worn down by Water. It’s just a peculiar . . . form of rock [with] a human agency in there.” Anishinaabe artist Susan Blight has also been thinking about what it might mean to recognize concrete as having life and spirit, particularly in relation to her art installation entitled “Weweni Bizindan (Listen Carefully),” at The Bentway—a public space located beneath the Gardiner Expressway, a highway running along the shoreline of Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) at the southern end of Toronto. In an episode of The Red Nation Podcast, hosted by Uahikea Maile, Blight explains how she started thinking of concrete as a relative, with life and spirit, because the Gardiner has

been crumbling for many, many years, and is actually quite a delicate piece of infrastructure . . . And so, when we went to do the site visit, with the curator of this project . . . one of the things that she told us, that stuck in our minds, was that people come, I think it’s once a month, I could be wrong, . . . with, like, stethoscopes of sorts . . . and they listen to these concrete pillars, known as bents, that are holding up the highway . . . —hence “The Bentway.” But they come and they listen to the inside of these concrete bents for flaws. They can actually hear if something’s starting to fall apart or crumble within . . . the bents. And one of the things that is contributing to this is that there’s salt . . . within the concrete that is holding up the highway. And so they listen to see if they can hear that . . . salt moving within the pillars. (Blight, as cited in Maile, 2022, 39:04-40:17)

Blight goes on to elaborate that

[a]s Anishinaabe, when we work specifically with the language, we are dealing with a whole different worldview, we are working from a different worldview, and a worldview that often sees life, or spirit, in things that aren’t necessarily, in the Western world, seen as having life and spirit . . . and so, in thinking about that, we started to think about the Gardiner. . . . If we were to imagine ourselves, you know, 300 years in the future, one thousand years in the future, what does the Gardiner become? If we can envision a world beyond this one now, if we can envision a dismantling of the settler colonial state, what does the Gardiner become? . . . We started to think about that and to think about the Gardiner as . . . an infrastructure that could hold spirit, perhaps. I don’t know. It’s not an answer, but it’s a question. (Blight, as cited in Maile, 2022, 40:38-42:30)

In an artist statement about the installation, the Ogimaa Mikana Project (n.d.)—an artist collective founded by Blight and Hayden King, another Anishinaabe scholar and artist—poses further questions about what it might mean to think of concrete, and the Gardiner specifically, having life and holding spirit:

for Anishinaabemowin – a verb-based language that ascribes spirit to rocks and trees among many other animate things – we might consider the built environment to be a

relative. What does it mean to be in relation to the street? To speak to, and through it? Learning that the space of The Bentway speaks, and you can hear it if you listen closely (salt used in the concrete curing process long ago moving through the structure), pushes us to consider the Gardiner on new terms; what life exists here amid the traffic and the wind? (para. 1; original italicized)

The concrete of the Trent-Severn Waterway might similarly have life and hold spirit. Stalactites have formed in tunnels running through the Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21, after decades of Water dripping through the concrete of the structure, potentially demonstrating the liveliness of this transformed rock and Water. Thinking about concrete in this way raises questions about what ethics and justice may look like for the other-than-human persons who *are* now the edifices of the Trent-Severn Waterway. However, it also brings to mind how these edifices were created through the excavation, alteration, transportation, and transformation of rock and earth, for settler-colonial ends. Similar to Waters, these rocks and earth were likely fulfilling responsibilities to Creation and, when they were manipulated to become part of the Trent-Severn Waterway, their ability to fulfill these relationships was unjustly interfered with.

* * *

Altogether, the Trent-Severn Waterway has inflicted violence against a multitude of beings: the Waters and Lands who it re-shaped; the rocks who compose its edifices; the waterfowl, turtles, and other animals who are disturbed by large motorboats; the fish who were cut off from their spawning sites; the manoomin and trees who it drowned; the Nishnaabeg People whose Land was flooded and who live in relation with all of these other-than-human persons. When this violence is a manifestation of Canadian settler colonialism, it demonstrates the gap in settler thought and action that is created by settlers overlooking other-than-human persons in our analyses and efforts to dismantle settler colonialism.

SETTLER-COLONIAL IMPOSITION UPON NISHNAABEG NATIONS AND OTHER-THAN-HUMAN PERSONS

As described in my introduction, settler colonialism, including as it exists in Canada, has been conceptualized as a distinct form of colonialism. Often, colonialism is understood to be a system where colonial agents remove resources from a colonized territory, in order to send them back to a colonizing metropole. Settler colonialism, on the other hand, is when significant numbers of people from the colonizing metropole come to live on the colonized territory, transforming the territory in order to live according to their own life ways, instituting settler cultures, languages,

legal systems, economies, religions, and ways of living, to the detriment of Indigenous cultures, legal systems, economies, religions, and ways of living. “Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, *a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain*” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5; my italics).

Examining the Trent-Severn Waterway, it is evident that violent settler-colonial homemaking attempts to institute settler sovereignty upon other-than-human persons as well as Indigenous Nations. Settler-colonial homemaking proceeds *out of, onto, and into* the bodies and lives of other-than-human beings, which is particularly evident when they are recognized as persons—as *they are within Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous thought worlds and life ways*—instead of being dismissed as insignificant, a mere backdrop to human activities.

At times, other-than-human persons are specifically targeted to subjugate human Indigenous Nations, in order to enact colonial life ways on a colonized territory. For instance, the slaughter of buffalo in the North American prairies was carried out in order to weaken Indigenous Nations who hold deep relationships with the buffalo, forcing these nations onto reserves—although, the slaughter of buffalo has also been deemed as not only contributing to the genocide of Indigenous Peoples, but as genocide in its own right for Indigenous Nations who understand buffalo to be persons (see Hubbard, 2014). As far as I am aware, the Trent-Severn Waterway was not constructed with explicit intentions of suppressing Nishnaabeg or other Indigenous communities along its route—though colonial authorities may have relished the consequences that the waterway had for Nishnaabeg Nations. Instead, the waterway’s impact on manoomin and other plants; salmon, eels, bullfrogs, and other animals; the Waters and rocks themselves may be understood as collateral damage in the process of settler-colonial homemaking. Here, Jairus Victor Grove’s (2019) ideas of rendering are useful for understanding that settler colonial-violence need not proceed actively with premeditation; settler-colonial violence can proceed out of callous indifference to anyone and anything that does not contribute to settler-colonial homemaking.

For Jairus Victor Grove (2019), “[n]o anthropogenic, planetary-scale threat faced today—be it nuclear weapons, plastic, climate change, or global war—originated outside the Euro-American circuit of expansion, extractivism, and settlement” (p. 11); that is, the predominant perils that the Earth is facing today have primarily arisen due to the actions of European states and societies, and the states and societies created via European settler colonialism, including Canada

and the United States of America. Grove therefore dubs our current era the “Eurocene,”²⁷ which he characterizes as a perpetuating war aimed at homogenizing the diversity of life into a single form of life that facilitates Euro-American “expansion, extractivism, and settlement” (p. 11): “a violent pursuit of [one] form of life at the cost of others—full stop” (p. 3).

Grove (2019) contends that the perpetuating war of the Eurocene does not primarily proceed through direct killing, but through a “principle of world making that *renders* some forms of life principle [*sic*] and other forms of life useful or inconsequential” (p. 3; my italics)—“rendering, in the way that fat is rendered into soap, or students are rendered pliable and obedient subjects, is the driver of our epoch” (p. 5).²⁸

The construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway did not seek to outright eliminate what existed along the course of where it was constructed; the Trent-Severn Waterway *only* exists because of the Waters and Lands who already existed there: as James T. Angus (1988) describes, “[m]uch of the work was already done. Nature had carved a natural channel between the pre-Cambrian bedrock and the intersecting strata of limestone” (p. xi). Instead, the Land, the rocks and the earth, were altered—through digging and blasting—in order to *render* the Waters “pliable and obedient” (Grove, 2019, p. 5) to settler transportation and goals of “expansion, extractivism, and

²⁷ While Victor Jaius Grove (2019) presents his “Eurocene” as an alternative to the “Anthropocene,” I am not interested, here, in arguing whether “Eurocene” is a more apt alternative to “Anthropocene” compared to other concepts such as the “Capitolocene,” “Plantationocene,” or “Chthulucene” (see Haraway, 2015—although she dances around problematic anti-natalism in the cited article). I do support criticisms of the term “Anthropocene” and desires for an alternative term; but, I am engaging with Grove because his idea of “rendering” contributes to analyzing the Trent-Severn Waterway’s colonial imposition on other-than-human persons.

The now widely-used term “Anthropocene” has been proposed for our current geologic era, to connote that human activities are changing the Earth to such a degree that humans—“anthropos”—are now the primary force shaping the planet. However, this term has been rightly critiqued by many scholars and activists, including Grove (2019), for suggesting that *all* humans are responsible for causing these changes to the Earth. The “Anthropocene” is ignorant of power: certain people with power, political and capitalist leaders, are the real force driving changes to the Earth. Moreover, systems of oppression including white supremacy and heteronormative patriarchy have excluded many humans from being considered humans at different points in history. Grove addresses how Sylvia Wynter, a Black woman, “will not miss the Anthropos because, among so many others, she was never considered human to begin with” (Grove, 2019, p. 11). Claiming *now* that all humans are responsible for changes to the Earth is insulting given the denial of different peoples’ humanity throughout history and continuing today.

²⁸ I must acknowledge that Nicole Shukin (2009) develops a notable concept of “rendering” related to how animals are exploited within capitalism. She notes that “[a] glance at the dictionary reveals that *rendering* encompasses a multiplicity of . . . meanings” (Shukin, 2009, p. 23; Shukin’s italics); and specifically engages with a double entendre of rendering “signif[ying] both the mimetic act of making a copy, that is, reproducing or interpreting an object in linguistic, painterly, musical, filmic, or other media . . . and the industrial boiling down and recycling of animal remains” (Shukin, 2009, p. 20; Shukin’s italics). While Jaius Victor Grove (2019) does refer to “the way that fat is rendered into soap” (p. 5), I contend that his use of “rendering” is perhaps better aligned with the idea that ‘to render’ is “[t]o cause to be or become; to make” (Oxford English Dictionary, March 2023, Meaning & use section, entry IV.18.a.)—and not Shukin’s double entendre of making a copy *and* recycling animal remains. Shukin’s rendering may also have significance for examining the Trent-Severn Waterway, but that analysis is not the focus of this paper.

settlement” (Grove, 2019, p. 11). The rocks and earth were also rendered “pliable and obedient” (Grove, 2019, p. 5) themselves, extracted to be used in the construction of edifices along the waterway. However, I ought to note that rendering does not necessarily occur without resistance, which I examine in “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway.”

The Trent-Severn Waterway epitomizes rendering in pursuit of settler-colonial homemaking, making use of what it can and carelessly ignoring what it cannot. Settlers wanted to use Waterbodies to facilitate bringing more settlers into the area, to expand businesses including logging and mining industries, to ship extracted resources, to generate electricity to further advance settlement and, ultimately, for recreation—again, “expansion, extractivism, and settlement” (Grove, 2019, p. 11)—and so they re-shaped the Waterbodies, and the Lands around them, to achieve these goals.

Moreover, as Aaron Mills (2018) elucidates, there are three forms of settler-colonial violence:

The first is to Indigenous persons. It’s individual-centred violence that hurts our bodies, minds, and spirits. This kind of violence is the least abstract and thus the easiest to identify and understand. . . . The second kind of violence is . . . group-centred violence that attacks . . . all the knowledge forms and practices of being that, albeit provisionally, help persons to identify collectively as a people. It seeks to undo our collective sense of self such that there is no longer an identifiable Indigenous group in which a recovering individual might seek membership.

The third form of violence, to Indigenous life ways and thus to indigenous constitutional orders, is more abstract. It’s structural violence that denies us our ability to speak and, over enough time, even to imagine our lives lived within our own understandings of what a person is, what a community is, and what freedom looks like. . . . Eventually we come to see our own life ways as anachronistic; we internalize the Western progress epic and become capable of seeing ways we lived and acted otherwise only as a kind of “going back.” (p. 136)

Acts of violence against individual Indigenous persons may have occurred during the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway; the waterway *itself* enacts violence in the second and third form. In the flooding of Nishnaabeg graves and sacred sites, and the destruction of Nishnaabeg food relations including manoomin, salmon, and eels, the waterway attacks the collective identity of the Nishnaabeg as a distinct people. In reshaping Waters and Lands of Nishnaabeg territory in pursuit of colonial ends, the waterway contributes to the deception that settler-colonial life ways are inevitable and Indigenous life ways—Nishnaabeg or otherwise—are doomed to extinction, advancing the loss of Nishnaabeg “notions of persons, freedom, and belonging” (Mills, 2018, p.

136). In neither of these cases does it matter if the waterway was created with the explicit intention of enacting violence upon Nishnaabeg peoples—it enacts violence nonetheless, imposing a settler-colonial life way without regard for who or what it impacts.

Furthermore, the Trent-Severn Waterway enacts all three of these types of violence upon other-than-human persons. There is violence to the bodies of individuals in, for instance, the blasting and excavation of rocks and the flooding of manoomin and bird nests. There is violence to groups' abilities to continue as distinct Peoples in, for instance, salmon and eels being cut off from their spawning sites. And although I cannot speak to other-than-human persons' "understandings of what a person is, what a community is, and what freedom looks like" (Mills, 2018, p. 136), the restructuring of the Waters, Lands, and rocks along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes a settler-colonial life way upon these persons.

And this imposition did not end once construction of the waterway was completed: this imposition *continues* as long as the waterway exists. As Patrick Wolfe (2006) asserts,

settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event . . . elimination is an organizing principal [*sic*] of settler colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence. (p. 388)

The Trent-Severn Waterway manifests both the negative and positive dimensions of settler colonialism. Negatively, it maims the Waters and Lands as they used to exist. Positively, it imposes new paths and currents on the Waters, to achieve colonial ends, as well as literally erecting edifices upon the Waters and their surrounding Lands. And this structured invasion has stayed to this day: the Waters and Lands have not returned to what they were, nor have they been free to act of their own accord to become something new—colonial paths and currents still saddle the Waters, and the edifices that govern these paths and currents remain.

* * *

I will not state that the Trent-Severn Waterway *needs* to be physically dismantled as part of dismantling settler colonialism: I do not believe it is my place to make such an assertion or such a decision—what comes to exist through the dismantling of settler colonialism is the purview of Indigenous Peoples, not settlers like myself. However, the Trent-Severn Waterway continues to be a colonial imposition, inflicting violence upon Nishnaabeg Nations and their other-than-human relations—settler-colonial violence entangled into my life and the lives of other settler Canadians. If settlers are to work to right our relations with Nishnaabeg Peoples, including those impacted by

the waterway, we must also right our relations with our shared other-than-human relations. Knowing that the Trent-Severn Waterway is a settler-colonial imposition on other-than-human persons, it is imperative to start being accountable to our other-than-human relations.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS
WITH OTHER-THAN-HUMAN PERSONS
ALONG THE TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY**

Once in [their] life a [person] ought to concentrate [their] mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. [They] ought to give [themselves] up to a particular landscape in [their] experience, to look at it from as many angles as [they] can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. [They] ought to imagine that [they touch] it with [their] hands at every season and [listen] to the sounds that are made upon it. [They] ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. [They] ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.

-N. Scott Momaday (1976, p. 83)

The imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway—opposed to anyone and anything that does not contribute to Canadian settler colonialism or capitalism—is characteristic of the anthropocentrism of the dominant settler Canadian thought world. I assert that settlers who were raised and live immersed in this thought world need to confront this anthropocentrism, if we are to support Indigenous Peoples in dismantling settler colonialism.

In this chapter, I autoethnographically recount my efforts to earnestly take Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood seriously—learning cross-ontologically and cross-culturally—as a strategy for confronting this anthropocentrism. Through insights and observations from my interviews, I bring my own ideas and practices into conversation with Nishnaabeg Elders and knowledge keepers, and other settlers working to support Nishnaabeg communities and engage with Nishnaabeg knowledge in a good way. I begin by revisiting how anthropocentrism manifests in the dominant settler Canadian thought world. I then reiterate the importance of confronting this anthropocentrism, if settlers are to support Indigenous Peoples in dismantling settler colonialism, as well as attending to some pitfalls of engaging with Nishnaabeg thought worlds in appropriative and extractive ways. Next, I enter into a deep examination of the walking methodology that I undertook in my efforts to take seriously Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood, reflecting on why I undertook a walking methodology, what my walking methodology looked like, and how my practice evolved over time. Lastly, I share a selection of thoughts and ideas that came to me while spending time with other-than-human persons along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway and also Wonscontonach (Don River). These thoughts and

ideas represent moments on the learning journey that I am still on, trying to engage with Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood and to learn from Land myself.

Throughout the rest of my dissertation—and especially in the latter sections of this chapter—I include excerpts from the recordings that I took while spending time along the Trent-Severn Waterway and Wonscontonach (Don River), edited and expanded upon for clarity, in order to illustrate my learning process—a settler’s learning process—of working to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds and develop relationships with Land. Many of these thoughts and ideas are not fully developed and reflect how I continue to grapple with the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western thought world.

DOMINANT WESTERN ANTHROPOCENTRISM

As a reminder, I am using ‘dominant Western thought world’ to refer to a trajectory of thought—stretching across ancient Greek philosophy, Medieval Christian theology, the European Renaissance, European Enlightenment, and rise of the Western scientific method—that has significantly taken hold in Europe and has been spread to other parts of the world via European imperialism and colonialism, including to what is now, colonially considered Canada. Europeans and their descendants—including many settlers in Canada—are not monolithic in their thinking, and never have been, but this trajectory of thought has particular influence over social, legal, and political orders and institutions in Europe and European settler colonies, including Canada.

Several of my interview participants shared thoughts on the anthropocentrism of this dominant Western and settler Canadian thought world. Taylor Wilkes—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, who was a facilitator and program coordinator with Our Living Waters at the time of our interview—described the dominant Western and settler Canadian thought world as having

an air of superiority . . . that we’re the superior beings and these other beings [whose habitats] we’re destroying . . . don’t matter. [The Trent-Severn Waterway is] a shining jewel of [a] colonial worldview: access creates more access to further exploration. And I’m sure that there were rationales about . . . changing the landscape for what the humans needed, instead of honoring the landscape for what it was.

Kelly King—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous folks in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former Education Director with TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—noted how the dominant settler

Canadian thought world “teaches you to not consider anyone else but your own species—and . . . not even your *full* own species because, of course, [there’s] racism.”

Ideas of human separation from and superiority over the more-than-human world exemplify long-held presumptions of the dominant Western thought world. Following from works like Aristotle’s *History of Animals*, the dominant Western thought world has long been laden with ideas that there exists a *scala naturæ*, or great chain of being: a hierarchy of complexity and value between different beings, generally rising from minerals, to plants, to animals, to humans, to—traditionally—angels, and to God. As a result, humans have been purported to be somehow exceptional to other animals and the wider ‘natural’ world—not merely unique, as all beings are unique in different ways, but somehow *uniquely* unique.

This human exceptionalism has been scrutinized—including during the European Enlightenment, Scientific Revolution, and rise of taxonomy and theories of evolution—though often to determine *what it is* that makes humans exceptional, not to consider *whether it is valid* to conceive of humans as, somehow, being exceptional.

In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben (2004)—a notable social and political philosopher—interrogates the idea and process of human exceptionalism. Agamben describes how humans’ use of language has been indecisively considered as a distinguishing characteristic of human exceptionalism: there are outstanding questions about the degree that other animals possess language—for example, “[u]p until the eighteenth century, language . . . jumps across [taxonomic] orders and classes, for it is suspected that even birds can talk” (p. 24). Additionally, because language is a product of culture, it does not account for the exceptionalism of humans if they are without language: language “is not a natural given already inherent in the psychophysical structure of man [*sic*]; it is, rather, a historical production which, as such, can be properly assigned neither to man [*sic*] nor to animal. If this element [language] is taken away, the difference between man [*sic*] and animal vanishes” (Agamben, 2004, p. 36). The fabrication and use of tools has also been proposed to be a uniquely human trait; however, animals including primates, birds, and cephalopods have all been found to use—and, at times, fashion—tools (see Griffin, 1992, pp. 101-114). Disputing whether there is *anything* that makes humans exceptional to all other animals, Agamben relays that Carl Linnaeus—“the founder of modern scientific taxonomy” (p. 23)¹—was

¹ Although Giorgio Agamben (2004) turns to Carl Linnaeus for an authority on biological classification—and I do as well, when quoting Agamben—I ought to note that Linnaeus contributed to pseudoscientific justifications for racism.

unable to find “a generic difference between ape and man [*sic*] which is consistent with the principles of natural history” (Linnaeus, as cited in Agamben, 2004, p. 24), “hardly know[ing] a single distinguishing mark which separates man [*sic*] from the apes, save for the fact that the latter have an empty space between their canines and their other teeth” (Linnaeus, as cited in Agamben, 2004, p. 24).

Thus, Agamben (2004) surmises that dominant Western thought continuously *redefines what a human is* in an attempt to produce an ‘exceptional’ human, through a process that he dubs the “anthropological machine.” As animal philosopher Matthew Calarco (2015) describes, “[t]he separation of human life from animal life . . . cannot just be read off of the natural world, as if human beings arrive into the world already neatly distributed into various categories and attributes . . . It is the [anthropological] machine itself that creates, reproduces, and maintains the distinction between human life and animal life” (p. 53-54).

The anthropological machine continues to operate as part of the dominant Western thought world. It is reflected in Val Plumwood’s (2007) ecofeminist theorization—previously mentioned in “Chapter One: Introduction”—that within the dominant Western thought world, “[r]ationalism and human/nature dualism have helped . . . promote human distance from, control of and ruthlessness towards the sphere of nature as the Other, while minimising non-human claims to the earth and to elements of mind, reason and ethical consideration” (p. 4). Operating within a cult of “a particular narrow form of reason” (Plumwood, 2007, p. 4), “built on the myth of autonomous reason and autonomous man, inheriting the rationalist failure to situate the human in ecologically embedded and socially embedded ways” (Plumwood, 2007, p. 27), the dominant Western thought world denies, for instance, other-than-human beings’ capacity for agency.

In discussing dominant settler Canadian understandings of other-than-human beings, my interview participants further illustrated ongoing ramifications of the anthropological machine. Kelly King addressed how “in a settler colonial mindset, we’re very extractionist. We’re very much thinking, ‘what can this thing give me? How does it benefit me?’ and we are never taught the opposite. . . . We’re never taught how we give back, not just the same amount that we take, but more than we take.”

Alongside classifying animals and plants, Linnaeus classified humans into five categories: *Homo sapiens Americanus*, *Homo sapiens Asiaticus*, *Homo sapiens Afer*, *Homo sapiens Europaeus*, and *Homo sapiens Monstrosus* (see Vizenor, 1999, p. xiv).

Jane Gray—a non-Indigenous faculty member at Trent University in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former policy analyst for the Manitoba government—similarly described extractive elements of the history of the dominant Western thought world, and the impact that that way of thinking still has on our institutions today:

there has been, over many centuries in what we call the Western world, this ongoing disconnection of people from place, of people from the Land that sustained them. And all in order to have power over people and the Land, and the people with the closest knowledge of the Land. . . . Our Western institutions, they're very much coloured by that history. And certainly, when you think about the founding of what is now Canada, [it] is all based on the fur trade and taking resources for export—and not about making deep connections to the Land here and the people here. Although many did make deep connections over generations and created relationships, that wasn't the primary reason that that settlement happened.

Examining religion in the dominant Western thought world, Reverend Julie Stoneberg—a settler, and former minister of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough and member of the Fellowship's Indigenous Allies Working Group—espoused that, within dominant Christianity, “the whole domination of the Earth and use of the Earth's resources is such a strong part of [the] culture,” despite there being “no context, from what was written [in the Bible], for bulldozers, and super mines, and whatever. It doesn't give us leeway to just take over, and to kill everything, and wipe everything out in the interest of a super mall or whatever.”

Taylor Wilkes remarked that dominant settler Canadian thought worlds are focused on “exploitation, ownership, domination, linearity— . . . about separating, and isolating, and sterilizing.” Wilkes further described how this separation, isolation, and sterilization works to alienate people—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—from Land. For Wilkes, this alienation was profoundly felt when she participated in a canoe trip—organized by Paul Baines, another of my interview participants—on the Trent-Severn Waterway, from the south end of Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) to the bay of Kente (Bay of Quinte) on Gchi-Nibiish / Chi'Nibiish (Lake Ontario):

go[ing] through so many . . . sections that had been modified for the Trent Canal, I could just feel the choking, or the silencing, or the muzzling of the river, and the impact that that had on all the other beings around. . . . And that echoes the way it feels to have a colonized mind. There are times at work where I feel muzzled or I feel silenced by this Western worldview that's been imposed on us—on everyone, not just Indigenous folks. This process of separating, and isolating, and sterilizing is intangible as much as it is tangible.

Contrast this marginalization and dismissal of other-than-human beings with the Indigenous, and specifically Nishnaabeg, understandings of other-than-human beings that I included in the introduction of this dissertation. For instance, Vanessa Watts (2013), who is

Mohawk and Anishnaabe, describes place possessing agency “in a similar way that Western thinkers locate agency in human beings” (p. 23), Land being “full of thought, desire, contemplation and will” (p. 23), and all living things “choos[ing] how they reside, interact and develop relationships” (p. 23). Again, as Graham Harvey (2017) describes, there is a “widespread indigenous [*sic*] . . . understanding that humans share this world with a wide range of persons, only some of whom are human” (pp. xvii-xviii).

It is worth repeating that these understandings emerge out of long lineages of Nishnaabeg thought, just as the dominant Western thought world follows a particular lineage of thought. The existence of this lineage of Nishnaabeg thought does not mean that all Nishnaabeg people are monolithic in their understandings. Moreover, I do not want to perpetuate racist tropes of the “noble savage” or “ecological Indian.” Nishnaabeg thought worlds and life ways, including understandings of other-than-human personhood, are not innately held by Nishnaabeg Peoples; they are taught and learned. In my interview with Chief Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation—a Nishnaabeg First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), along the Trent-Severn Waterway—he spoke about needing to educate his community about the value of the tallgrass prairie and black oak savanna—a historic ecosystem on the south side of Pimadashkodeyaang, that people like Mowat and Nishnaabeg Elder Rick Beaver have been working to protect and re-enliven:

[w]e used education to re-teach the community about the quality of this site, about its characteristics, about the importance of biodiversity, [and] species at risk. And it took years to reteach the community about the value of biodiversity and the value of this globally rare grassland, because for decades, for over 100 years, the Indian Act—which controlled our community and our people—cared nothing about the environment. And the government, in general, cared nothing about how our people viewed the environment; they only cared about gaining control over our people and over our self-governing institutions.

SETTLER ENGAGEMENT WITH NISHNAABEG ONTOLOGIES OF OTHER-THAN-HUMAN PERSONHOOD

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, if settlers fail to confront the anthropocentrism of the dominant settler Canadian thought world, then our efforts to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism can be limited. Settlers are not attending to the full extent of Indigenous social, legal, and political orders if we are not recognizing that other-than-human beings can be important relatives, even kin, to Indigenous Peoples. We may even undermine the

sovereignty of Indigenous thought worlds, reinforcing settler colonialism, when we dismiss and exclude these beings.

Although *I am* working to understand and engage with Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood in this research project, I do not mean to assert that it is necessary for all settlers to fully understand specific Indigenous Nations' understandings of other-than human beings if they are to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism. Instead, I am arguing that settlers ought to recognize that these beings *are persons* for many Indigenous Nations, and to *be mindful of* that personhood in our theory and action.

Looking to Haudenosaunee thought worlds for a moment, John Mohawk (2010) outlines how within Haudenosaunee thought worlds there is

a tradition that every time we gather together to have a meeting, we open with what is called a *ga no ya* or opening speech. Some people call it a thanksgiving address. . . . It's kind of like Iroquois diplomacy: we start with what we agree on and then we keep going to the things that we cannot agree on. . . . The speech starts with an opening that we see one another, we need each other; we need people to be in the world and it's a good thing that there are people in the world; we're grateful and thankful that there are other people in the world and it's good to see them here, so we give a greeting. . . . Since that's the way we do things amongst ourselves, we should be able to do that with other beings, and so it goes on and we do greetings to the Earth. Everybody should be able to give greeting to the Mother Earth. She's a person, and—call it poetic—it's a way of us having a relationship with that, so we acknowledge that relationship. It's fundamental: right after people, Earth. Then it goes to grasses, waters, trees, plants, winds, the moon, the stars, the sun, the universe, the whole thing. Everybody in the world ought to be able to agree that we depend on those things. Those things are actually essential to us. (p. 275; Mohawk's italics)

My knowledge of the *ga no ya* is limited and I ask readers to understand that what I share about the *ga no ya*, here, is reductive. But, while spending time along the Trent-Severn Waterway, I came to think that, in part, a *ga no ya* serves as something of a roll call: a *ga no ya* is shared at the start of Haudenosaunee gatherings, in part to remind those people present of all of the other-than-human persons who may not be present, or who may not be able to speak for themselves at that gathering—at least in ways that will be readily understood by humans. A *ga no ya* calls on the people present to consider not just their own concerns or interests, but the more-than-human world, when they are making decisions.

*I'm thinking about the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address,
The Words that Come Before All Else,
that, in order to have a meeting,
we need to first be able to agree on these things.
I think there is a bit of a roll call, in a way:*

*naming everyone who is part of these conversations,
who needs to be part of these conversations,
who we need to consider being part of these conversations.
And so, being mindful of other-than-human personhood
is a starting point for even having discussions
between settlers and Indigenous Peoples.
When settlers overlook other-than-human persons,
we're leaving persons who ought to be part of the conversations,
out of the conversations;
and we need to be mindful of them
if those conversations are to happen in a good way.*

-Edited from recording at Couchiching Lock, Lock 42,
on Matchedash (Severn River),
November 20, 2021

Several of the settlers who I interviewed also spoke of the significance of the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. Jane Gray—a non-Indigenous faculty member at Trent University in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former policy analyst for the Manitoba government, who lives adjacent to a wetland near Odenaabe (Otonabee River)—recalled Onondaga Haudenosaunee professor David Newhouse including the Thanksgiving Address as part of a course, when Gray was pursuing her Masters Degree in Sustainability at Trent University. In her Ph.D. dissertation, Gray (2022) describes how this and other teachings influenced her own relationships with the Land and the beings who live on it:

[w]hat has helped me to make more sustainable decisions in my own life has been connecting to the place where I live by learning from the peoples whose ancestors were here for thousands of years before me. Amongst the teachings received from Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee teachers has been a practice of daily gratitude that, for me, involves being thankful for all that sustains this place, myself, my family, and all life, along with all the good people who have supported this journey. The more I learn from these teachers, the more grateful I am and the more my decisions are connected to that which sustains us. (p. xviii)

Reverend Julie Stoneberg—a settler, and former minister of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough and member of the Fellowship's Indigenous Allies Working Group—similarly shared the value of continued practices of calling Land and other-than-human relations to mind: “thinking about stewardship of the Land . . . of the flora, of the fauna, everything—all the beings—I think speaking that regularly, bringing it to mind regularly, can’t help but change you a little bit, right? . . . [T]he fact that the words are there, I think it ingrains something in us to keep remembering.”

My call that settlers ought to attend to Indigenous conceptions of other-than-human personhood is really a call that, if we are to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism in a way that aligns with Indigenous more-than-human social, legal, and political orders, we ought to adopt a philosophy, if not a practice, akin to a *ga no ya*, reminding and obligating us to consider other-than-human persons. We, settlers, must consider the intrinsic value of other-than-human beings as persons. It is not enough to attend to these beings in an instrumental way, where their well-being is important because it contributes to human well-being. Nor is it even enough to attend to other-than-human beings because they are ‘important’ for Indigenous Nations. As I asserted in my introduction, Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous thought worlds are not just the same dominant Western thought world but with some ‘cultural’ differences—they are other possible worlds, based in their own ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies. Other-than-human personhood is a *reality* within Nishnaabeg—and other Indigenous—thought worlds, which settlers ought to be mindful of; and, other-than-human persons matter, in their own right.

Pitfalls of Cultural Appropriation and Extractive Learning

Despite the imperative of attending to Indigenous more-than-human social, legal, and political orders if settlers are to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism in a way that aligns with Indigenous Nations, in my experience, relatively few settlers who are interested in dismantling settler colonialism regularly contend with dominant Western anthropocentrism. This claim may be an overly broad presumption, based on a few isolated incidents, including when, after reading Glen Sean Coulthard’s (2014) *Red Skin, White Masks* in a graduate course on settler colonialism, another student noted that they still ‘didn’t get grounded normativity’—the term that Coulthard uses to describe Indigenous Peoples’ anticolonial praxes as being informed by Land—in a way that came across as indifferent, rather than recognition that they are still learning. Given my own research interests, I likely overemphasize how much Coulthard discusses grounded normativity in *Red Skin, White Masks* but, nevertheless, the concept is foundational to Coulthard’s conceptualization of Indigenous anticolonialism. In the same course, after I mentioned something about how settler colonialism has negatively impacted Indigenous Peoples’ capacities to maintain meaningful relationships with Land, another student earnestly told me that I should read Thomas Hobbes (1651/1986). I doubt that Hobbes, who famously considers humans to be living in a state of nature consisting of “Warre of every one against every one” (p. 189) until they enter into a

social contract under an absolute sovereign, has anything insightful to say regarding Indigenous relationships with Land. As Ojibwe poet David Groulx (2015) writes in the poem “Hobbesian Notions,”

If the Whiteman thinks
Indian lives were
“nasty brutish and short”
before he came

He should see them now (p. 2)

As they learn and work with Indigenous Peoples, many settlers do come to think more about their relationships with other-than-human persons; however, before going through that learning process, I find that there can be a tacit assumption that Indigenous ontologies surrounding other-than-human personhood are cultural knowledges that are inappropriate for non-Indigenous Peoples to engage with.

It is important for settlers to be mindful of cultural appropriation and of extractive learning: where settlers may learn about Indigenous knowledges solely for their own purposes, without regard for the Peoples who that knowledge comes from and without supporting Indigenous Nations while learning from them. In an effort to temper the possibility that my own research may fall into cultural appropriation or extractive learning, I asked my Nishnaabeg interview participants whether they feel there is space for non-Nishnaabeg people—and, more specifically, non-Indigenous people—to engage with Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood and, if so, what they feel is appropriate.

*I'm thinking about my interviews with Indigenous People.
Do I want to be asking about 'how do you understand the Water?'
I think it's maybe more about asking . . . is there space and, if so, what is the space,
for non-Indigenous people to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds?
Would it be helpful for us to do that? Would that be a problem?
And I can share my own thinking, where
I don't think Nishnaabeg communities along the Trent-Severn Waterway
can really have the conversations that they maybe should be having,
might want to be having,
with Parks Canada and with the people operating the Trent-Severn,
without changes to our settler way of thinking.
And so, what is the place of settlers learning about Indigenous knowledge*

*to prepare us to have those conversations?
And what are the boundaries of cultural appropriation there?*

-Edited from recording at Couchiching Lock, Lock 42,
on Matchedash (Severn River),
November 20, 2021

Elder Dorothy Taylor, Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation and founder of the Sacred Water Circle, explained that, “what Indigenous people frown upon is appropriation to the point where now you are the Elder, now you are the expert. We share these teachings and these ceremonies and, all of a sudden, you start doing the ceremonies yourself or start teaching that you’re the Elder.”

Nishnaabekwe Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams—one of the founders and organizers of Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those Who Walk for the Water, and the Kawartha Water Walks—shared similar sentiments that problems arise when non-Indigenous people claim to be experts of Indigenous knowledge, though she spoke more about the problems of failing to acknowledge who and where the knowledge is coming from:

a lot of non-native people come to the Elders, they take that knowledge, and they use it as their own without any acknowledgement of the person that they got the knowledge from. I know that for a fact, because Nishnaabeg knew about penicillin. That knowledge was given to a non-native woman and she used it and she sold it for the pharmaceuticals. Now they’re making money and we have to pay for it. Even though Nishnaabeg owned that plant and owned that knowledge, we still have to pay for it.

Even when she is a Nishnaabeg Elder, Elder S. Williams shared that because she comes from Wiikwemkoong and is a guest in the territory where she now lives, she “goes to the Elders in this community to talk to them” when there is knowledge about this territory that she does not know, rather than claiming expertise that is not hers.

Furthermore, Elder S. Williams explained that avoiding cultural appropriation and extractive learning requires having the right intentions: “as long as you have good thoughts, good things that you want to do, we allow that. But, if you come in order just to take the knowledge and use it for your own good, that’s not right. [We always tell people] [i]f, from your heart, you want to do good . . . you continue to do good, and walk with us, be with us, it’s okay.”

Elder Dorothy Taylor mentioned that avoiding cultural appropriation and extractive learning “begins with relationship and how that relationship is nurtured and engaged.”

Heidi Burns—a manoomin-harvester, scholar researching connections between manoomin gathering and intergenerational relationships, and activist with Community Voices for

Manoomin—brought these two points together, outlining that settlers can engage with Nishnaabeg knowledge in a good way,

[a]s long as you're trying to engage in a respectful way, making sure that permissions are asked, consent is given . . . [and that] it's a reciprocal relationship. . . . If it's not reciprocal, then that's when you're moving into the territory of appropriation. But, in my experience, I see absolutely no harm in making an effort to form those connections and to learn, . . . especially if it's for the purpose of advocating [for] Indigenous sovereignty, Land Back, and environmental protection.

Elizabeth (Liz) Osawamick, another founder and organizer of Nibi Emosaawdamajig – Those Who Walk for the Water, and the Kawartha Water Walks, noted that it is important to follow Nishnaabeg protocols, including practices of offering semaa (tobacco) and gift-giving, in order to maintain a respectful relationship with Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers.

Elder Shirley Ida Williams also noted that it is important that non-Indigenous Peoples share their research findings with the Indigenous communities whose knowledge they are engaging with, so that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work together to tackle the issues we are facing. Elder S. Williams said that it is important to “acknowledge . . . the Indigenous knowledge and non-Indigenous knowledge, to meet together, to work in partnership, . . . to take care of the world in a much better way.”

I hope that my research project is appropriately following these practices and expectations. While I designed my research project without direct input from Nishnaabeg people living along the Trent-Severn Waterway, I undertook this project based on what I had heard and read from Nishnaabeg people about the Trent-Severn Waterway. I offered my interview participants semaa and provided them with gifts. I shared a draft of my dissertation with my interview participants, to better ensure that I am relaying and engaging with their words and knowledge in a good way, and I will share my finalized dissertation with them.

As previously mentioned in “Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Methods,” I am also in discussions with my interview participants about how I might share my research with their communities and the organizations that they are part of. At the time of writing, I have been invited by Elder D. Taylor to become a member of and to share my research with the Sacred Water Circle. The Sacred Water Circle is a not-for-profit initiative, founded by Elder D. Taylor and others, for “Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work together for the benefit of water” (Sacred Water Circle, n.d., para. 2), “lead[ing] with spirituality but also recogniz[ing] the necessity of working with science and policy to promote positive change in how we live with water” (Sacred Water

Circle, n.d., para. 2). I have also been invited by Leora Berman—a settler, and founder of The Land Between charity and Turtle Guardians—to attend “[a] regional series [of talking circles] to share knowledge, identify needs, and find solutions for spaces and species at risk and common but disappearing wildlife” (Land Between, The, n.d.b) in the Lands where The Land Between charity focuses their work; to share my research at one of these talking circles, focusing on fishes, swimmers, lakes, and wetlands; and to create a video related to my research that will be shared on The Land Between charity’s website. Other interview participants have suggested that I may be able to adapt and publish parts of my research in regional and community newsletters and newspapers along the Trent-Severn Waterway. And I continue to be in touch with my interview participants to explore other ways of sharing my research with them and relevant organizations and communities. I hope to continue developing relationships with the people who I interviewed, and to work with them and their communities in the future.

And I want to explicitly maintain that although this is my doctoral dissertation, I am not an expert in the Nishnaabeg knowledge that I am attempting to engage with, by any means. This research project is an attempt at trying to engage with Nishnaabeg knowledge of other-than-human personhood and to reflect on what work settlers ought to do to prepare us to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism in meaningful ways.

*I think what I’m trying to look at is
if we are going to adequately contribute to
dismantling the settler colonialism that’s here,
then I think we need to get out of a lot of our ways of thinking.
And so, a lot of my work is more focused on preparing ourselves
to better engage in decolonization.
Or, at least, that’s what I hope for it to be.*

-Edited from recording at Couchiching Lock, Lock 42,
on Matchedash (Severn River),
November 20, 2021

On the Importance of Developing Relationships with Land

A number of the Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers who I interviewed also spoke about the importance of spending time and developing relationships with Land, and the importance of following protocols and prayer when doing so.

According to Heidi Burns, “that you go out and . . . spend time on the Water . . . I think that’s probably the most important part of doing this work, is actually forming that relationship for

yourself. That's been really integral to me while I work out my place here and my own identity even." She expanded on what she had gained through working with and for manoomin, saying, "[w]hen you go and gather your own food, and you process it, and you build a relationship through the food by being on the Water, by being in its particular habitat, and doing the work to process it, you can't really help but form a really close relationship with it"—"you have to participate in that process to really fully understand how deep our connection is to, as you've said, other-than-human life forms."

Burns further posited that humans have learned from other-than-human persons for a very long time, and continue to do so: "plants and animals have their own—if we want to put it this way—economies and political systems, their own agreements with each other, that pre-exist human occupation on the Land. And . . . we have learned *from* our relationships to the Land. . . . Our cultures have come from learning from plants and animals. This is our relationship; this is how it works."

Elder Dorothy Taylor discussed the value of "sit[ting] quietly in nature," advising me to "just be quiet and listen . . . Being quiet and listening to nature helps you to literally fall in love. When you're in love with something or someone, you want to save it or you want to help it, or you don't want to do harm to it. So, it's up to us as people to fall in love with nature once again."

For Liz Osawamick, Indigenous Peoples do have a special role in relation to the Land: "[e]very race has been given a responsibility and . . . our [Indigenous Peoples'] responsibility is to look after the Land, and protect the Land. So, you hear [of] Indigenous People always fighting and helping, or protecting the Land . . . we are the ones that have to do that, so that we don't destroy our Mother, the Earth." But, Osawamick noted there is also value in non-Indigenous People "giving those prayers to her [Mother Earth], and talking to the Water, talking to the trees, talking to the plants. They're here for a reason—everyone has a purpose in life."

Osawamick also discussed the role that offering *semaa* (tobacco) plays, when Nishnaabeg People are working with and learning from Land: "we take natural tobacco, and we give thanks. That's how we communicate to the Waters, to the Land, to the rocks, to the trees, to the fire . . . we offer our tobacco—that's how we give thanks. We just stand there, we put the tobacco in our left hand, and we give gratitude to everything that is alive, here on Earth."

Elder Shirley Ida Williams discussed Nishnaabeg practices of fasting, in order to further explain the importance of following protocols when trying to learn from Land. As relayed to me

by Elder S. Williams, when fasting, “you need to do it in the right way. You can’t just say, ‘I think I’m going to go and ask the Creator for this’ and sit beside the tree. It doesn’t work that way. There are protocols you need to do. So, if you want to do that, go to an Elder that knows these things—not just any Elder either, people who are trained in order to do that.”

I imagine that the protocols when fasting are more extensive, especially for non-Indigenous People looking to do that sort of learning, but Elder S. Williams described some of the protocols during Water Walks, including that “we always encourage people to think in a positive way . . . [W]e only want good thoughts as you’re walking for that Water, because that Water will give you thanksgiving and it will also bless you.”

According to Elder Dorothy Taylor, “you always have to lead with prayer” when working with the Land and learning from the Land, because—for the Nishnaabeg—Spirits of the Land can sometimes make themselves known to certain people: “how can the Spirit of the Land speak to you? What do they look like? How can you hear them? . . . [I]t’s an act of faith and courage that you lead with prayer and ceremony.”

Liz Osawamick shared several stories of Land and Spirit communicating with her, while she was participating in Water Walks:

When I do these walks, I always look for signs out there . . . [W]hen we walked for that Water, that year [McGinnis Lake by Kinomaagewapkong / Kinomaage Waapkong (Petroglyphs Provincial Park)] . . . when we finished, it was the fish that just jumped up. Seeing that, it was like an acknowledgement from our late Grandmother Nokomis Josephine Mandamin-ba,² because she is from the Fish clan, from the Catfish clan actually. So, I thought, ‘wow, that’s a blessing.’ It’s a confirmation that she probably was there with us during that walk, in spirit. . . .

Even last year . . . [on] World Water Day, walking from here to the Water . . . on a twig . . . [it] looked like a little old woman, walking with her cane and pail. It was just amazing. Again, right away, I think of the late Josephine-ba . . . being there and giving thanks. Because I believe that she’s still doing her work up in Spirit World. . . . The women still honor and walk for the Water because of her—we continue to acknowledge her even though she’s not with us.

As some final words on the value of settlers building relationships with and working to learn from Land, Heidi Burns also recounted a teaching that she received from Elder Shirley Ida Williams:

² Elder Josephine Mandamin-ba started walking for the Water in 2003, inspiring the Water Walk movement. She passed away on February 22, 2019.

[w]e're all Indigenous to somewhere.³ And at the root of our beings, we have, somewhere inside of us, Original Instructions, but we've forgotten them. And, if we were to all be in touch with our ancestral knowledges, those Original Instructions—get back in touch with our Indigenous roots, as human beings—we would understand teachings like 'All Our Relations,' and how to better communicate with each other, and [how to] make sure that consent is given and [that] we're engaging reciprocally.

For Elder Dorothy Taylor, “even if you're non-native, you are a child of the Earth. And you have that right—even in addition to what Indigenous People do—to pray and to ask the Spirit of the Land to assist you, or to guide you, on the work that you do with the Land.”

SPENDING TIME AND DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LAND

I KNOW MOUNTAINS because I have stood on precipices and breathed. I know prairie because I have lain on my back and been absorbed by the sky. I know the ocean because I have immersed myself in it and felt the pull of its current. If I want to know life, I need to experience its wonder and breathe it in with every breath. If I want to know possibility, I need to see its immensity and allow it to absorb me. If I want to know faith, I need to surrender to it and feel it pulling me in its unseen direction.

-Richard Wagamese-ban (2016, p. 88)

Even before I spoke with these Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers, I felt that if I was going to take other-than-human personhood seriously, it was necessary that I try to develop relationships with and learn from other-than-human persons directly, rather than just learning *about* other-than-human persons through human interlocutors. As persons, other-than-human beings are knowledge keepers themselves, and they might share knowledge with me. This understanding principally comes to me from Joe Sheridan and Roronhiakewen “He Clears the Sky” Dan Longboat (2006), who describe how, in Haudenosaunee thought worlds, thought emerges from Land and human thought is the knowledge that Land shares with humans.

Thus, as previously explained, a core part of my research was a walking methodology—to use Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman's term—where I spent time along the Trent-Severn

³ The idea that “We are all Indigenous” can be problematically used to dismiss the particular concerns of Indigenous Peoples and the violences that they face—similar to how “All Lives Matter” is used to dismiss the particular concerns of the “Black Lives Matter” movement. I implore readers to not misinterpret Elder S. Williams' teaching in this way.

Waterway, as well as along Wonscontonach (Don River), to develop relationships with these places, Waterbodies, and the other-than-human persons present, and to see what insights they may share with me. As mentioned in “Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Methods” my walking methodology was developed via nature journaling in courses led by Timothy B. Leduc and Traci Warkentin; encouragement to spend time outside in a course led by Deborah McGregor; and theories, and articles by Indigenous scholars including Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) and Vanessa Watts (2013), and environmental educators and philosophers including Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston (1999), David Jardine (1997, 1998), and David A. Greenwood (2019).

My Walking Methodology Practice

To recap and expand on what I outlined in “Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Methods,” about how I sought to learn from Land, I developed and practiced how I might build relationships with Waterbodies and their surrounding relations by visiting Wonscontonach (Don River)—which is not on the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, but is close to where I currently live—more than twenty-four times between September 2021 and the time of writing.

I walked down to Wonscontonach through Toronto’s Riverdale Park West, travelling more-or-less the same path each time. Once truly in the river valley of Wonscontonach, I stopped by a particular fallen tree and, using a handheld recorder, recorded the time, date, weather, and anything significant that was on my mind, as a way of trying to set aside things that may distract me from the place, so that I might better ‘enter’ the place. I also brought to mind the snails that were often on the path that I would travel after that point, and used that memory as a reminder to ‘slow down’—both for the safety of those snails and any other beings I might come across while walking, so that I might better avoid stepping on them, and to invoke that I often need to slow my thoughts and actions in order to better be present, aware, and connected in and to that place.

I then walked to a notable crack willow (*Salix × fragilis*) (see Figure 16), who I see as watching over my ‘entrance’ to Wonscontonach. I spoke to the tree, greeting them and extending well wishes, and put down semaa (tobacco) for them. I reminded the tree of who I am and my intentions with Wonscontonach—that I was there to spend some time with Wonscontonach, to build our relationship, and that I hoped to learn—and asked the tree’s consent to do so.

I am not very practiced in ‘hearing’ when other-than-human persons provide or refuse consent, though I hope to continue practicing and learning.

*I'm thinking about that question of getting consent from Land.
I've been focusing on Land as the type of thing
that can be treated ethically or not treated ethically,
that can give consent or not give consent.
Looking at the personhood of Land is a starting point.
I'm trying to reflexively look at how to learn from Land,
and ethics needs to be part of that.
But this project is also still an attempt at figuring things out.
I'm not an expert. This project is about learning.*

-Edited from recording along the canal
that accommodates the Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21,
parallel to Odenaabe (Otonabee River)
May 27, 2021

Figure 16

Crack willow tree (Salix × fragilis) at my 'entrance' to Wonscontonach (Don River)



Note. Photo taken by author, October 13, 2021.

*I was walking down to a little marshy area,
but I didn't go right to it,
because someone, I don't know if they were a bird or a chipmunk or who,
started really making a racket.
I didn't want to keep going down that path and disturb them further.
I've asked the Water to let me know if they don't want me here.
And other beings can let me know as well.*

-Edited from recording along the canal
that accommodates the Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21,
parallel to Odenaabe (Otonabee River)
May 17, 2022

At this point in my engagement with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, I already understood that offering semaa is an important practice—a teaching that was also shared with me by a number of the Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers who I interviewed. But beyond offering semaa, my practice of talking to this particular tree was of my own making. I find solace in Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) reminiscing about her family's, particularly her father's, "secondhand ceremony" (p. 36) of pouring the first cup of coffee onto the ground when camping and speaking special words.⁴ Kimmerer shares that when she later became more immersed in traditional Indigenous ceremonies, she "understood that our coffee offering was not secondhand, it was ours" (p. 36). Although my practice may not have been 'right,' I hope and feel that there is still value in it as "[a] homemade ceremony, a ceremony that makes a home" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 38).

After leaving that tree, I walked down to a specific sandy bank of Wonscontonach, taking pictures along the way—including at a specific stand of staghorn sumac (see Figures 17 & 18)—to document changes to the place through the seasons and across time. I came to stop at progressively more places on my way to that sandy bank, after I became acquainted with them. For instance, on one cold autumn visit, I found a dragonfly seemingly freezing on the metal railing of a bridge that crosses Wonscontonach (see Figures 19 & 20). I placed the dragonfly on the leaf of a nearby tree, growing out of the bank of Wonscontonach, hoping that the dragonfly might be able to warm there in the sun (see Figure 21). After that event, I would stop by that tree on my visits, to greet the tree and the riverbank that seemed to hold and support each other, also offering them semaa.

⁴ I am excluding these words from this paper, as they include a "true name." Kimmerer (2013) writes that "[a]mong our Potawatomi people, there are public names and true names. True names are used only by intimates and in ceremony" (p. 34).

Figure 17

Stand of staghorn sumac in river valley of Wonscontonach (Don River)



Note. Photo taken by author, February 9, 2022.

Figure 18

Same stand of staghorn sumac in river valley of Wonscontonach (Don River)



Note. Photo taken by author, July 21, 2022.

Figure 19

View facing south on bridge crossing Wonscontonach (Don River)



Note. Photo taken by author, September 29, 2021.

Figure 20

View facing north on bridge crossing Wonscontonach (Don River)



Note. Photo taken by author, November 16, 2021.

Figure 21

Dragonfly who I found, who looked to be frozen to a bridge crossing Wonscontonach (Don River), and who I moved to this small tree, growing on the bank of Wonscontonach



Note. Photo taken by author, November 3, 2021.

Figure 22

Location on Wonscontonach (Don River) where I regularly conducted my walking methodology



Note. Photo taken by author, February 9, 2022.

Figure 23

Same location on Wonscontonach (Don River) where I regularly conducted my walking methodology



Note. Photo taken by author, July 21, 2022.

Once I reached my specific sandy bank (see Figures 22 & 23), I followed a similar practice as what I did with the crack willow—greeting Wonscontonach (Don River) and the other-than-human beings present, extending well wishes, putting down semaa, reminding the beings present of who I am, stating my intentions, and asking for consent to be there. When it was warm enough to do so, I often walked into the Water of Wonscontonach while carrying out this practice.

I then tried to spend at least two hours at this specific sandy bank—though a couple visits were shortened because I was feeling unwell or due to weather. I would not leave simply because it was raining or snowing, but I made decisions about what felt safest and best for my health, depending on the weather conditions.

During my time in this place, I would practice various ways of developing my relationship with the place and reflecting on what insights came to me through the place. Sometimes, I tried to spend the whole time just being ‘present’ in the place, not recording my thoughts, feelings, or experiences at the time, but reflecting on and recording them afterwards. On other visits, I let my mouth run for nearly the full time I was there, recording a steady stream of thoughts, feelings, and experiences. During most of the visits, I tried a middle ground of these approaches, spending fifteen to twenty minutes focusing on being ‘present’ in the place, and then recording my thoughts, feelings, and experiences from that fifteen- to twenty-minute period. I would then do another round of being ‘present,’ followed by recording another reflection, and so on. I paid attention to the other-than-human persons—and, at times, human persons—who were present around me, reflected on my research project and questions related to my project, and recorded insights that emerged.

ME: What is the point of prayer and meditation?

OLD WOMAN: To bring you closer to the Great Mystery.

ME: So I can understand it?

OLD WOMAN: No. So you can participate in it.

I grew up spiritually after that.

-Richard Wagamese-ban (2016, p. 75)

At the end of this chapter, I share a number of the insights that came to me while spending time along Wonscontonach and the Trent-Severn Waterway. However, in order to further illustrate my process, I feel that I ought to, here and now, share some of my considerations of where my walking methodology practice resonated, for me, as an act of ‘faith’—not in a way where faith is synonymous with religion, but in a way where I was committed to believing in something, while also not feeling certain that it is ‘true.’ Namely, I consciously committed to thinking of other-than-

human beings as possessing the capacities that would make them ‘persons,’ even though such a perspective does not immediately and readily come to me, when that understanding is not part of the thought world and life ways that I was raised and live immersed in. My walking methodology, and broader research project, revolve around a crucial understanding that there is a difference between understanding an idea—in this case, Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood—and living and acting in such a way that takes that idea seriously.

*That is leading me back to thinking about faith.
If I’m learning how to learn from Land,
that is really about coming to understand a place
in a way that I wasn’t raised with,
that I wasn’t taught.
So, I’m intentionally having faith,
putting intention behind believing
things that aren’t always readily apparent to me.*

-Edited from recording at Wonscontonach (Don River),
September 19, 2021

Furthermore, following from the work of Joe Sheridan and Roronhiakewen “He Clears the Sky” Dan Longboat (2006) and, later in my academic process, Vanessa Watts (2013), my walking methodology involved intentionally and consciously taking seriously that the ideas that came to my mind when spending time along Wonscontonach and the Trent-Severn Waterway *might be being shared with me from the Land itself and other-than-human persons constituting the Land.* As expressed by Sheridan and Longboat, “Native American intellectual tradition still continues to express the North American landscape in intellectual and spiritual reciprocity, where the more-than-human grants qualities of mind to the human” (p. 368); “[e]xactly how many generations settlers take to naturalize their cultural identity to Turtle Island is beyond us, but when the transformative powers of the land speak, we recommend opening the heart and mind to the timeless, living ontology that lives on the very land that crafts Indigenous mind and Haudenosaunee imagination alike” (p. 367). I do not ‘know’ whether any of my insights were shared with me by the Land, when I was with Wonscontonach or the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon, especially when I am still only starting to engage with Indigenous knowledge systems—and Haudenosaunee knowledge systems in particular, when considering the work of Sheridan and Longboat. But, taking seriously that Land *might* be sharing knowledge with me feels, again, like an act of ‘faith.’

Although, I am also mindful of Nishnaabekwe Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams' caution, when talking about learning from Land and Spirits while fasting, that "you need to do it in the right way. You can't just say, 'I think I'm gonna go and ask the Creator for this' and sit beside the tree. It doesn't work that way. There are protocols you need to do."

* * *

My visits to Wonscontonach (Don River) were intended to hone my walking methodology, so that I better knew what to do when I spent time along the Trent-Severn Waterway. It is difficult to provide a straightforward description of my visits to Waterbodies along the Trent-Severn Waterway, because each visit was different. As I previously mentioned in "Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Methods," I visited Waterbodies along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway eighteen times between September 2020 and the time of writing, driving along the entire course of the Trent-Severn Waterway over the span of two days, taking a tourist cruise on Odenaabe, canoeing stretches of Odenaabe (Otonabee River) and Matchedash (Severn River), and spending time at particular places along Saagetay'achewan (Trent River), Odenaabe, Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes), Matchedash, and the Newmarket Canal, a failed extension of the waterway. I spent varying amounts of time—though often a couple hours—at these different places, walking along stretches of the Waterbodies or sitting and staying in certain spots. Similar to my practice along Wonscontonach, I greeted the Waterbodies and other other-than-human persons who I was visiting, extended well-wishes, put down semaa (tobacco), introduced myself and my intentions, and asked for consent to be there. I then reflected and recorded any insights, again similar to my practice along Wonscontonach, holding faith that some *could* be insights shared with me from the Land.

Later in this chapter, I reflect on my emerging relationships with the other-than-human persons who I spent time with, and insights I gained from the experience, including questions about the nature of personhood; experiences of self and relationships, and how they shift in time; and how embodiment both opens possibilities for building relationships and impacts who those relationships might be built with.

Other Settlers' Practices for Developing Relationships with Land

A number of the settlers who I interviewed shared their own practices of spending time and developing relationships with Land, and what they had learned from Indigenous knowledge

keepers about how to do so in a good way. Their insights helped me to refine my walking methodology practice as I carried it out, and I hope that they may also help interested readers in developing their own ways of building relationships and learning from Land.

Leora Berman—a settler, and founder of The Land Between charity and Turtle Guardians—recounted how significant Indigenous teachings have been for her own relationships with other-than-human persons, including the turtles in her care that she “very consciously use[s] . . . [as] an introduction to nature” for “kids and communities.”⁵ Berman shared, “I can introduce settlers and people to turtles and I can show them—and the turtles will show them too—that they have agency, and they’re sentient, and they have souls. And there’s a wisdom there, but it’s the Indigenous stor[ies] of the turtle that really [turn] people’s heads.” Berman noted that “I don’t think nature would have shown me these things without the Indigenous [teachings]; without that introduction to . . . who [other-than-human persons] are. . . . And that’s why the restoration of Indigenous language, and the preservation and support for reinvigoration of Indigenous knowledge and culture is so important.”

Aleyah-Erin Lennon, a settler educator researching critical spirituality and how settlers might decolonize their own sense of identity and belonging, shared that she had been told by Anishinaabekwe Ojibwe and Odawa Elder Dr. Shirley Ida Williams to “go sit by the Water, and listen.” In Lennon’s words, when you sit by the Water, “you can feel that transformative, healing power come over you, and you develop and nurture an embodied relationship with your places and the Spirits that live there.”

For Kelly King—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous folks in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former Education Director with TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—“just taking time to witness what all of [the more-than-human beings] are up to in certain seasons, and being on the Land more frequently myself, has really encouraged that learning and that responsibility”:

[a] lot of my learning . . . [about] ways that I’m in relationship with more-than-human beings is just by observing, and being with them . . . to see what they’re up to . . . and all

⁵ As described by Berman,

We’re very fortunate to—and, I mean, it’s a hell of a lot of responsibility—to have adopted turtles and snakes from the . . . Ontario Turtle Conservation Center and Scales Nature Park. These are souls that can’t go back into nature because of various reasons, either they’re [injured or disabled], or they were born in captivity, so they don’t have a territory, and that’s problematic . . . —you cannot just put them out in new territories or areas in nature that they are unfamiliar with, because it is like asking them to learn a new language. (personal communication, August 1, 2022)

those things that we're not taught to see—that we're not taught to give value to. . . . And if you can see the world in that way, I know my perspective . . . has changed dramatically, because I'm just constantly seeing new things, all the time. There's just infinite knowledge in the natural world to learn from. So, if every little thing can be seen as exciting, then you can learn a whole lot from the Land.

Christy Caudill—a settler, and space and Earth scientist who has been developing her relationships with Land over the past several years—shared that committing to spending time with other-than-human persons is “always about developing relationships for me. And I very intentionally, when I enter, tell the beings I want to enter in[to] a relationship: ‘I’m here. I’m just open. I just want to hear . . . I’m just present, that’s all.’ I just want to learn, and I open myself up to that, and don’t try to project anything, or think, or ask for anything.”

Jane Gray—a non-Indigenous faculty member at Trent University in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former policy analyst for the Manitoba government, who lives adjacent to a wetland near Odenaabe (Otonabee River)—mentioned that she was developing relationships with other-than-human persons through specific practices of “tapping the trees, and learning about the maples, and learning about the different birds.” Whereas, for Leora Berman spending time with Land is not about learning from Land, but “just revel[ing] in the relationship.”

My interview participants also shared practices that they use to try to build their relationships with other-than-human persons in their average daily life, and not only when they have the time to go out and spend time with the Land. Ian Attridge—a settler environmental and land trust lawyer and instructor at Trent University in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), and a member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough’s Indigenous Allies Working Group, the Indigenous Allies Forum, and other ally groups—mentioned that in an Anishinaabemowin course at Trent University, Elder Dr. Shirley Williams had taught him and the other students to start “your morning with honouring the Water . . . so often I do that. I start the day with a glass of Water and honouring the Water.” Similarly, Alix Taylor, a settler who is a founding member of the Sacred Water Circle in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), was Elder Grandmother Josephine Mandamin-ba’s “chauffeur for a little while, when she visited Peterborough” and shared how Elder Grandmother Mandamin-ba “lifted Water three times every morning—before she took a sip, she’d lift it up, and express her love and gratitude for the Water . . . and so I also tried to do this.”

Taylor Wilkes—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, who was a facilitator and program coordinator with Our Living Waters at the time of our interview—mentioned noticing “that a lot of Nishnaabeg leaders will not talk about Water without

Water present, and so they'll have a bowl of Water or something there, to center her voice or include her voice." Learning from this practice, Wilkes tries,

to have something with me that's a teacher or a reminder, whether it's a braid of sweetgrass that's been given to me, or an acorn that represents my ancestral heritage—[my] Indigenous roots from Europe—or some sort of tangible being, teacher, with me while I'm doing this abstract work in Google Docs [or] on Zoom . . .

There's something about strengthening the relationship in these different ways, that more and more the work feels like it comes through me, instead of me leading or directing it. It's not my mind making choices. It's me holding something, and speaking, and not necessarily knowing what I say. . . . [S]ometimes I feel like I black out, but that's how you know . . . you're speaking from spirit, or heart, or something deeper than your mind.

And although it was specific to her work at TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—which focuses on “how Indigenous science and more . . . ‘Westernized’ sciences can work together to give us more complete ideas and relationships to the spaces that we occupy”—Kelly King spoke about how,

when I am considering the development of [education] programs, I'm thinking of who or what else can guide this, that's not just myself and my own worldview. So, a big way that our programming has developed, is first and foremost, seasonally. . . . [W]e look to what the Land is telling us in seasonal contexts, but we're also looking at moon cycles, and what the moons of the territory are telling us about what we need to be paying attention to. So, when people ask me about TRACKS programming, specifically, I often point to the Land as the one that is guiding our programming, and very much directing it, and we're just a conduit to amplify and highlight what the Land is already teaching. . . .

Even if I'm developing something for, say, November, it's very rare that I just pick up a program I've done in March and plop it into another season. It's how, at the very least, do I speak to a moon cycle that's happening? . . . As of last night, we're now in Manoomin Giizis [which, corresponding to the Gregorian calendar, starts in August and continues into September], and if we're looking at the Wild Rice Moon, then what's happening on the Land? And why was it so important that the whole moon cycle was named after that action and that process on the Land?

A number of my interview participants also explained how they were focusing on developing relationships with specific beings or specific places, as an entry into developing their relationships with other-than-human persons and Land more broadly. Barbara Herring—a settler researcher and consultant specializing in equity and diversity, and member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough's Indigenous Allies Working Group and the Indigenous Allies Forum—connected her practice of developing relationships with specific beings and places to Indigenous teachings she has learned: “some Indigenous communities in South America, [who] taught me, . . . [said] ‘our Land is just this part of the river, where it goes around this bend. That's the Land we know, and that's the Land we have responsibility for.’” Herring explained that

the lesson I take out of [that teaching] is . . . my responsibility is to the Land that I'm literally living on. And I have a very big property behind my house—a big city property, I should say. And my goal is to know it, and to live with the earth, the dirt, and the trees, and the rabbits, and the squirrels that are there. Living with *the Land* is living with *that* Land, and . . . caring for *that* Land.

Herring also offered advice for how other settlers might start to develop their own relationships with Land, saying “I found it helpful, I came into relationship with one tree”:

I had an island for about 30 years . . . and there was a tree on that island that I had a deep relationship with. . . . And I would go, and I would stand with my back to it, so that it could experience my heart and my being. And the other thing I've been told by Indigenous People, is that if you really believe they're alive, and that they have the same integrity as you do, or you are affording them the same respect, then listen to them. And so, this was a tree that I would listen to. And I would open by standing with my back to [it], . . . it had access to me and whatever it wanted to read from me—I was simply there for it to experience as it would. And [I] would listen to it and try to understand its tree-ness.

Herring encouraged other settlers to “find a being, a rock,” “or listen to the grasses every springtime, in a particular place you're going to be visiting, for the next 10 years, 20 years. Make a date with the birds in a particular area, that you'll come back [to] in the springtime every year, and hope that they will too, so you can greet them. Make a date . . . it could be every day, [it] could be once a year.”

Paul Baines—a settler currently working on how settlers can re-member kinship with place and Indigenous Peoples through a new cultural initiative called Kinadian, who previously worked as the manager for the Sisters of St. Joseph Blue Community program, was a coordinator for the Great Lakes Commons, and was the founder of the Great Lakes Commons Map—organized a multi-leg canoe journey from the south end of Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) to the bay of Kente (Bay of Quinte) on Gchi-Nibiish / Chi'Nibiish (Lake Ontario), in May 2021—which several of my interview participants took part in—in order to follow “the ancient salmon route that would have come up through the Bay of Quinte, up the Trent [River], through Rice Lake, and up the Otonabee [River], and beyond.” Baines mentioned that not everybody who joined on the canoe journey was doing so “for the same reason,” but for him,

[m]y European Indigenous ancestors from what is now called the British Isles would have had a sacred and kinship relationship with the Atlantic salmon, which are also unique to Lake Ontario—the same waterbody that I grew up on. For me, the canoe journey was about witnessing the route Atlantic salmon were taking for thousands of years, and feeding the bodies and culture of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. In the early 1900s, and after only 100 years of European settlement, displacement, extraction, and ‘development’ of the

waterway, the Atlantic salmon were made extinct. Through friends and some local media coverage, this witnessing has been shared with more people as a form of re-remembering colonial violence. Part of my role in uncolonizing myself and where I live names this violence, and may one day lead to more collective efforts in remembering and repairing. The Atlantic salmon braid where my ancestors are from and where my parents and I decided to settle. They help teach me about my responsibilities as a guest in Michi Saagiig territory, and as a descendant from European salmon people.

Baines' efforts to re-connect with his ancestors' ancient relationship with Atlantic salmon echo a teaching that a number of my interview participants mentioned learning from Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers, that in order to support Indigenous Peoples and their efforts to dismantle settler colonialism, settlers ought to connect with their own ancestries and lineages. Aleyah-Erin Lennon shared that she had been told by Anishinaabekweg—Anishinaabe women—that it is “important for us [settlers] . . . to remember our stories, to remember our songs, to remember our languages, our names, our histories so that we can recreate a sense of identity and belonging here, in this place, that’s in better relationship with the people and the more-than-human beings.”⁶

As Kelly King explained, connecting with her ancestors is a means of “actively working towards learning what [it] means . . . [t]o embody Indigeneity *of other places*, while being a guest and a settler *in this space*”—“a lot of it comes down to that responsibility . . . of if I’m in this space and if I intend to stay in this space, as a settler human, as a settler person, then how am I actually embodying responsibilities to place?”

My Emerging Relationships

I feel unsure of how to write about my developing relationship with the Waters, rocks, plants, animals, and other beings who I came to meet along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway and Wonscontonach (Don River). How do you write about a developing relationship with even a human person? I could write *about* these persons, describing them, sharing stories about them, or about our time spent together. But none of those options feel appropriate for describing a *relationship*.

I do not want to romanticize or exaggerate the connections that I started to feel—I still have a long way to go to truly understand the personhood of these beings and to develop relationships

⁶ See Lennon (2020) for more information on her practice, and for narratives and dialogues that she has had with Anishinaabekweg research supporters.

that more fully consider, respect, and honour this personhood—but I also do not want to dismiss that I did start to feel connections. As I write, I think of the comforting familiarity of my patch of sand and rock on Wonscontonach, even as it changes through the seasons: the harsh chill of the Water and the rough muck squishing between my toes when it was warm enough to step into the river; the coolness of the air in that place, even in the unrelenting summer sun; the overwhelming foliage of wild grapes in the summer; the sublime grayness and awesome palette of browns, yellows, oranges, reds, purples, and pinks in late autumn—not just in leaves, but in stems and branches; the full-embodiment of winter, of cold and deep snow. I think also of small fish nibbling on my toes; the chance sighting of salmon, beavers, and deer; furtive visits from unknown mustelids and waterfowl; the ubiquity of Canada geese and mallard ducks, of robin songs and red-winged blackbird screeches.

Beyond Wonscontonach, I think of the wide sweep of Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) (see Figure 24); tricky turtles who disappeared into the Water before I could take their picture; and the unexpected grandeur of Ranney Gorge (see Figure 25) and of Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake) (see Figure 26)—unfamiliar landscapes so close to where I grew up. I think of serpentine Odenaabe (Otonabee River) (see Figure 27), at the same time calm and welcoming, and also swift and forceful—coloured, simultaneously, by being a lifelong acquaintance and by childhood warnings that I needed to be careful of their dangerous currents. I think of witnessing a swarm of unknown passerines speeding over Odenaabe’s Waters (see Figure 28); of the paradise of Namesagaiken / Nummey Saukyagun / Annlequion Checom (Sturgeon Lake)—where I still imagine I could be happy spending the rest of my life, just watching osprey—and the haunting dark Water of Matchedash (Severn River) (see Figure 29), speaking of its depth and age.

Difficulties Connecting to Land

While respecting the connections that I started to feel with the other-than-human persons I spent time with, I also want to be honest that I often found it difficult to connect with the places that I visited. I often found myself distracted, thinking about tasks that I had to do when I got home, other happenings in my life, other interests and concerns. When visiting unfamiliar locations, I was often simultaneously trying to be ‘present’ in the place, with the more-than-human persons there, while also keeping track of where I was and where I was heading. This multitasking could further hinder feeling in tune with the place.

Figure 24

Saagetay'achewan (Trent River), looking north into river's mouth, at opening into Bay of Kente (Bay of Quinte) on Gchi-Nibiish / Chi'Nibiish (Lake Ontario)



Note. Photo taken by author, September 26, 2020.

Figure 25

Ranney Gorge on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River), south of Campbellford



Note. Photo taken by author, August 22, 2021.

Figure 26

Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake) from canoe



Note. Photo taken by author, September 26, 2021.

Figure 27

Odenaabe (Otonabee River) from canoe



Note. Photo taken by author, September 7, 2021.

Figure 28

Odenaabe (Otonabee River) at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22



Note. Not visible in the picture, small birds were darting over the Water when this photograph was taken. Photo taken by author, May 28, 2021.

Figure 29

Matchedash (Severn River) at Severn Falls



Note. Photo taken by author, May 29, 2022.

At times, I was also distracted by worry over whether I would ‘get something’ that I could use for my dissertation. Overly focusing on trying to experience something ‘useful’ likely did not help me to ‘hear’ what the Land might actually be saying.

*There’s a real mix of things going on, with these walks.
I’m trying to pay attention and plan where it is that I’m walking,
and to pay attention to the infrastructure of the place
—to the dams and the canals and locks and everything—
and to pay attention to the Land and other-than-human persons
and their presences.*

*I’m trying to balance all of those concerns,
as well as other, distracting thoughts.*

*I’m trying to dip into the place, on a deeper level,
to just be in the space.*

*And I’m doing this work for my dissertation,
and feel like I need to ‘get something’ from being out here.*

*There are difficulties in doing this work,
and doing this work given who I am,
as a settler, as an academic,
as someone enmeshed in capitalism.*

I’m feeling the demands of needing to be ‘productive.’

-Edited from recording at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22,
on Odenaabe (Otonabee River),
May 28, 2021

In my interview with Heidi Burns—a manoomin-harvester, scholar researching connections between manoomin gathering and intergenerational relationships, and activist with Community Voices for Manoomin—she mentioned how “the everyday, surviving, Western way of life . . . [is] designed so that most people make, *if they make*, just enough money to cover bills. So, the opportunities to build a relationship with the Land are almost non-existent”:

[a]n urban way of life, or even a suburban way of life, even sometimes our rural way of life is so economically demanding in the way that we do things, in [the] Canadian economy, that building a meaningful relationship with the Land and other animals is virtually impossible. . . . There has to be some conversation about the impacts of colonialism on all of us, in this way. I find it really difficult to separate how to build a Land-based relationship, how to understand our ecological relations and our place in the ecosystem—our place in this big world—without addressing the fact that it’s really difficult to do that when you’re surviving [in] a capitalist, resource-based, extractive system.

I do not mean to shirk questions that may be critical of my walking methodology or to disregard that I may have been able to develop relationships with Land in a better way. However, many of the distractions that I experienced reflect Burns’ account of the difficulties of developing

relationships with Land within dominant settler Canadian capitalism. I found it difficult to be fully present with the Land, because I could not easily put other tasks and obligations, necessitated by the capitalist system, out of my mind. I worried about getting something ‘useful’ from the time I was spending with Land, because of capitalist expectations of constant productivity, with a limited scope of what that productivity can look like. In order to justify, to myself, that it was okay to spend time developing relationships with Land—rather than being productive in some other way—I often had to frame what I was doing *as work*. *Just* taking time to be with Land felt irresponsible.

In these ways, my efforts to learn from Land mirror Bradley Bryan’s (2000) finding, discussed in my introduction, that trying to understand Indigenous conceptions of property “bring[s] us closer to the question ‘what does it mean to be a human being steeped in liberal understandings trying to understand cross-culturally’ rather than an answer” (p. 5). Trying to develop relationships with Land demonstrated how dominant settler Canadian capitalism undermines settlers’ and Indigenous Peoples’ capacities to develop relationships with Land.

If settlers are to develop meaningful relationships with other-than-human persons—to offer other-than-human persons “the space and time, the occasion, and the acknowledgement necessary to enter into relationship” (p. 118), to quote Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston (1999)—then the work that I am trying to do in this research project ought to be brought into conversation with scholarship examining life under capitalism and the internalization of capitalism that leads people to police their own ‘productivity.’ That exploration is outside of the immediate scope of this research project, but is a valuable direction for where my research potentially ought to head.

From another perspective, my worry over ‘getting something useful,’ when spending time along the Trent-Severn Waterway and Wonscontonach (Don River) also reveals that my concerns about extractive learning—discussed earlier—are also relevant when learning from Land. As put by Christy Caudill—a settler, and space and Earth scientist who has been developing her relationships with Land over the past several years—when I interviewed her,

this term, ‘spiritual extractivism’ came to me . . . where go[ing] to nature [to] ‘get healed’—there’s so many problems with that statement. . . . [W]hy are you, in a time where we do nothing but take and take . . . why would you go there and just take for your own healing? And . . . you as an isolated individual, how can you pretend that you could be healed if nothing else around you could get healing? Or be healed? Or, you’re not giving anything back? How could you possibly be healed? Only on some egoic levels could that be possible.

Although capitalism may, again, be a significant factor, there is a tension in my work, in terms of extractive learning. I am working to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, and to

develop relationships with and learn from other-than-human persons, in order to better support Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism and to encourage that settlers might be able to realize more ethical, just, and non-violent thought worlds for ourselves. However, I am also doing this work as part of a research project that is contributing to my Ph.D., benefiting me *within* dominant capitalist settler Canadian society. I do not feel that this tension invalidates my efforts to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, and to develop relationships with and learn from other-than-human persons; however, I also contend that it is important for me to be mindful of this tension, and not to overlook it, as I continue this work.

Conceptualizations of “Land as palimpsest” sometimes help me to make sense of these competing feelings and demands. A palimpsest refers to a piece of writing, written onto a material that previously had other writing on it, and where traces of the original writing remain: writing something on a piece of paper that you had previously written on, and even though you erased the original writing, there are still traces of it on the paper. Ideas of “Land as palimpsest”—written about by Naomi Norquay (2022), for example—conceive of how a similar dynamic exists with regard to Land, where roads and buildings, for example, are ‘written over’ an existing landscape, which continues to exist despite this imposition. I further extend the metaphor of “Land as palimpsest” to think about how I have a desire to develop meaningful relationships with other-than-human persons, but the demands of capitalism, for example, are written over that desire. Although I can feel self-instilled pressure to learn from Land in ways that will ‘accomplish’ something within academia and Canadian settler capitalism, I ought to reconnect with and ground myself in the traces of my more fundamental desire to develop meaningful relationships with other-than-human persons.

*There's that idea of Land as palimpsest,
and the city being built onto this pre-existing Land
that's always still there.
And it might be similar,
that this manufactured, colonial, capitalist life
is written over this pre-existing, always existing life.
I think that's something for me to remember and try to pay attention to.*

-Edited from recording at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22,
on Odenaabe (Otonabee River),
May 28, 2021

In my interview with Kelly King—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous folks in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former Education Director with

TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—she spoke about

learn[ing] a lot from plant medicine people, in particular . . . [and] one of the biggest things I've learned there is that when it comes to anything that we're engaging with . . . how do we consider [how] we can give back more than we take?

If you're harvesting, let's say, wild bergamot on the Land, for example, how are you returning to that place after you harvested the medicine, at peak time of energy and nutrients? How are you returning to that place, so that you're tending to that plant at all the other times, as well? . . . [H]ow are you in relationship with [that plant] through all the stages? So, if you are harvesting. . . —end of July, beginning of August is usually a time for [wild bergamot]— . . . when are you going back for that plant in, say, September and October, when it's all dried up and the seeds are ready to be spread?

Just as it is important to maintain ongoing, reciprocal relationships with Nishnaabeg People, to avoid extractive learning when engaging with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, it is important to maintain ongoing, reciprocal relationships with Land when working to learn from Land.

INSIGHTS FROM LAND: MOMENTS ON MY LEARNING JOURNEY

To close this chapter, I will now share a selection of the ideas, ponderances, and questions that came to me, as I spent time with Wonscontonach (Don River) and the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon. As previously mentioned, these thoughts represent moments on the learning journey that I am still on, trying to engage with Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood and to learn from Land myself. Many of these thoughts are not fully developed, and they also reflect how I continue to grapple with the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western thought world that I was raised in and that I continue to live immersed in. Nevertheless, these insights offer an example of what I, a settler, have learned from Land. And I share these thoughts, also committed to the belief that they could have originated in the Land and been granted to me by the Land.

Conceptions of Personhood

*As a settler talking about other-than-human personhood
questions of anthropomorphism arise.
Are we just applying human characteristics to other beings?
But that's because our idea of humanity
and our idea of personhood*

*are so wrapped up together.
Whereas, if we start from a conception of personhood
that is not defined only through humans,
but is defined through humans and through other beings,
then there's no applying human characteristics to other beings.*

*-Edited from recording at Couchiching Lock, Lock 42,
on Matchedash (Severn River),
November 20, 2021*

*When thinking about other-than-human personhood
there's a question of whether personhood is defined on human terms
and then extended to other beings,
or whether personhood encompasses humans and other beings.
Is a Nishnaabeg concept of personhood,
a concept of personhood that, through its very conception,
is not human-specific or human-centered?
That changes the project, because then
I'm not so much considering other beings as being human-like.
I'm trying to expand the concept or open up the concept
of what it means to be a person.*

*That's something to consider.
And something to consider when I'm at places like this,
along the Trent-Severn Waterway,
because evidence of other-than-human personhood
isn't necessarily about looking for the Water or the rocks
to be behaving in human ways;
it's about looking for ways that these beings
demonstrate personhood in a wider capacity.*

*-Edited from recording at Big Chute Marine Railway, Lock 44,
on Matchedash (Severn River),
July 23, 2021*

I imagine that many people who think from a dominant Western thought world would conceive of other-than-human personhood as anthropomorphic—misattributing human characteristics to non-human beings. However, such accusations arise themselves from the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western thought world, where being a “person” is often treated as synonymous with being a “human”—although, it must be noted that many members of the human species have also been and continue to be denied their humanity and personhood. Within Nishnaabeg thought worlds, humans have *never* been considered to be the only persons and, thus, in Nishnaabeg thought worlds, attributing personhood to other beings is *not* extending nor misattributing human characteristics.

That said, it is likely a misnomer to even refer to Nishnaabeg Peoples as having conceptions of ‘other-than-human personhood.’ In the same way that Bradley Bryan (2000) describes how “we lose access to the true nature of Aboriginal existence once we re-describe it ‘as’ propertied” (p. 6), it may be inaccurate to suggest that there *are* concepts of ‘personhood’ within Nishnaabeg thought worlds, even putting aside language and translation.

Again, I refer to Nishnaabeg concepts of ‘other-than-human personhood’ based on Graham Harvey (2017) relaying that according to Irving Hallowell, amongst the Ojibwe,

[t]o be a person does not require human-likeness, but rather humans are like other persons. Persons is the wider category, beneath which there may be listed sub-groups such as ‘human persons,’ ‘rock persons,’ ‘bear persons,’ and others. Persons are related beings constituted by their many and various interactions with others. Persons are wilful beings who gain meaning and power from their interactions. Persons are sociable beings who communicate with others. Persons need to be taught by stages (some marked by initiations) what it means to ‘act as a person.’ (Harvey, 2017, p. 18)

More than relaying the idea that humans are not the only persons in Nishnaabeg thought worlds, this quote provides an overview of Nishnaabeg understandings of personhood, *which differ from dominant Western understandings*. For instance, I would not define that “[p]ersons need to be taught by stages (some marked by initiations) what it means to ‘act as a person’ ” (p. 18), even though—according to Harvey (2017)—such an understanding exists within Ojibwe thought worlds. These parameters for personhood are also incongruent with the Oxford English Dictionary’s (OED) definitions of personhood and person:

- “[t]he quality or condition of being a person; esp. personal identity, selfhood” (Oxford English Dictionary, July 2023b, Meaning & use section);
- “[a]n individual human being; a man, woman, or child”;
- “[i]n emphatic use: a human being, as distinguished from an animal, thing, etc. In later use also: an individual regarded as having human rights, dignity, or worth”;
- “[t]he self, being, or individual personality of a man or woman, esp. as distinct from his or her occupation, works, etc.”;
- “[i]n general philosophical sense: a conscious or rational being”;
- “*Law*. An individual (natural person *n.*) or corporate body (artificial person) recognized by the law as having certain rights and duties” (Oxford English Dictionary, July 2023a, Meaning & use section, entry II.2.a., II.2.c., II.3.a., II.5., III.7.; OED’s italics; original bold removed).

Truly engaging with Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood requires further engagement with Nishnaabeg conceptions *of personhood*.

Possibly sharing insights into Nishnaabeg conceptions of personhood, Ojibway Elder Basil Johnston-ban (1976/2008) provides an outline of human life, describing that

[l]ife was an ordeal, not only in the physical sense, but in a moral sense as well. Central to the life of the Anishnabeg was the “vision.” The first portion of life, infancy and youth, was a period of preparation and quest for the vision. Both were arduous. Both body and soul-spirit had to be prepared and tested. Only when both were made fit by frequent testing did the vision come. After vision, in the adult and old age stages of life, came the period of understanding and living out the vision. Neither was easy. Perhaps the ordeal in the moral order was more demanding than that in the physical order.

Ordeal though the preparation and quest might have been, it was the vision that wrought profound changes in the tone, quality, and style of a man’s life. For prior to the vision, life was existence, preparation and receiving; after vision, life became living, fidelity, and giving. (139)

Graham Harvey (2017) additionally alleges that Nishnaabeg understandings of other-than-human personhood are learned over time:

This animism (minimally understood as the recognition of personhood in a range of human and other-than-human persons) is far from innate and instinctual. It is found more easily among elders who have thought about it than among children who still need to be taught how to do it. In learning to recognise personhood, animists are intended, by those who teach them (by whatever means) to become better, more respectful persons. That is humans might become increasingly animist (reaching beyond the minimal definition) as throughout life they learn how to act respectfully (carefully and constructively) towards other persons. (p. 18)

This idea, that humans might learn to recognize other-than-human personhood throughout their life, differs significantly from the understandings of many environmental educators and philosophers, still immersed in dominant Western thought worlds, who purport that humans have a more ‘innate’ connection with other-than-human persons in childhood, and this connection is lost as people age (see, for instance, Edith Cobb, 1977).

Moreover, understanding that people might learn to recognize other-than-human personhood throughout their life is reassuring and inspiring for my work, as my—and other settler’s—need to learn to become more animist may parallel a common journey even amongst Nishnaabeg Peoples, although settlers may be starting from a more removed location, compared to Peoples living immersed in more-than-human social, legal, and political orders.

Considering how recognizing other-than-human personhood may be learned over one’s life, during one of my visits to Wonscontonach (Don River), I reflected on how significantly living

and being raised within a thought world where other-than-human beings are persons might change your experiences and relationships with Land:

*I was thinking about how I'm feeling more comfortable
having conversations with the river, talking to the river as if it's a person.
And I was thinking about what it would be like, if you were raised
with that mindset, if you always knew the Land as being made up of persons,
how natural it might be to talk to other-than-human persons
and how different your experience of Land would be.*

*I don't even talk to humans around me very often, in the city,
but there is, at least, an attentiveness to them.
If you were to readily see all of the plants, all of the animals,
the Land itself, the Water as persons, then what sort of similar
attentiveness would you have towards them?*

*When speaking to the river happens more easily and feels less weird,
when I feel more comfortable being in this place,
when the place does, maybe,
feel more like a person who I'm coming and seeing,
those slight shifts might actually point to some
more profound changes in my experience
—and I'm only coming down here once a week.*

*How different would my experience of this place be,
if I was raised and always lived seeing these other beings as persons?*

-Edited from recording at Wonscontonach (Don River),
December 15, 2021

Other-than-Human Experiences of Self

*Where does Water's agency exist?
At what scale does Water's agency exist?
When I'm thinking about the Water's relationship
with the rock, where does one being end and another begin?
What is an other-than-human person,
versus a place,
versus Land?*

-Edited from recording at Hastings lock, Lock 18,
on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River),
October 10, 2021

While I started to develop a familiarity, maybe a relationship or even friendship, with Wonscontonach (Don River) in particular, as I spent time with them—becoming more comfortable spending time with them, finding it increasingly meaningful to talk to them—I am still apprehensive when I reflect on Wonscontonach and other Waters being *persons*. The nebulous

boundaries and scale of Water are part of the problem. Of course, the boundaries of humans and other animals are also more nebulous than they readily appear—scientists have found that there are roughly as many bacteria and microbes in human bodies as there are human cells (Abbott, 2016).⁷ However, in my experience, there is still a lived sense and experience of being a ‘self.’⁸

Richard Wagamese-ban (2016) writes a number of reflections that relay his experience of ‘self’ in an Ojibway Anishinaabe thought world where relationships are also pivotal,⁹ including,

I AM MY silence. I am not the busyness of my thoughts or the daily rhythm of my actions. I am not the stuff that constitutes my world. I am not my talk. I am not my actions. I am my silence. I am the consciousness that perceives all these things. When I go to my consciousness, to that great pool of silence that observes the intricacies of my life, I am aware that I am me. I take a little time each day to sit in silence so that I can move outward in balance into the great clamour of living. (p. 15)

And

I AM A dreamer made real by virtue of the world touching me. This is what I know. I am spirit borne by a body that moves through the dream that is this living, and what it gathers to keep becomes me, shapes me, defines me. The dreamer I am is vivid when I fully inhabit myself—when I allow that. Meditation is not an isolated act of consciousness. It’s connecting to the dream. It’s being still so that the wonder of spirit can flow outward, so that the world touches me and I touch the world. It’s leaving my body and my mind and becoming spirit again, whole and perfect and shining. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 16)

Spending time with Wonscontonach (Don River) and the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon, it is difficult for me to wrap my brain around Water having a sense and experience of ‘self’ and, if it does, at what scale that ‘self’ would be—although ‘wrapping my brain around’ this idea may also not be what is needed. As novelist China Miéville (2002) writes,

⁷ It was previously thought that bacteria and other microbes outnumbered human cells ten to one in human bodies; however, a 2015 study found that the ratio of microbes to human cells is closer to one to one (Abbott, 2016).

⁸ Some scholars, such as Brian Massumi (2014), suggest that ideas of individuality, and individual agency and autonomy, ought to be done away with because of how interrelated humans are with other beings—“[a]nimal politics is also obliged to *distance itself from the concept of agency*. The transindividuality of the process of vital becoming complicates the question of agency . . . there should be no illusions that the mental power of processual subjectivity resides in a ‘mind’ (individual or collective). It is a subjectivity not only without an efficient cause behind it, but without a subject behind it either” (p. 40-41). Although I am open to Massumi’s claims from a philosophical perspective, I am very wary of them from a political perspective: it feels dangerous to posit theories that undermine autonomy considering ongoing violences that violate the autonomy of bodies, individuals, and nations, including ongoing violations of Indigenous sovereignty and heteropatriarchal rape culture.

⁹ Wagamese-ban (2016) also writes reflections that emphasize the significance of relationships, within Ojibway Anishinaabe thought worlds, including writing that

FROM OUR VERY first breath, we are in relationship. With that indrawn draft of air, we become joined to everything that ever was, is and ever will be. When we exhale, we forge that relationship by virtue of the act of living. Our breath commingles with all breath, and we are a part of everything. That’s the simple fact of things. We are born into a state of relationship, and our ceremonies and rituals are guides to lead us deeper into that relationship with all things. (p. 44)

Water “has been given many names. Each inlet and bay and stream has been classified as if it were discrete. But [Water] is one thing, where borders are absurd. It fills the spaces between stones and sand, curling around coastlines and filling trenches between the continents” (p. 1; original italicized). At what scale does Water experience itself as a person? Is all Water collectively one person? Is an ocean a person? A lake? A river? A Water droplet? A Water molecule? Depending on this scale, I may have been spending time with different Water persons every time I visited Wonscontonach and the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon.

Although I have not spent time there specifically for this research project, there is a place I know as High Falls, on Eels Creek¹⁰—a Waterbody that feeds into Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake), on the Trent-Severn Waterway, quite close to Kinomaagewapkong / Kinomaage Waapkong, the Teaching Rocks. Pondering those falls, I often reflect on the varied behaviour of the Water that constitutes them. There is somewhat of a main channel of Water flowing down over the rocks, although—more accurately—there are many different trails that the Water follows, over and between different outcroppings of rocks. There are also drops of Water flying into the air as mist, splashes of Water lapping onto the rocks at the sides and throughout the channel, and Water pooling into little eddies. And that is only what I can readily see. There is Water evaporating into the air. Grasses, bushes, trees, and other plants, as well as fungi, may take in some of the Water. Animals—fish, birds, and mammals, including humans—may take in some of the Water. When the Water at High Falls takes so many different forms and travels in so many different ways, it is difficult to say where the Water person—or persons—of High Falls begin(s) and end(s).

I do not want to presume that Water *does not* have an experience of self, especially considering the Ojibway Anishinaabe experience of self described by Richard Wagamese-ban (2016). However, when understandings of autonomous individuals are so enmeshed in the dominant Western thought world, I find it difficult to conceptualize or even imagine how personhood might exist with either a radically different experience of self or, possibly, no experience of self at all.

¹⁰ According to Edwin C. Guillet (1957), Eels Creek is named for a Nishnaabeg chief (p. 24) known as Eels, though, in the past, eels—the animal—could also be found in the creek at certain times of year (p. li).

Water's Relations

Spending time along the Waters who the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon, and with Wonscontonach (Don River), I was also struck by the ways that Water interacts with other other-than-human persons.

In my interview with Kelly King, she discussed how observing connections and relationships has become significant for her when spending time with Land on her own, and in her work with TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program:

[s]omething I try to tell kids all the time is try to make those connections of relationships as much as possible, by just witnessing and observing. So, what bird is most frequently visiting that serviceberry tree? Or, if you are lifting rocks at this time of the year, who are you seeing? But, why are you not seeing them at this time of year? And why do you think that might be? What are the relationships that you're seeing? Or that we're not seeing? . . . If we stop and slow down, we can see how those relationships are actually continually happening on the Land, but if we don't stop and slow down and teach ourselves to just slow and observe, then we're not going to see those relationships happening.

Waters have an interesting relationship with the sky: perhaps it has something to do with feeling closer to the horizon but, at least for me, being on or in the Water—swimming or being in a boat—has a way of bringing the 'sky' closer to my level. This feeling of being closer to the sky was encouraged by being visited by birds, including great blue herons, belted kingfishers, Canada geese, mallard and wood ducks, American robins, red-winged blackbirds, sandpipers, house sparrows, pine siskins, double-crested cormorants, and downy woodpeckers, while canoeing along Odenaabe (Otonabee River) and Matchedash (Severn River), and when spending time with Wonscontonach (Don River).

While undertaking my walking methodology, Waters' relationship with sunlight also became significant to me, and the unique and beautiful ways that Waters reflected light frequently drew my attention (see Figure 30).

*There's a stump in the Water, and a tire, and some rocks
that are all creating ripples.
And I was spending a lot of time focusing on the ripples,
sitting with them, watching them,
because they all come together and meet.
I was just liking the look of them, where they meet,
and the way that the light looks there.*

I was thinking about how much the reflection of light plays a part in viewing Water, knowing Water, seeing Water, spending time with Water.

-Edited from recording at Wonscontonach (Don River),
December 10, 2021

Figure 30

Overlapping ripples on Wonscontonach (Don River) creating a 'braid'



Note. Photo taken by author, December 10, 2021.

I also particularly contemplated the relationship between Water and rocks. Although rocks can often be a ubiquitous backdrop, it is difficult to overlook them at places like Burleigh Falls (see Figure 31)—where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake) meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake)—or along Matchedash (Severn River) (see Figures 32 & 33). As I discussed in the previous chapter, the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway was largely a reshaping of rock that, in turn, caused a reshaping of Waters. The stretch of Waters was the impetus for the waterway, but the Waters flow as they do because of their interactions and negotiations with the rocks over ages, with some densities being worn away while others remain. As James T. Angus (1988) writes “[m]uch of the work was already done. Nature had carved a natural channel between the pre-Cambrian bedrock and the intersecting strata of limestone” (p. xi).

*What I'm really feeling curious about today
is that interplay of the Water and the rock.
The way that, through erosion,
the Water shapes the rock, shapes the Land.*

*But also how what rocks are there,
the makeup of those rocks,
how that impacts the flow of the Water.*

-Edited from recording at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22,
on Odenaabe (Otonabee River),
May 28, 2021

Reflecting on the long-term relationship and negotiations between Water and rock often brought to mind Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) writing on the animacy of Anishinaabemowin—the Anishinaabe language. Kimmerer writes about learning the word “*wiikwegamaa*: ‘to be a bay’ ” (p. 54; Kimmerer's italics) and contemplating how she felt able to “smell the water of the bay, watch it rock against the shore and hear it sift onto the sand” (p. 55):

[a] bay is a noun only if water is *dead*. When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb *wiikwegamaa*—to *be* a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. “To be a bay” holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between the shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise. (p. 55; Kimmerer's italics)

When I first read this passage, I was deeply intrigued by the other-worldly dynamism of a Nishnaabeg thought world where a bay, of its own volition and unburdened by Western laws of physics, “could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 55). Spending time along the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon, and with Wonscontonach (Don River), made me reconsider that the animacy of Water does not necessarily question dominant Western physics in ways that I had first thought. A bay can “become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 55), but Waters do not exist in isolation—Waters are in relationship with rocks, for instance, and if the rocks agree to be worn away, through long-term negotiations, then a bay might indeed “become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 55).

The rocks along the route of the Trent-Severn Waterway have been shaped through long-term negotiations with Waters and other other-than-human persons. And, as discussed in the previous chapter, the rendering of Waters and rocks for settler-colonial ends interferes with these longstanding relationships and negotiations.

*Land is so much a part of the history of the
Trent-Severn Waterway, in a way
that's been left out of the conversation.*

*That interaction between the Water and the rock
is so important in creating the Waterbodies
that led to the waterway.*

-Edited from recording at Burleigh Falls lock, Lock 28,
where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake)
meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake),
August 25, 2021

Figure 31

Example of rocks at Burleigh Falls—where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake) meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake)



Note. Photo taken by author, August 25, 2021.

Figure 32

Example of rocks on Matchedash (Severn River), beside Big Chute Marine Railway, Lock 44



Note. Photo taken by author, September 27, 2020.

Figure 33

Same rocks on Matchedash (Severn River), beside Big Chute Marine Railway, Lock 44, without Water



Note. Photo taken by author, May 29, 2022.

*“Remember[ing] the future; imagin[ing] the past” of the Trent-Severn Waterway
(Fuentes, 1985, p. 338)*

*What would this place look like without the Trent-Severn Waterway?
What can this place look like in the future, without the Trent-Severn Waterway?
How is this place, now, a result of the Trent-Severn Waterway?
How is this place just what the Land is like here?*

-Edited from recording at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22,
on Odenaabe (Otonabee River),
May 28, 2021

While spending time along the Trent-Severn Waterway, I often tried to imagine what the place would have looked like before the waterway, as a way of envisioning what the place might look like if the waterway had never been built or what it could look like in the future if, for instance, the physical structures of the waterway were dismantled. This practice calls to mind Carlos Fuentes’ (1985) adage, “[r]emember the future; imagine the past” (p. 338): “[t]he future has no more powerful anchor than the past because the past is the only certifiable future we have; the past is the only proof we now have that the future did, in effect, once exist” (p. 338).

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson appears to include a similar practice of “[r]emember[ing] the future; imagin[ing] the past” (Fuentes, 1985, p. 338) in some of her writing:

Doug tells me Chi’Niibish had its own resident population of salmon that migrated all the way to Stoney Lake to spawn. We drank directly from the lakes, and that was a good, healthy thing to do. There was a large population of eels that also migrated to Stoney Lake each year from the Atlantic Ocean. There was an ancient old-growth forest of white pine that stretched from Curve Lake down to the shore of Lake Ontario, which had virtually no understory except for a bed of pine needles. There were tallgrass prairies and black oak savannas where Peterborough stands today. The lakes were teeming with minomiin, or wild rice. The land was dotted with sugar bushes, the lakes were full of fish.

It sounds idyllic, because compared to now it was idyllic. Our knowledge system, the education system, the economic system, and the political system of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg were designed to promote more life. Our way of living was designed to generate life—not just human life but the life of all living things . . . It was an emergent system reflective of the relationality of the local landscape. (L. B. Simpson, 2017, p. 3)

Chief Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation—a Nishnaabeg First Nation on Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), along the Trent-Severn Waterway—also spoke to me of imagining the past. I am not sure whether or not there is an element of remembering the future in Chief Mowat’s imaginings, but I suspect there might be:

I think about, when I go, say, over Lock 18 at Hastings, that was an important fishery . . . before locks were put in, it was a very important fishing site. . . . [And] at these fishing sites along the Trent-Severn Waterway, where there are now dams and locks and bridges,

those were important meeting sites, harvesting sites, burial sites. And, of course, [settler] society—as it progressed and as settlement moved up through the system— . . . didn't really care about that. That was something that had to be overcome and tackled and tamed. And so, these important fishing sites that would have harboured activity, and villages, meeting areas, and all the social activity that would have revolved around that, is something that we can't replace, but something that we should be mindful of.

And these sites are 2000 years old and more. It's fascinating to wonder what it looked like at one time and it's fascinating to think about the trade that came down through what is now the Trent-Severn Waterway.

Likely due to presumptions and limitations of the dominant settler Canadian thought world, and particularly due to being influenced by Catholicism while growing up, I often found my reflections on the past—and possible future—of the Trent-Severn Waterway coloured by questions of whether the waterway was 'good' or 'bad.' Entering my walking methodology with an attentiveness to settler colonialism, I often presumed the waterway to be a bad thing. And yet, valuing Water, the Trent-Severn Waterway also allows Water to flow through new areas. For instance, the canal in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) extends roughly 4 miles (~6.5 km) (Angus, 1988, p. 226), bringing Water through that space. Plants and animals now live in that new stretch of Water. Along this canal, and many of the other structures of the Trent-Severn Waterway, there is often an expanse of Land that is left as park space or otherwise 'undeveloped,' providing additional habitat for other-than-human persons on the shores of the Water.

*I'm thinking about ways that the canal
—even as an artificial, unintended place
for the Water to flow—
provides a space for life.*

*And, also, how the green space that is kept
along the banks of the canal,
maintains space for other-than-human life
in the city.*

-Edited from recording along the canal
that accommodates the Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21,
parallel to Odenaabe (Otonabee River)
May 27, 2021

In Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), the naturally occurring Odenaabe (Otonabee River) is crossed by a series of hydroelectric dams, leaving it feeling very controlled by human activity, while the canal that runs adjacent to Odenaabe is much less encumbered, as it is meant to be an easily navigable passage for boats. Over a century since the canal was dug, with cedar and other

trees and plants growing along its banks, the canal now feels like a more ‘natural’ Waterbody than Odenaabe itself (see Figure 34).

Figure 34

Human-made canal in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), parallel to Odenaabe (Otonabee River), built to accommodate the Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21



Note. Photo taken by author, May 17, 2022.

As previously mentioned, even the Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21, is seemingly becoming a more ‘natural’ space. With decades of Water dripping down the concrete, stalactites have formed within tunnels that run through the lift lock (see Figure 35), giving me the impression that this human-made structure could one day appear to be more of a cave.

However, prioritizing the ‘life’ that has entered these spaces also overlooks the ‘life’ that was removed from them. Where the canal now runs through Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), there were once rocks and earth, fulfilling their responsibilities and supporting life and Creation in their ways. Returning to my previous subsection on the relationships between Waters and rocks, if Creation desired for Water to run where the canal now stretches, then the Waters and rocks could have, possibly, negotiated to accomplish that goal.

*I keep trying to boil this down to,
 when there's a canal,
 that now holds Water, and fish, and plants,
 is it maybe not such a bad thing?
 And what should this place become
 if the locks and everything were taken out?
 Should the canals be filled back in,
 or drained, or something like that?
 Maybe that's a negotiation to be had between the Water and the rock,
 and that will happen between the Water and rock over time.*

-Edited from recording at canal between
 Couchiching Lock, Lock 42, on Matchedash (Severn River)
 and Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching),
 November 20, 2021

Figure 35

Stalactites forming within Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21



Note. Photo taken by author, May 27, 2021.

Aqua Nullius

*While sitting here, I've been thinking a lot about
 the landscape under the Water.
 Where there's this idea of Water being empty space:
 we only focus on the surface of the Water,
 and not what's in the Water.
 It wouldn't be terra nullius,
 it would be maybe aqua nullius?*

-Edited from recording at canal between
 Couchiching Lock, Lock 42, on Matchedash (Severn River)
 and Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching),
 November 20, 2021

For readers unfamiliar with the term, *terra nullius*—roughly translated from Latin as “nobody’s land” or “empty land”—refers to colonial ideology, supported by papal doctrines

including the *Dum Diversas* of 1452 and the *Romanus Pontifex* of 1455,¹¹ that Turtle Island and other Lands around the world were free to be colonized because they were devoid of people, or because the Indigenous Peoples of these Lands did own the Lands according to dominant European regimes of Land and property ownership (see Vowel, 2016, pp. 236-237).¹²

During my time spent along the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon and Wonscontonach (Don River), I came to understand that there may be a parallel *aqua nullius*—‘empty water’—in dominant settler Canadian thought worlds, even if not in colonial legal doctrines. As terrestrial beings, settler humans may perceive Waterbodies as being ‘empty’ apart from their surface. On maps, for instance, there may be a uniform blue to depict Waterbodies, in contrast to the landscapes and political borders of Lands. However, I suspect that there are as diverse ‘landscapes’ underwater as there are on Lands—hills and valleys; areas of rock, sand, and mud; forests and grasslands of aquatic plants; and beings living in the Water column, and both on and under the bottom of the Water. Novelist China Miéville (2002) reflects this diversity when describing the oceans of his fictional world, *Bas-Lag*: “[t]he landscape below the surface is one of mountains and canyons and forests, shifting dunes, ice caverns and graveyards” (p. 2; original italicized).

In my experience, settler Canadians are rarely too thoughtful about what is below the surface of the Water. They mostly think about what is underwater if it might help them when angling or if it might pose a danger to them or their boats—I discuss some of the ways that underwater other-than-human persons along the Trent-Severn Waterway have impacted people and boats in the next chapter, “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway.”

¹¹ In March 2023, the Vatican released a statement claiming that the “Doctrine of Discovery,” established by these papal bulls, “is not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church” (Holy See Press Office, 2023, para. 6) that “the papal documents in question, written in a specific historical period and linked to political questions, have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith” (Holy See Press Office, 2023, para. 6), and that “the contents of these documents were manipulated for political purposes by competing colonial powers in order to justify immoral acts against Indigenous peoples that were carried out, at times, without opposition from ecclesiastical authorities” (Holy See Press Office, 2023, para. 6). I have not read how Indigenous individuals and communities are responding to these claims, but my immediate reaction is that they feel to be an attempt to shift blame and shirk accountability for how the Catholic Church has enacted and enabled colonialism.

¹² As an aside, I have commonly seen *terra nullius* refuted by arguing that these Lands were not empty: Indigenous Peoples were living on them and making use of them, even if they were not doing so according to European property regimes. During my walking methodology, I became curious about how such an argument may reinforce anthropocentrism. Even if a Land was devoid of human inhabitants, would it be ‘empty’ within social, legal, and political orders where other-than-human beings are persons, agents, and actors?

Understanding Waterbodies not as empty, but as full—full of Water, but also rocks, plants, and animals—further illustrates the prominence of relationships between other-than-human persons, and suggests that developing relationships with Waters needs to consider other beings as well.

*I keep thinking about what it would be like
if you could remove the Water from the river.*

*And I don't mean drain the river,
but if you could see what's underwater
in three-dimensions.*

Parts would be sandy.

Parts would be rocky.

How would the 'elevation' change?

How would the vegetation change?

How does sunlight change in different places?

How does the consistency of the Water change?

*In Wild Blue Media, Melody Jue [2020] talks about cenotes, underwater caves,
and where the freshwater meets the saltwater
there's almost like yellow rivers under the Water.*

*-Edited from recording on Matchedash (Severn River),
May 29, 2022*

Terrestrial Bias and Milieu-Specificity

*I was just reminded
of that quote by Momaday,
about taking the time to know a place from all its angles*

*-Edited from recording at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22,
on Odenaabe (Otonabee River),
May 28, 2021*

*I was thinking about that Momaday quote
—I don't know exactly what it is—
but about seeing a place from all angles*

*-Edited from recording at Wonscontonach (Don River),
December 3, 2021*

*I was thinking about Momaday
and, again, his quote about trying to
see a space from all the angles that you can*

*-Edited from recording at Wonscontonach (Don River),
July 21, 2022*

Once in [their] life a [person] ought to concentrate [their] mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. [They] ought to give [themselves] up to a particular landscape in [their] experience, to look at it from as many angles as [they] can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. [They] ought to imagine that [they touch] it with [their] hands at every season and [listen] to the sounds that are made upon it. [They] ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. [They] ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.

-N. Scott Momaday (1976, p. 83)

Likely evident from how often I mentioned it during my walking methodology, this quote from N. Scott Momaday (1976) was something of a refrain as I conducted my walking methodology—which is why I have included it as an epigraph both here and at the beginning of this chapter.

Rather, my misremembered version of the quote was something of a refrain. I thought Momaday (1976) called on people to look at a landscape from ‘*all angles*,’ and I was often struck by the magnitude of that call. How was I to look at Wonscontonach (Don River), for example, even my particular patch of Wonscontonach, from *all* angles? I always came to the same spot—more-or-less, as the place itself changed between my visits. I could view this spot from other directions—different places along the stretch of sand or even from the other side of the river, but what about from in the air? Or under the Water? Or even under the surface of the Earth?

I did not realize that Momaday’s (1976) actual wording was that a person should “look at [a particular landscape] from *as many angles as [a person] can*” (p. 83; my italics)—which is not *as big* of an ask.

Adding to my quandary, I do not read Momaday’s (1976) “angles” as only referring to physical directions. Even during the period when I was most consistently visiting Wonscontonach, I was only visiting for two hours—plus the time it took me to get to my specific spot—once a week, at roughly the same time in the afternoon. I did make an effort to visit in the late evening on a couple occasions, staying until after the sun set; and I was visiting through the seasons. But, nevertheless, how was I to see Wonscontonach at all times? At all times of a day? At all times of a week? At all times of a year?

Connecting with my earlier thoughts on *aqua nullius*, Melody Jue (2020) develops concepts of terrestrial bias and milieu-specificity. To help explain these concepts, I first turn to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. Lakoff and Johnson outline

how metaphors are not merely literary flourishes; metaphors reveal cultural conceptions of the world. For instance, the dominant Western thought world has a general conception of up being good and down being bad, which arises in various facets of life and society. Authorities are referred to as being ‘higher up’; feeling sick or sad may be described as being ‘down’; someone might ‘hold their head up high’ when they are feeling good or proud. These cultural understandings are metaphorical—there is nothing innate, necessary, or ‘natural’ about up being good and down being bad.

Melody Jue (2020) relays how Ursula Le Guin flips this metaphor in the short story “The Author of Acacia Seeds,” describing how “[t]o us, ‘up’ is a ‘good’ direction” (Le Guin, as cited in Jue, 2020, p. 80), but for subterranean ants, “‘down’ is where security, peace, and home are to be found. ‘Up’ is the scorching sun; the freezing night; no shelter in the beloved tunnels; exile; death” (Le Guin, as cited in Jue, 2020, p. 80). Therefore, an anti-monarchist ant writes “Up with the Queen!” to convey the same idea that a Western human may compose as “Down with the Queen!”

Melody Jue (2020) takes George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s (1980) analysis of metaphors even further, exploring how dominant Western academic theories are also shaped by cultural metaphors and, particularly, how dominant Western academic theories tend to be couched in terrestrial understandings when humans are predominantly terrestrial beings. There is a milieu-specificity to dominant Western academic theories and, specifically, a terrestrial bias. Jue investigates how being immersed in seawater would necessitate reconceptualizing media theory understandings of interface, inscription, and database, where, for scuba divers, “not just the lungs but the whole body figures as a distributed *interface*” (p. 29; my italics); “[i]n the abyssal environment of *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* [a species of squid], *inscription* on paper or even stone tablets is eventually eroded by seawater or encrusted with growth” (p. 30; my italics); and “terrestrial notions of the archive or *database* as informed by the language of earth and sediment” (p. 32; my italics) must be rethought to “consider storage in terms of seawater’s capacity for protean transformation” (p. 32). My terrestrial bias was made evident to me as I reflected on the passage from Momaday (1976) when spending time along the Waters where the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes and along Wonscontonach (Don River).

And Jue’s (2020) reconceptualizations from below seawater are not the only alternatives to our terrestrial theories. Even the freshwater lakes and rivers who the Trent-Severn Waterway

imposes upon differ from the seawaters that Jue examines. And what would it mean to theorize and understand the Trent-Severn Waterway from within the earth or from the sky?

Terrestrial bias is also not the only such bias to be aware of. There is a diurnal bias of primarily understanding via daylight. There is a size bias where, although varied, human size never approaches the size of a grain of sand, for example. Moreover, when considering how a person might develop relationships with other-than-human beings, these aspects of human life and embodiment not only bias our experiences, but also distance humans from a significant portion of life on Earth, making it easier said than done to offer other-than-human persons “the space and time, the occasion, and the acknowledgement necessary to enter into relationship” (Cheney & Weston, 1999, p. 118). Jonathan J. Bennie et al. (2014) find that “[g]lobally, the majority of mammal species are nocturnal (69% in our dataset)” (p. 13728). And humans are considered megafauna and are quite large relative to most animal life on Earth: JV Chamary (2023) reports on a study finding that mammals converge to an optimal mass of only 100 g (~0.2 lbs) in warm regions and 900 g (~2 lbs) in cold regions (para. 11).

*Today, I've been focusing on being in this place,
seeing it from different angles,
trying to understand how
different creatures and critters
experience the space:
the birds fluttering over the Water,
the fish jumping out of the Water,
the voles in the plants at the Water's edge.*

-Edited from recording at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22,
on Odenaabe (Otonabee River),
May 28, 2021

Amongst humans, I am also biased by being a white, settler, cisgender man, for example. These aspects of my embodiment bias how I experience spaces, how I might develop relationships with other-than-human persons, *and* my ability to carry out this sort of research project. In the Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) region, and in other parts of what is now considered Ontario, there is a documented history of racist violence towards people of Asian descent, when they are fishing (see Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). If I were not a cisgender, white man, I suspect that I may have been harassed while spending so much time along the structures of the Trent-Severn Waterway, as I did for this research project. Exploring how white privilege, male

privilege, and other societal privileges enable me space to develop relationships with Land in another direction that my work should likely take in the future.

*I'm just along the side of the road, taking pictures,
and I'm worried about what if someone thinks
that I'm fishing and throws something at me,
or something like that.*

*There's white privilege in being able to do this work,
where other people might be harassed or assaulted
while trying to do the same sort of work.*

-Edited from recording at Burleigh Falls lock, Lock 28,
where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake)
meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake),
August 25, 2021

That my experiences of the Trent-Severn Waterway and Wonscontonach (Don River) are biased does not mean that they are invalid. Embodied as I am, these biases are not ones that I can easily escape from. Seemingly universal human biases offer reminders to be humble in what I purport to know of other-than-human persons. Melody Jue (2020) proposes this same humility, building off of Donna Haraway's work on "situated knowledge": "rather than thinking of the terrestrial bias in media theory as synonymous to something false or incorrect, I would like to think of it as a situated perspective that responds to the fact that we live on land, are bound by gravity . . . and experience daily life as immersion in invisible air rather than water" (Jue, 2020, p. 11); "I imagine 'terrestrial bias' as a necessary partial perspective—one that, once recognized, erodes the dream of a master language that would be totally objective, distant, and adequate to articulating and describing the world in its entirety" (Jue, 2020, p. 10). The biases of being a white, settler, cisgender man reveal other structures of oppression that I ought to confront as I continue this work.

* * *

In the previous chapter, "Chapter Three: The Settler-Colonial Imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway," I demonstrated ways in which the Trent-Severn Waterway enacts violence against Nishnaabeg Nations *and* their other-than-human relations, asserting that settlers ought to confront the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western and settler Canadian thought world, if we hope to attend to the full extent of Indigenous social, legal, and political orders in our efforts to support Indigenous Nations in dismantling settler colonialism.

In this chapter, I have taken up this confrontation, further examining the obligations that settlers have to consider the personhood of other-than-human beings, relaying teachings from

Nishnaabeg Elders and knowledge keepers on the importance of developing one's own relationships with Land, documenting my own efforts to develop relationships with Land, and sharing insights that I gathered through these efforts.

When outlining the motivations behind this research project, in the introduction of this dissertation, I discussed Bradley Bryan's (2000) study to learn about Indigenous conceptions of property, where Bryan ultimately concludes that "we are able to comprehend that the various kinds of social relations we have discussed *could exist*, even if we cannot comprehend what it is like to live them. Indeed, we are struck with the sheer impossibility of thinking *in that way* for us" (p. 25; Bryan's italics). I asserted that given the violences and injustices of settler colonialism and other structures of power, it is *imperative* that settlers try to strive beyond Bryan's conclusions and realize new thought worlds, new life ways, and new worlds in which to live.

It may, however, appear that my efforts to consider Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood follow a similar trajectory as Bryan's (2000) question "what is an Aboriginal legal concept of property" (p. 5) circling back and "bring[ing] us closer to the question 'what does it mean to be a human being steeped in liberal understandings trying to understand cross-culturally' rather than an answer" (p. 5). My walking methodology demonstrated, for instance, the difficulties that I have not conceiving of personhood in anthropocentric terms; the tendency that I have to think of complicated, multifaceted histories as black-or-white, good-or-bad; and the terrestrial bias of my efforts to engage with other-than-human persons. These insights are valuable in order to better understand my continuing inculcation in the dominant Western and settler Canadian thought world and the unlearning that I still need to do with regard to dominant anthropocentrism.

Moreover, I insist that coming to these insights does not inevitably lead to Bryan's (2000)—in my opinion, pessimistic—conclusion. Returning to a point raised in the first insight from Land that I shared, Graham Harvey (2017) contends that Nishnaabeg understandings of and relationships with other-than-human persons are learned over time:

animism (minimally understood as the recognition of personhood in a range of human and other-than-human persons) . . . is found more easily among elders who have thought about it than among children who still need to be taught how to do it. In learning to recognise personhood, animists are intended, by those who teach them (by whatever means) to become better, more respectful persons. That is humans might become increasingly animist (reaching beyond the minimal definition) as throughout life they learn how to act respectfully (carefully and constructively) towards other persons. (p. 18)

As I maintain throughout this dissertation, my confrontation with the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western and settler Canadian thought world is ongoing, and the insights that I share in this chapter represent moments on that continuing learning journey. Although I certainly have a long way to go in recognizing and respecting the personhood of other-than-human beings, the difficulties that I currently experience do not reflect a “sheer impossibility of [settlers] thinking” (Bryan, 2000, p. 25) of other-than-human beings as persons. In fact, in the next chapter, I continue my confrontation with dominant anthropocentrism by undertaking what Bryan (2000) has deemed impossible: imagining the sort of thought worlds that settlers might realize if we come to better understand Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous conceptions of other-than-human personhood.

**CHAPTER FIVE:
RE-STORYING OTHER-THAN-HUMAN SURVIVANCE
AGAINST THE TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY**

*River will come for them.
She only rests till time
needs her to bathe, wash over.*

*Without offerings
She will come swollen,
snatch them up like pollen,
disperse, dispense, derogate.*

Wet earth profuse once more.

-Allison Adelle Hedge Coke
(2006, p. 62)

Although my efforts to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, learn from Land, and unlearn dominant anthropocentrism are ongoing, I have started to develop a familiarity, if not a relationship or even friendship, with other-than-human persons, including the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon and Wonscontonach (Don River), through spending time with them and also learning from Nishnaabeg Elders and knowledge keepers, and settlers working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg Nations.

In this chapter, I now turn towards what settler recognition of other-than-human personhood can possibly achieve, imagining the sort of thought worlds that settlers might realize if we better understand Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous conceptions of other-than-human personhood. Continuing my case study, I speculate on how recognizing other-than-human survivance re-stories the Trent-Severn Waterway and the beings that it imposes upon, upholding and honouring the agency that these other-than-human persons enact in their continued survival against the waterway. I open the chapter by outlining the concept of survivance. I then relay stories that speculate on other-than-human persons' resistance, refusal, resentment, and resurgence in the face of the Trent-Severn Waterway. And I close the chapter by considering why other-than-human survivance is significant regarding settlers' decolonial praxes.

As previously mentioned, my stories of other-than-human personhood are *speculative*, not definitive. Personhood entails a degree of unknowability. In another demonstration of the anthropocentrism of dominant Western thought worlds, dominant Western positivism presumes that humans are able to fully know the more-than-human world and everything that constitutes it,

if we properly take apart and study how every part of the more-than-human world functions. As Carolyn Merchant (1990) outlines in *The Death of Nature*—a foundational ecofeminist text—since the seventeenth-century, a machine metaphor has significantly influenced dominant Western thought, conceiving of “the cosmos, society, and the human being . . . as ordered systems of mechanical parts subject to governance by law and to predictability through deductive reasoning. . . . Mechanism rendered nature effectively dead, inert, and manipulable from without” (p. 214). Although this mechanistic, positivist view can extend to human thoughts and behaviours, I contend that in day-to-day life, there is more of an understanding that humans are not fully knowable. No matter how well we know another person, we never know or experience the full extent of their inner world and, therefore, there is always a possibility that other humans may behave in ways that surprise us. Recognizing other-than-human personhood entails recognizing that other-than-human persons similarly possess inaccessible inner worlds: my re-storying is speculative because I do not know the inner workings, intentions, or the full extent of the actions of the other-than-human persons who I discuss. I do not want to reinscribe dominant Western positivism, and the speculations that I present in this chapter are not intended to regale a new, more ‘true’ history of the Trent-Severn Waterway. Instead, my re-storying is an attempt to creatively *imagine* the sort of stories and histories that might be possible and that settlers might realize if we were better aware of other-than-human personhood.

Moreover, as with many of my reflections throughout this dissertation, I am mindful that my current understanding of other-than-human personhood is a snapshot of a moment on a learning journey, where I am still in the active process of learning what it means and looks like for me to try to engage with Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood in a good way. As I continue on this learning journey, my understanding of other-than-human personhood and my relationships with other-than-human persons will continue to develop, giving me further reason to be explicit that my re-storying is creative imagining based on what I understand *now*, and not a new definitive history.

Nevertheless, speculating on other-than-human survivance is a valuable culmination of the learning journey that I have presented throughout this dissertation, bringing to light the sort of thought worlds that settlers may begin to realize as we support Indigenous Nations in dismantling settler colonialism. As Jairus Victor Grove (2019) avows, in support of speculative scholarship, “[i]deas matter even if they cannot save us. Stories, explanations, and philosophical adventures

are, in my estimation, the best of what the human estate has to offer. No matter how desperate things get, someone will still ask why this is happening, and we will share in that question the possibility of thinking together” (p. 11).¹

DEFINING SURVIVANCE

Survivance—particularly developed and advanced by Gerald Vizenor, an Anishinaabe author, poet, and literary critic—is an invaluable concept for affirming agency in Indigenous Peoples’ continued survival against settler colonialism, as well as for considering the agency and personhood of other-than-human beings. Survivance does not denote any specific strategy for surviving against settler colonialism. There is not a checklist or a set of guidelines for what is and is not survivance. Instead, survivance is demonstrated in *dynamic* and *varied* ways that Indigenous Peoples have dealt and continue to deal with settlers and settler colonialism. Vizenor (2008) describes “Native resistance of dominance . . . [as] serious, evasive, and ironic” (p. 17);² “Native American Indians have resisted empires, negotiated treaties, and as strategies of survivance, participated by stealth and cultural irony in the simulations of absence in order to secure the chance of a decisive presence in national literary, history, and canonry” (p. 17). I understand survivance to be a lens or perspective that can be used to examine varied actions that Indigenous Peoples undertake to continue to survive against settler colonialism, and survivance is a framework for respecting the agency in all of these varied actions.

I often hear it suggested that ‘survivance’ is a combination of ‘survival’ and ‘resistance,’ or ‘survival’ and ‘endurance.’ However, for Vizenor (2008), the suffix -ance does not come from another word, but denotes survival that is an *active* undertaking: “the suffix *ance* is a quality of action . . . The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *ance* as a ‘state or condition’ or ‘action,’ as in *continuance*. Survivance, then, is the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb *survive*, ‘to remain alive or in existence,’ to outlive, persevere with a suffix of *survivancy*” (p. 19;

¹ As previously noted, my use of speculation is also inspired by Melissa K. Nelson’s (2013) formulation of trickster logic as “a tool of liberation from any form of linear, monologic style, and universalizing theory” (Pulitano, 2003, p. 164, as cited in Nelson, 2013, p. 214) that “invites readers to enter the watershed of Ojibwe imagination” (Nelson, 2013, p. 214). However, I am not able to employ trickster logic myself, when I do not have sufficient knowledge or experience of trickster stories, Ojibwe imagination, or Nishnaabeg thought worlds.

² Given the dynamic, varied, and ironic forms of survivance, Gerald Vizenor (1993) often links survivance with trickster figures: “[t]he tribal trickster is a liberator and healer in a narrative, a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagination” (p. 187). However, Lee Maracle (2015) also denounces how “Native Literature [has become] categorized as unique because of the trickster figure” (p. 85), writing that “[c]haracterizing all modern Indigenous literature through a single metaphorical or mythical character is a tad absurd” (p. 85).

Vizenor’s italics). *Survivance* emphasizes survival—particularly, Indigenous Peoples’ continued survival against settler colonialism—as active and agential: Indigenous Peoples are not merely passively still alive despite settler colonialism; Indigenous Peoples continuously undertake strategies to survive against settler colonialism, maintaining their thought worlds and life ways.

When Vizenor defines survivance, he often emphasizes that survivance enacts Indigenous presence, and challenges presumptions of settler dominance and Indigenous victimry. For instance, likely the most-cited description of survivance comes from the book *Fugitive Poses*, where Vizenor (1998) states that survivance

is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence. . . .

[S]urvivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry (p. 15).

Regarding Indigenous presence, Vizenor asserts that dominant Western understandings of Indigenous Peoples often emerge out of fabricated colonial narratives created by non-Indigenous peoples, rather than by actual lived Indigenous presences. As Louis Owens (1992) describes, “the Indian in today’s world consciousness is a product of literature, history, and art, and a product that, as an invention, often bears little resemblance to actual, living Native American people” (p. 4). Cultural, literary, and artistic tropes that tend to shape settlers’ understandings of Indigenous Peoples include the “Vanishing Indian” and the “noble savage,” developed via “James Fenimore Cooper’s stoic savage[s]” (Owens, 1992, p. 23) in the *Leatherstocking Tales*, Queequeg in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, and Injun Joe in Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* (see Owens, 1992, p. 23), as well as “the way Indians were depicted by white artists like photographer Edward Curtis and sculptor James Earle Fraser” (Velie, 2013, p. 67), in works like Curtis’ *Vanishing Race—Navajo* and Fraser’s *The End of the Trail*.

Vizenor uses the term ‘simulation’—taken from Jean Baudrillard (Yu, 2008, p. 93)—to name how these depictions of *indians* take the place of actual Indigenous presences, creating an absence of actual Indigenous Peoples: “[t]he *indian* is a simulation, the absence of natives; the *indian* transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or native stories” (Vizenor, 1998, p. 15). Vizenor often writes “*indian*,” in lower-case and italicized, to emphasize and distinguish *indian* simulations from actual, lived Indigenous presences.

Survivance affirms actual, lived Indigenous presences by focusing on all of the ways that Indigenous Peoples continue to actively and agentially survive against settler colonialism. Because Gerald Vizenor is a literary scholar, he and people who write after him often analyze how

Indigenous literature enacts survivance. When Indigenous Peoples write, they enact Indigenous presences through the *act* of writing. They can also enact Indigenous presences by portraying Indigenous Peoples according to Indigenous realities, thought worlds, and life ways, not *indian* simulations. And while the survivance enacted through Indigenous literature is significant, I contend that survivance is not only relevant for literary or other artistic analysis—though I have heard it claimed otherwise. Vizenor (2008) describes survivance as “a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory” (p. 11). And he repeatedly uses the story of Ishi, a Yahi man who came to live and work in the museum of anthropology at the University of California, to demonstrate what I describe as embodied survivance.

Ishi—who was given this name by the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, because he refused to ever share his real name or even nicknames—was a Yahi man who, between 1911 and his death in 1916, “lived and worked for five years in the museum of anthropology at the University of California” (Vizenor, 2008, p. 4). Alfred Kroeber’s daughter Theodora Kroeber (1970) recounts how after Ishi was “found naked, emaciated, and lost” (p. 81), “the Department of Indian Affairs authorized . . . [his] release . . . to the custody of [Alfred] Kroeber and the museum staff” (p. 81). Gerald Vizenor discusses how Ishi enacted survivance through his refusal to give up his cultural understandings and practices even as he accepted his new life in the museum. And while storytelling contributed to his survivance, Ishi’s survivance was also very-much *lived and embodied—an embodied Yahi presence* in a museum, against the backdrop of violent settler colonialism: “Ishi never lost the sense of his own identity. He always knew who he was: a well-born Yana to whom belonged a land and Gods and a Way of Life” (Kroeber, 1970, p. 82) (see also Vizenor, 1999, pp. 126-127; Vizenor, 2008, pp. 3-5).

Beyond creating an absence of actual, lived Indigenous presences, *indian* simulations also contribute to presumptions of settler dominance and Indigenous victimry: presumptions that settlers are and have *always* been dominant in their dealings with Indigenous Peoples, and that Indigenous Peoples are and have *always* been victims of these interactions. As alluded to, Vizenor also uses survivance to challenge these presumptions. In no way does Vizenor overlook the violence created by settler colonialism, and the atrocities that have followed from settler colonialism on Turtle Island. However, Vizenor asserts that further harm is done when the suffering of Indigenous Peoples is presented as the essence of their existence. As Alan R. Velie writes, Vizenor “objects bitterly to the condescension involved on the part of whites who insist on

seeing Indians primarily as objects of pity” (Velie, 2013, p. 67); “portraying Indian history as an unbroken string of atrocities and humiliation, devoid of highpoints or anything that Indians can point to with pride” (Velie, 2008, p. 148).

Where logics of settler dominance and Indigenous victimry suggest that only settlers have been agents in the history of settler-Indigenous relations on Turtle Island—that Indigenous Peoples have just passively borne the brunt of settler colonialism—survance, again, recognizes and upholds agency and action in *dynamic* and *varied* ways that Indigenous Peoples continue to survive against settler colonialism. Survance claims respect for Indigenous Peoples and affirms that they continue to be agents in the ongoing histories of Turtle Island.

While survance is often used to examine Indigenous Peoples’ survival as active and agential, Joe Lockard (2008) writes—in a collection edited by Vizenor—that survance is not a uniquely Indigenous practice:

[s]urvance stories may begin within an indigenous [*sic*] narrative tradition, but they do not stop at cultural barriers proclaimed by the guardians of narrative authenticity. . . . Hallmarks of this narrative ethos of resistance include an embrace of syncretic openness and ironic welcome to all compatriot storytellers, whatever their culture, who face the imminence of human death with self-knowledge and even a smile. (p. 211)

When there is no cultural barrier to survance, I do not see why there would be a human-exceptionalist species barrier either, especially when survance arises in an Anishinaabe thought world where humans are not the only persons. Although he rarely discusses it explicitly—at least from what I have found in my studies—Vizenor does touch on other-than-human survance, including in the novel *Hiroshima Bugi* (2003), the chapter “Literary Animals” in *Fugitive Poses* (1998), and the essay “Native Transmotion” (2019).

Moreover, Vizenor significantly ties other-than-human persons to Indigenous Peoples’ survance, including in literature. For instance, he writes that “Native [*sic*] stories must create a natural union of authored animals on a tricky landscape of human and animal survance—the survance of humans in the literature of animals” (Vizenor, 1998, pp. 135-136). And he names “natural reason” as an aspect of survance, defining “natural reason” as “an active sense of presence, the tease of the natural world in native stories . . . the use of nature, animals, birds, water, and any transformation of the natural world as direct references and signifiers in language” (Vizenor, 2003, p. 36).

To better grasp Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood, I explore other-than-human survance. I contend that viewing Land as only a passive, material object and

understanding other-than-human persons as lacking capacities such as agency, animacy, and spirit creates simulations of *nature* that evoke human dominance and other-than-human victimry and absence. Like Indigenous Peoples, other-than-human persons are offered “pity and condescension but no respect” (Velie, 2008, p. 148). But other-than-human persons also undertake dynamic and varied actions to continue to survive against settler colonialism, as well as against environmental destruction. Viewing these actions through the lens of survivance reveals the active agency of Land’s continued survival.

Nishnaabeg survivance against the Trent-Severn Waterway has been ongoing since its construction began. Examples of such survivance include:

- petitions concerning the poor documentation and problematic implementation of the Upper Canada Land Surrenders, leading to the 1923 Williams Commission (Wallace, 2020, para. 5);
- the testimony of people like Chief Dan Whetung of Curve Lake First Nation, during the 1923 Williams Commission, who “stress[ed] that it was critical for his people to maintain their hunting and fishing rights” (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 80), particularly after the flooding caused by the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway;
- Nishnaabeg People continuing to hunt, fish, and harvest—evading game wardens—despite the Williams Treaties’ unilateral annulment of those treaty rights without discussion or consent (L. B. Simpson, 2017, p. 5; p. 27, n. 37; Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, p. 78);
- then-Chief of Curve Lake First Nation, Elder Gidigaa Migizi-ban and Wayne Taylor’s 1977 Supreme Court case, where they challenged the Williams Treaties’ blanket clause and proved that they had harvesting rights—particularly concerning bullfrogs—guaranteed by the Rice Lake Purchase of 1818 (Gidigaa Migizi, 2018, pp. 87-90);
- the Williams Treaties First Nations’ 1992 lawsuit, seeking compensation for the loss of rights and Lands under the Williams Treaties (Wallace, 2020, para. 17);
- the 2018 agreement and apology for the Williams Treaties (Wallace, 2020, para. 19); and
- Kawartha Nishnawbe’s 2021 blockade of reconstruction work on Lock 28, at Burleigh Falls—where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake) meets

Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake)—after not being consulted on the project.³

Through the rest of this chapter, I speculate on other-than-human survivance against the Trent-Severn Waterway. In order to highlight the dynamism of survivance, and how survivance is a framework for respecting agency in varied actions, I divide my examination of other-than-human survivance into four sections—resistance, refusal, resentment, and resurgence. The latter three terms are inspired by works by Indigenous scholars and activists Audra Simpson (2014), Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011, 2016a, 2016b), respectively. These writers may not situate their theories as enactments of survivance—they may even understand their theories as alternatives to survivance. Nevertheless, their theories fit within the dynamic and varied approach to survivance that I employ in this chapter. Moreover, the divisions between my four categories are somewhat arbitrary; many of the events that I relay cut across resistance, refusal, resentment, and resurgence.

*Survivance isn't defined. It's not a specific course of action.
It's more a way to frame the ways that Indigenous Peoples have continued to
survive, and to show them respect.
It can also be a way to hold respect,
and recognize how Waters and other beings
are also continuing to survive,
and that their survival is not passive,
it is agential.*

-Edited from recording at Hastings lock, Lock 18,
on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River),
October 10, 2021

³ Kawartha Nishnawbe is not recognized by the settler Canadian or Ontarian governments. The community originated in the 1910s, when several families moved from Curve Lake First Nation and settled on Island No. 31, also known as Centre Island, in Burleigh Township. As reported by Public History Inc. (2000),

[t]hrough the families who settled at Burleigh Falls may have been largely enticed by better economic opportunities, there also appears to have been some pressure at Curve Lake for certain families . . . [of mixed settler and Indigenous (Nishnaabeg) ancestry] to move off the reserve. Harry Daniels, author of *The Forgotten People: Metis and Non-Status Indian Land Claims*, argues that “As a substantial number of Indians from the Curve Lake band lost their ‘official’ Indian status and were no longer permitted to live on the reserve, they formed a year-round settlement at Burleigh Falls.” (p. 39)

The community later moved to Perry's Creek “[w]hen the Trent Canal Authority began building a larger dam at Burleigh Falls in the 1920s, [and] a construction camp was built on Island No. 31 in place of the native campground where for decades families from Curve Lake had spent their summers” (Public History Inc., 2000, p. 28). See Public History Inc. (2000) for more information on Kawartha Nishnawbe.

RESISTANCE

Survivance is likely most readily apparent in overt opposition to—in the context of my work—settler colonialism. In numerous cases, other-than-human persons can be viewed as opposing the construction and operation of the Trent-Severn Waterway, in what might be speculated to be agential acts of other-than-human survivance.

Resistance of Water

Throughout the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway, structures were repeatedly destroyed by Waters, especially during freshets—spring floods caused by rain and melting snow:

- “[t]he spring flood of 1838 carried away about 90 feet [~27.5 m] of the partially built dam” (Angus, 1988, p. 45) at Sheboctecon / Schebockticon / Shebaughtick (Buckhorn, where Lower Buckhorn Lake meets Buckhorn Lake);
- at the Young’s Point lock, where Katchawanook / Gichi Gaming (Katchewanooka Lake) meets Bessikakoon / Atigmeg Zaageguneen (Clear Lake), a coffer-dam⁴ “left in place through the winter of 1870 . . . [was] washed out by the spring currents and lodged against the lock gates, preventing their opening until the material was removed” (Angus, 1988, p. 139);
- before the locks and dams of the Trent-Severn Waterway were built on Matchedash (Severn River), the Ragged Rapids hydroelectric dam—which provided electricity for the town of Orillia—saw a “coffer-dam . . . swept away in the fall of 1899 . . . and in the spring of 1904 the main dam was washed away, destroying the power house and forcing the town to rely on its old steam plant to supply power” (Angus, 1988, p. 387); and,
- “a flash flood on 24 November 1909 washed away a coffer-dam and flooded out the excavation” (Angus, 1988, p. 285) of the Newmarket Canal extension of the waterway, which I discuss further later in this chapter.

In the late 1800s, “some of the crude log” dams used by lumber workers on what would become the reservoir lakes, which now provide Water to the Trent-Severn Waterway system, also “gave way in the spring floods” (Angus, 1988, p. 142).

⁴ A coffer-dam is a temporary dam, built so that Water can be pumped out of a location, so construction can occur in a place that is normally underwater.

The people who were overseeing the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway were often anxious about the spring freshets, given their destructive resistance to the waterway. For instance, in the 1840s, a proposal was made for “suspending the works on the Trent River until the following year,” once “the cost of the works had exceeded \$300,000” (Angus, 1988, p. 86). However, Thomas Wilson, one of the superintendents of the Trent Canal at the time, “advised that to leave the works in an unfinished state for a year would result in at least three-quarters of the work done being carried away in the spring freshet, eventually doubling the cost of completing them” (Angus, 1988, p. 86).

Likely the most significant flooding event during the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway happened on January 26, 1906, when “a section 40 feet wide broke away from the east bank of the canal” (Angus, 1988, p. 269) that had been built to accommodate the Peterborough lift lock on Odenaabe (Otonabee River). “An old farm drain over which the canal was built had given way, allowing the canal wall to sag and eventually collapse as water seeped through the cracks” (Angus, 1988, p. 270),

permitting 500,000 gallons of water to pour into East Peterborough. Trees were uprooted, basements were flooded, a brick works was inundated, horses and cows found themselves standing in three or four feet of water, and squealing pigs and squawking hens were swept away by the sudden deluge, many of them to drown. . . . Had the guard gate a few feet above the break not been forced into position by the rush of water, all of the canal . . . would have been drained into the town and the damage would have been catastrophic. As it was, about 2,000 feet of the canal were emptied. (Angus, 1988, pp. 269-270)

As described by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2008), from a Nishnaabeg perspective, the locks and dams of the Trent-Severn Waterway are seen as “disrupt[ing] the power of that flowing water with handcuffs and shackles, interfering with the cleansing, with bringing forth new life, and with the river’s responsibility of sustaining the territory” (p. 206). In working to take seriously the personhood of the Waters impacted by the Trent-Severn Waterway, it makes sense to speculate that these Waters might agentially resist the disruption and interference caused by the waterway, using floods to destroy edifices of the waterway.

Resistance of Snow and Ice

One can also speculate on how Waters have resisted the settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway in the forms of snow and ice. The arrival of winter weather often dictated the seasonal construction of the waterway. During the early construction projects in the 1830s,

building materials including quarried stone and cut lumber had to be hauled “out of the bush before the snow got too deep” (Angus, 1988, p. 40). Later, as concrete structures started to be built on the waterway, the concrete could not be poured after a frost (see Angus, 1988, p. 250). And James T. Angus (1988) notes that damage caused by frost was ubiquitous, describing how, at the 1907 opening of the canal connecting Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) with Nummaibene Seebe (Talbot River), “the neat rows of freshly cut blocks of limestone [were] *not yet . . . buckled by frost action*, conveying an illusion of order and efficiency” (p. 254; my italics).

Around 1860, a rail bridge across Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake)—one of the Waterbodies that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon—was abandoned, after years of being damaged by ice. T. C. Clarke (1855) describes how,

[w]hen there is no snow on the ice, the heat of the sun in the middle of the day expands [the ice], and it moves slowly, carrying the bridge with it. When night comes on and the temperature falls, it contracts again, and cracks and splits in a surprising manner.

One of these cracks took place at a very acute angle across the bridge, throwing one portion up stream [*sic*] about eighteen inches [~46 cm], and the other down as much. (p. 250)

J. H. Dumble (1858), an engineer of the Cobourg and Peterborough Railway, notes that “[t]his bridge on more southern waters would doubtless have been considered a most suitable structure, but owing to the violent and almost irresistible force of [expanding] ice . . . a considerable portion of this structure now presents the appearance of a complete wreck” (p. 415). Although this bridge was not part of the Trent-Severn Waterway—in fact, railways competed with the waterway as means of entering and exploiting the territory where the Trent-Severn Waterway now imposes—this act, nevertheless, offers an image of ice’s resistance to settler-colonial imposition.

Resistance of Trees

Working with the Waters, logged trees—whose removal from their territory was aided by the Trent-Severn Waterway—also resisted the waterway when it was under construction. Around 1840, “lock walls [were] badly damaged by timber running through the lock” (Angus, 1988, p. 66) at Crooks’ Rapids—now Hastings—close to where Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) meets Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake). At Whitlas Lock⁵ on Odenaabe (Otonabee River) south of Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), “[t]imber and sawlogs inflicted greater damage than usual on the

⁵ “Whitlas” was written with an apostrophe—“Whitla’s”—until the 1850s (see Angus, 1988, p. 109).

lock and dam during the timber run of 1852” (Angus, 1988, p. 109). And in the 1880s and 1890s, at Fenelon Falls—the northern-most point of Namesagaiken / Nummey Saukyagun / Annlequion Checom (Sturgeon Lake)—“[a] system of booms and piers was needed . . . to separate the log run from the navigation channel; when logs were running free, the river was so jammed that steamers could not pass up . . . [and] the timber . . . threatened to damage the gates” (Angus, 1988, p. 171). In the mid-1800s, at the height of logging activity in the territory along the Trent-Severn Waterway, the “plan for canalizing the Trent by a series of dams and locks was considered no longer safe or suitable . . . as it was thought that the immense quantity of timber descending the river might damage the locks, or that one of the dams upon which the locks would depend might give way in a spring flood, causing destruction of the whole system” (Angus, 1988, p. 106).

Likely the fiercest example of wooden and watery resistance occurred on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River), in 1845:

timber rafts by the hundreds and saw logs by the thousands descended the river in droves, as the whole winter’s timber harvest was launched along the river at the same time. The rafts cleared Hastings and Healey Falls with comparative ease, but, propelled by the relentless rush of the river, the wood piled up at the entrance to the Middle Falls [timber] slide, which could not handle the vast quantity of timber approaching all at once. Cribs of squared timber, rafts of pine masts, and loose logs burrowed beneath each other, creating a log-jam of unimaginable proportions and complexity. Water backed up behind the jam, creating enormous pressure. A boom placed in front of the dam broke, and then the whole mass gave way. Rafts disintegrated. Pieces of timber, masts, and saw logs were hurled over, through, and under the dam, much of it bypassing the [timber] slide altogether. The dam and slide were in danger of being swept away in an avalanche of bouncing logs and boiling water. The logs piled up . . . on the Campbellford bridge. [Thomas] Wilson [an aforementioned superintendent of the Trent Canal, at the time] placed a gang of men [*sic*] on the bridge to break up the jams as they formed; otherwise the bridge would have been toppled over. When the wood reached Ranney Falls, there was more trouble. . . . More jams formed. The mounting pressure of logs and cribs collecting at Percy Landing broke the retaining boom there. The uncontrolled timber then . . . crashed into the dam at Chisholm’s Rapids. Only the great exertions of the lumbermen [*sic*], funnelling the logs through the timber slide, prevented the works there from being severely damaged.

Resistance Against Steamboats

In the early days of the Trent-Severn Waterway, steamboats were also targeted by speculative acts of other-than-human resistance. In 1836, “ice sprung [the] seams apart” of the steamboat *Northumberland*, “allowing her [*sic*] to fill with water and settle to the bottom” of Odenaabe (Otonabee River) (Angus, 1988, p. 51). The boat was “raised and refitted” and

“rechristened . . . the *Sir Francis Bond Head*” (Angus, 1988, p. 51); however, “a year or two later she [*sic*] was wrecked on the Yankee Bonnet shoal on the Otonabee River and left there to rot” (Angus, 1988, p. 51). Around 1840, the steamboat *Newcastle* similarly “met her [*sic*] end on the Dangerfield shallows, on the Otonabee River” (Angus, 1988, p. 51). And “the dam at Whitlas . . . was not high enough to contain the River Otonabee during the spring freshet” (Angus, 1988, p. 109). It was “reported in 1851 that the [steamboat] *Forester* had been swept over the Whitlas dam no less than five times” (Angus, 1988, p. 109), carried by the Water’s resistance to this dam.

Steamboats also faced the resistance of “sunken logs, flood wood, and silt accumulating in the shallows” (Angus, 1988, p. 109), making “[n]avigation . . . hazardous” (Angus, 1988, p. 109): “[s]unken logs and ‘deadheads’ infested the navigation channels in ever-increasing numbers, creating considerable damage to the hulls and paddle-wheels of the steamboats” (Angus, 1988, p. 118). Between Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Eacunong (Lake Simcoe), “Mitchell and Canal lakes [are] no more than flooded forests” (Angus, 1988, p. 254). Even today, “[t]he well-preserved stumps of what were once verdant forests remain scattered about on the bottom, ready to wreak revenge on the hull of any boat that dares stray from the buoyed channel” (Angus, 1988, p. 255).

* * *

Altogether, these accounts—re-storied to consider the agency in other-than-human persons’ resistance and survival against settler colonialism—unveil the type of possible worlds that may be experienced within Nishnaabeg ontologies where other-than-human beings can be persons, kin, and nations possessing capacities including agency, animacy, and spirit. Although speculative—because I do not truly know the inner workings, intentions, or the full extent of the actions of the other-than-human persons discussed in these accounts—these accounts illuminate the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western thought world that only considers humans to have agency, and the gulf that this anthropocentrism creates for settlers working to support Indigenous Nations in dismantling settler colonialism.

REFUSAL

For Audra Simpson (2014), in addition to outright resistance, Indigenous Peoples—specifically the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke, in A. Simpson’s work—challenge and survive *against* settler colonialism through politics of refusal: refusing “to play the game of being American or

Canadian, which . . . would mean forgetting or abandoning the deep history, philosophy, and authority of Iroquois governance” (p. 25), refusing “to be enfolded into state logics, and [refusing], simply, to disappear” (p. 185).

The Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke are nationals of a precontact Indigenous polity that simply refuse to stop being themselves. In other words, they insist on being and acting as peoples who belong to a nation other than the United States or Canada. Their political form predates and survives “conquest”; it is tangible (albeit strangled by colonial governmentality) and is tied to sovereign practices . . . it is in place because the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke share a genealogical kinship relationship with other native peoples in North America and they *know this*. They refuse to *let go of this knowledge*. (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 2; A. Simpson’s italics)

A. Simpson’s work inspires me to similarly view other-than-human persons as agentially surviving *against* the Trent-Severn Waterway through refusal: refusing to be rendered into the forms required for the waterway’s construction and operation.

Refusal of Rock

Other-than-human refusal can be seen against the first lock of what would become the Trent-Severn Waterway—built in 1834, at the rapids between Namesagaiken / Nummey Saukyagun / Annlequion Checom (Sturgeon Lake) and Shebaughtickwyong (Pigeon Lake), known as Paub-boo-kaije-wenum / Bob-cajewon-unk (Bobcaygeon). As I previously discussed, conventional locks require significant control over Water levels in order to function: they need to be able to fill with Water to raise boats and empty of Water at a controlled rate to safely lower boats. According to Nicol Hugh Baird, an engineer and surveyor who worked on the waterway, this first lock was “entirely useless” (as cited in Angus, 1988, p. 18), because “[t]he limestone bed of the canal was full of fissures and crevices; as the water ran down the canal, it simply disappeared into the deep cracks, none of it reaching the lock which sat like an empty wooden bucket at the bottom of a dry well” (Angus, 1988, p. 18).

Considering survivance, this event might be viewed as limestone person(s) agentially refusing the settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway, refusing to hold Water in the way that the waterway required, refusing to *become* the Trent-Severn Waterway.

Limestone was also ready to refuse to become part of the Trent-Severn Waterway at other locations, including Crooks’ Rapids—now Hastings—close to where Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) meets Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake), and Whitla’s Rapids on Odenaabe (Otonabee River), south of Nogojiwanong (Peterborough). As James T. Angus (1988) describes, “[t]he

Trenton limestone, through which the lower Otonabee and upper Trent rivers flow, is soft and highly fossiliferous and disintegrates easily. Although readily available at the construction sites, it was totally unfit for lock construction” (p. 40). In the 1830s, the team working at Crooks’ Rapids was sent to find “deposits of the more massive Black River limestone, suitable for quarrying . . . just four miles [~6.5 km] from Crooks’ Rapids” (Angus, 1988, p. 40). But, after “trying to quarry stone in eight different spots . . . the rock proved unsuitable . . . [and] they were obliged to draw heavy stone from a quarry 16 miles [~26 km] from the construction site” (Angus, 1988, p. 40). Similarly, regarding the work at Whitla’s Rapids in the 1830s, “a deposit of suitable limestone was found” (Angus, 1988, p. 43), but it “had to be hauled over 16 miles [~26 km]” (Angus, 1988, p. 43). Accidents occurred daily amongst the teams hired to haul this stone (Angus, 1988, p. 44).

Even though limestone refused the imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway, using its porousness to refuse to hold Water, many of the first locks and canals constructed in what is now considered Canada were, nevertheless, constructed in limestone. The lock built at Sheboctecon / Schebockticon / Shebaughtick—Buckhorn, where Lower Buckhorn Lake meets Buckhorn Lake—in the 1880s, “was the *first* in Canada to be hacked through the tough *granite* of the pre-Cambrian shield” (Angus, 1988, p. 172; my italics), and this project also met stony refusal. A man named George Goodwin, “an experienced lock contractor” (Angus, 1988, p. 172), oversaw the work at Buckhorn, and is reported as saying that the granite “rock proved so very hard that it was impossible to keep a drill in working order, the percussion being so severe that the machines could not stand it for any reasonable length of time” (as cited in Angus, 1988, p. 172). “Consequently, [Goodwin] could rarely keep more than two drills operating at one time, the others being constantly in the repair shops or in Peterborough being rebuilt. As many men [*sic*] were kept busy in the shops repairing drills as were engaged in the excavation” (Angus, 1988, p. 172).

Between Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe), it was clay that refused to be rendered into a canal:

[t]he principal difficulty encountered on this section was in the excavation . . . which had to be dug through the heavy clay that was deposited on the bottom of post-glacial Lake Algonquin. Hard enough to dig at any time, the clay was almost impossible to remove during periods of wet weather. Horses and men could not stand up in the slippery stuff, steam shovels could barely penetrate it, and wagons bogged down in it. When the weather was hot and dry, the clay hardened like cement and was equally difficult to remove. (Angus, 1988, p. 253)

Even the concrete used in the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway was uncooperative. Detailed specifications for “how the concrete was to be mixed and poured” (Angus, 1988, p. 252) were not followed at the Kirkfield lift lock—on a canal connecting Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) with Nummaibene Seebe (Talbot River). When the lift lock was tested in 1905, “the concrete leaked so badly . . . that the reach could not be filled to more than 11 feet [~3.5 m] below the required level. Water poured through the walls at the rate of about 1 million gallons an hour [~3.8 million liters per hour]” (Angus, 1988, p. 252). As previously discussed, Anishinaabe artist Susan Blight has been thinking about concrete as a relative, with life and holding spirit (as cited in Maile, 2022, 39:04-40:17, 40:38-42:30; Ogimaa Mikana Project, n.d., para. 1). And although concrete was thoroughly used during the latter construction of the waterway, through this example, we can speculate on how rock, earth, and Water also refused to become the Trent-Severn Waterway, even as they were forcibly rendered into concrete.

Refusal of Water

On numerous occasions, Waters similarly refused to be rendered as the Trent-Severn Waterway needed. Systems like the Trent-Severn Waterway gradually ‘consume’ Water. Every time that a conventional lock empties of Water—a necessary occurrence whenever boats are travelling from the higher elevation of the lock to the lower elevation—the Water that was held in the lock is let out downstream, into the lower end of the waterway system, and is no longer usable by locks upstream (see Angus, 1988, p. 229). Therefore, there were frequent concerns that Water would refuse to continually supply enough of themselves for the waterway to function.

Concerns over Water supply were especially notable when considering how to connect Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe). Prior to the construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway, Canenandacokauk and Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong were part of two separate drainage basins. Canenandacokauk drained into Gchi-Nibiish / Chi’Nibiish (Lake Ontario) through the path where the Trent-Severn Waterway would be constructed, while Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong drained into Waasegamaa (Georgian Bay) and Odawa Zaagigan / Zaagiigan (Lake Huron). Therefore, “some means had to be designed . . . to move the crest of the watershed a few miles east into Balsam Lake, allowing its waters to feed both systems and thereby permit lockage of boats in both directions” (Angus, 1988, p. 240). “[M]any [people] claimed that the perennial shortage of water

for milling and logging in the Trent watershed demonstrated, beyond question, that there was not enough water in Balsam Lake to feed both halves of a navigable waterway” (Angus, 1988, p. 240).

Ultimately, Water’s refusal to cooperate as part of the Trent-Severn Waterway was hampered through further settler-colonial rendering on the so-called ‘reservoir lakes.’ In 1873, to ensure there would be enough Water in the Trent-Severn system for the continued operation of the waterway, logging industry, and mills “[a] group of 28 lumbermen [*sic*], millers, and steamboat owners, in an unusual display of co-operation . . . petitioned . . . for provincial management of . . . dams” (Angus, 1988, p. 142) that had been previously built by the logging industry.⁶

To facilitate the passage of timber down . . . rivers and their tributary streams, some of the big lumber operators had built dams and slides. The dams created large reservoirs of water that could be released gradually, when the lumbermen [*sic*] were ready to run their timber. . . . So great was the amount of water stored in the reservoirs that it was possible, even after the logs had been brought down, to feed enough water into the system . . . to support navigation and mill operation in the late summer. (Angus, 1988, p. 141)

Extending the settler-colonial reach of the Trent-Severn Waterway, “[t]hese dams converted [forty-four (see Jaakson, 1973, p. 1225)] northern lakes into important reservoirs for the storage of water which, when released into the Trent system, greatly facilitated navigation, milling, and the movement of timber” (Angus, 1988, p. 142).

Nevertheless, Water’s refusal to participate in the Trent-Severn Waterway was a factor in the waterway’s failure as a commercial shipping route. Even when construction of the waterway was tacitly revived in the 1870s, on the premise that the waterway would facilitate agricultural exports from the prairies, there was “criticism that the shallow Trent waterway, with a limited supply of water, could not accommodate the large class of steamers already navigating the Great Lakes and getting increasingly larger” (Angus, 1988, p. 158). At this time, the proposal was made to use barges along the canal, rather than steamboats: “[t]he plan was naïvely simple. Wheat would be brought from western ports to the land-locked harbour of Midland on Georgian Bay, just being developed and capable of receiving the largest vessels navigating the Great Lakes. The wheat would . . . later be transferred to barges, towed through the Trent canal to the Bay of Quinte, and moved on to Montreal without trans-shipment” (Angus, 1988, p. 158). Although this proposal may have been feasible, concerns over whether or not there would continuously be sufficient Water throughout the system dogged the waterway, and the barge proposal was never realized.

⁶ In 1906, the federal government took over control of these dams (Angus, 1988, p. 142).

Waters' refusal to become part of the Trent-Severn Waterway was especially significant on the Holland River division, also known as the Newmarket canal. After “the Grand Trunk [Railway], which had a virtual monopoly on transportation in [Ontario], increased its freight rates by 50 per cent [in 1904] and Newmarket’s industries and . . . political base were threatened” (Angus, 1988, p. 276), a proposal was made to extend “the Trent canal from Lake Simcoe to Aurora by way of the east branch of the Holland River” (Angus, 1988, p. 275), in order to promote tourism and trade in the region—despite the fact that “only about 60 tons of freight per day moved in and out of Newmarket, half of which was exchanged with Toronto. So a canal running north would carry at most about 20 tons of freight per day, providing it had somewhere to go when it reached Lake Simcoe” (Angus, 1988, p. 278).

James T. Angus (1988) mentions that “Water transportation through Newmarket was not a new idea . . . the town site had been on the canoe route of the Toronto Carrying-Place” (p. 277). However, such a canoe route did not consume Water like a system of locks would.

There was no suitable source of Water for this extension of the Trent-Severn Waterway. Initially, it was presumed that a series of locks could function “on the water that could be collected in the dry hills south of Newmarket” (Angus, 1988, p. 277). However,

[t]he source of the east branch of the Holland River is a marshy area on the Oak Ridges Moraine . . . [a] number of small streams feed into the river . . . [but] average precipitation in the drainage area is only 30 inches [~76 cm] per year. . . . [M]easurements revealed that while there would be sufficient water in the system to operate the locks during the spring freshet, the minimum quantity of water flowing in the river in the summer was not adequate. Since each lockage would require from 52,000 to 62,000 cubic feet [1.5- to 1.75-million liters] of water, storage reservoirs to conserve the spring floods would have to be built for navigational purposes in the summer months. (Angus, 1988, p. 281)

These reservoirs were deemed too expensive (Angus, 1988, p. 285); and later studies found that even with reservoirs, there would be so little Water flowing into the system that “it would have taken two and a half weeks to fill the locks” (Town of East Gwillimbury, n.d.), meaning—as far as I understand—that boats would need to sit in a lock for two and half weeks, waiting for the lock to fill with Water, *every time* they wanted to move from the lower elevation of a lock to the higher elevation. On the existing Trent-Severn Waterway, any of the locks can fill from their lower elevation to their higher elevation in under thirty minutes, as far as I am aware.

In order to provide the Water necessary for the Newmarket Canal, ideas were also floated to divert “the water in Lake Wilcocks, the headwater of the Humber River” (Angus, 1988, p. 281), but this “diversion was ruled out . . . because of legal suits that would result from cutting off the

natural flow of water in the Humber River” (Angus, 1988, pp. 285-286). Another proposal was to pump Water *from* *Zhooniya Zaagiigan / Kitchigaming / Ecuniong (Lake Simcoe) to* Newmarket— “[t]he newspapers had more fun with that suggestion. . . . The *Mail and Empire* complained that ‘in the end the country may have to pay for pumping water from Lake Simcoe to Newmarket in order that the same water may run again into Lake Simcoe by way of the canal’ ” (Angus, 1988, p. 286).

Despite Water’s refusal to cooperate, “construction on the [Newmarket] canal system began in 1906 and continued until 1912, when the project was canceled . . . due to significant cost overruns. At this time, the majority of the work had been completed on the second section of the project, from Newmarket to Holland Landing. Three locks, four swing bridges, and a turning basin had all been constructed” (Town of East Gwillimbury, n.d.). Even today, “[t]he east branch of the Holland River is . . . an extension of the Trent-Severn Waterway. Parks Canada keeps the river dredged and buoyed as far as Holland Landing” (Angus, 1988, p. 295). On the Nokiidaa Trail in East Gwillimbury, between Holland Landing and Newmarket, the three “ghost locks” (Town of East Gwillimbury, n.d.) still remain—“gateless locks, stained to the colour of the muddy water that trickles through them, stand[ing] sturdily amid weeds and vines” (Angus, 1988, p. 295) (see Figure 36).

* * *

Once again, these accounts speculate on what the history of the Trent-Severn Waterway might look like according to ontologies where other-than-human beings can be persons. Rather than outright opposition to the waterway, these accounts showcase other-than-human persons refusing the settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway, refusing to *become* the Trent-Severn Waterway, providing another perspective on the active and agential other-than-human survivance understood in Nishnaabeg thought worlds.

RESENTMENT

Providing another perspective on active and agential Indigenous survival against settler colonialism, Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) builds off work by Frantz Fanon, Thomas Brudholm, and Jean Améry in order to conceptualize resentment as “a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures our lives, our relations with others, and our relationships with land” (p. 109). Coulthard’s

Figure 36

'Ghost lock' that remains from uncompleted Holland River division of the Trent-Severn Waterway, in East Gwillimbury



Note. Photo taken by author, November 11, 2021.

understanding of resentment challenges Friedrich Nietzsche's foundational appraisal of "*ressentiment* as an irredeemably vengeful, reactionary, and backward-looking force" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 108; Coulthard's italics), instead avowing that "Indigenous peoples' individual and collective expressions of anger and resentment can help prompt the very forms of self-affirmative praxis that generate rehabilitated Indigenous subjectivities and decolonized forms of life" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 109).

In common usage, "resentment" is usually referenced negatively to indicate a feeling closely associated with anger. However, where one can be *angry* with any number of things, resentment is typically reserved for and directed against instances of perceived wrongdoing. . . . [R]esentment, unlike anger, has an in-built *political* component to it, given that it is often expressed in response to an alleged slight, instance of maltreatment, or injustice. Seen from this angle, resentment can be understood as a particularly virulent expression of *politicized* anger. (Coulthard, 2014, p. 110; Coulthard's italics)

Given the commonplace, negative implications of "resentment," it may give some readers pause for me to posit that other-than-human persons act 'resentfully.' A number of Indigenous

thinkers describe how, as we are a part of Creation, Land loves humans (see Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 121-127). From such a perspective, even actions that may seem harmful to humans can be understood as arising out of love and care. Anishinaabe Elder and knowledge keeper Dave Courchene (Nii Gaani Aki Inini—Leading Earth Man), for instance, describes climate change as “the way that nature can teach us to realize the impacts of our actions” (as cited in Cameron et al., 2021, p. 6). For me to describe other-than-human beings as acting out of resentment may appear to contradict this conception of Land as loving. However, drawing such a conclusion misses the distinction that Coulthard (2014) is making between Nietzsche’s “ressentiment” and politicized “resentment.” Politicized anger is not antithetical to love. In reality, it is often *love* for persons experiencing maltreatment and injustice that fuels “entirely appropriate manifestation[s] of . . . *resentment*” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 109; Coulthard’s italics). When discussing other-than-human resentment, I do not intend to frame other-than-human beings as inherently vengeful or violent. Instead, taking inspiration from Coulthard, I use “resentment,” in this dissertation, to describe ways that other-than-human persons actively and agentially respond to “slight[s], instance[s] of maltreatment, or injustice[s]” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 110) created by the settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway.

As responses to the impacts of the Trent-Severn Waterway, many of my examples of other-than-human resentment were previously touched on in “Chapter Three: The Settler-Colonial Imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway.” A number of these acts of other-than-human resentment also harm other-than-human persons. They are, nevertheless, worth re-considering as acts of agential survivance, even if they are imperfect in who all they harm.

Flooding as Resentment

The rise of Water levels, flooding riparian Lands along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, might be understood as politicized, loving anger carried out by Waters in response to the imposition of dams. Although this flooding significantly impacted Nishnaabeg communities, it also frustrated colonial settlement, preventing the use of Lands that would be valuable for farming. Previously discussed in “Chapter Three: The Settler-Colonial Imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway,” in the mid-1800s, a petition called for the removal of the dam at Chisholm’s Rapids—now Glen Ross—on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River), because “by it, hundreds of acres of very valuable land was [*sic*] totally destroyed” (petition, as cited in Angus, 1988, p. 145).

Considering the agency and personhood of Water, this flooding can be re-storied as Waters intentionally and politically flooding 20,000 to 25,000 acres [$\sim 81\text{--}101\text{ km}^2$] of Land in response to this one dam.

Disease as Resentment

Stagnant Waters—created by flooding and the damming of Waterbodies—further carried out acts of politicized anger in the form of disease outbreaks,⁷ the most significant of which was likely the response to William Purdy’s dam on Yawbaskkaokawk (Scugog River)—previously discussed in “Chapter Three: The Settler-Colonial Imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway.” As described by James T. Angus (1988), Purdy “built a 14-foot-high dam” (p. 48) across Yawbaskkaokawk, in the 1830s, and because “[t]he top of the dam [had] a higher elevation than Lake Scugog, the source of the river, the water was backed up all the way to the head of the lake, creating an immense mill pond 30 miles [$\sim 48\text{ km}$] long. Thousands of acres of land were inundated” (p. 48).

Following from this flooding, there was a significant loss of plant life as “[h]ay meadows and cleared land . . . had been covered to a depth of nine feet [$\sim 2.7\text{ m}$] . . . [I]ow, shore-line flats had become deep bays filled with stands of rotting hemlock and tamarack . . . and large pieces of bog floated from swamps to drift around the lake as islands” (Angus, 1988, p. 48). Subsequently, “[s]chools of fish . . . were destroyed by the noxious gases released from decaying vegetation” (Angus, 1988, p. 48).

In what might be conceived of as an act of politicized resentment responding to all of this death, an 1838 “epidemic of typhus killed about one-third of the [human] population in the vicinity of Purdy’s ‘pond’ ” (Angus, 1988, p. 49). Typhus is an insect-borne disease, and James T. Angus (1988) notes that the combination of stagnant Water and decaying vegetation had created “the ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes” (p. 48)—although mosquitoes are not known to carry typhus.

⁷ As far as I am aware, wetlands only contribute to disease by virtue of being suitable breeding grounds for disease vectors, such as mosquitoes and ticks. However, wetlands have long been associated with disease and that mindset was likely prevalent at the time of the Trent-Severn Waterway’s construction. Anthony Wilson (2018) writes that, [o]ne of the oldest and most persistent beliefs about the dangers swamps posed to humans is the idea that swamp’s exhalations caused disease. Indeed, malaria, which comes from the Italian for ‘bad air,’ was for a long time a catch-all term for any disease or ailment thought to result from inhaling swamp miasma . . . Although Alphonse Laveran traced the true cause of malaria to the parasite *Plasmodium* in 1880, the idea that swamps generated and essentially breathed disease was pervasive, persisting among the general public well after Laveran’s discovery. (p. 76)

Following this epidemic, “[a] band of men armed with pitchforks, flintlocks, and axes attacked [Purdy’s] mill and chopped down part of the dam” (Angus, 1988, p. 49). But because “[t]he deed to his property . . . contained a reservation securing him the right to keep the water at its present height without subjecting him to any action for damages” (Angus, 1988, p. 48), “Purdy could not be sued for damages; nor could he be forced to lower the level of his dam” (Angus, 1988, p. 49), and “Purdy’s sons rebuilt” (Angus, 1988, p. 49) the parts of the dam that were destroyed.

Although constructed on Yawbaskkaokawk (Scugog River)—a Waterbody now experiencing the imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway—Purdy’s dam was not part of the waterway. In fact, in the late-1830s, Purdy’s property was expropriated so that the Trent-Severn Waterway could be built—though “[h]e struck a good bargain. . . . [T]he government built a new dam and kept it in repair, and Purdy, his heirs, and successors received permission to draw off for milling purposes all surplus water not needed for navigation . . . [and] \$2,000 in cash” (Angus, 1988, p. 50).

However, the harm that Purdy’s dam caused continued to elicit resentful responses: “an outbreak of ague that struck in the late summer and early autumn of 1843 . . . was worst at Lindsay, in the vicinity of Purdy’s mill pond, still a . . . potential health hazard” (Angus, 1988, p. 87)—“[o]f the 75 men employed at Lindsay, only 11 were fit to work by the end of September, and 10 men died” (Angus, 1988, p. 87). And in the summer of 1844, when construction of a lock and dam “to replace Purdy’s mischievous structure” (Angus, 1988, p. 87) was completed, “it was decided not to open the lock, and thus lower the water in Lake Scugog to the level at which it was to be permanently kept, until cold weather set in . . . to avoid a recurrence of the fever, which, it was feared, would result from exposing the sodden lake bottom to the hot summer sun” (Angus, 1988, p. 87).

Following the events around Purdy’s dam, disease outbreaks—speculatively the actions of agential Waters and insects—came to be particularly fear-inducing acts of other-than-human resentment along the Trent-Severn Waterway. In 1855, the lock at Paub-boo-kaije-wenum / Bob-cajewon-unk (Bobcaygeon) had to be replaced, after “the canal lining of plank and timber . . . was found to be rotten and warped” (Angus, 1988, p. 112). “In order to lay the foundation for the new lock chamber, the contractors planned to lower the water in Pigeon Lake, but when the inhabitants learned about this, fearing health problems from the miasmatic conditions that would

arise from decaying vegetable matter, they picketed the works. So intense were the feelings that the contractor was assaulted” (Angus, 1988, p. 112).

Resentment Against Logging

The logging industry also solicited the resentment of other-than-human persons along the course of the Trent-Severn Waterway, following the unfettered dumping of refuse into the Waters. At the height of logging in the territory, in the mid-1800s, “[t]ons of sawdust, slabs, board edgings, bark, and wood chips were dumped into the mill races every day. The waste drifted downstream and settled in rotting layers on the bottom of quiet bays, promising to convert the lovely chain of Kawartha Lakes into an oozy morass of decaying wood fibres” (Angus, 1988, p. 118). In an ironic show of politicized anger, the dumped, rotting wood became an impediment to settler-colonial travel and shipping:

a group of steamboat captains reported that at Lindsay “the accumulation is such that it will soon be impossible to approach the wharf”; at Fenelon Falls, “what was once a deep eddy and the only landing is now so filled up that boats cannot land and other landing places have to be sought”; [and] at Bobcaygeon, “the lower entrance to the lock is so much filled that boats and loaded scows stick now and soon will not be able to pass up and down loaded.” (Angus, 1988, p. 119)

The resentment of logging refuse was a difficult problem to contend with. James T. Angus (1988) reports how, at Sheboctecon / Schebockticon / Shebaughtick—Buckhorn, where Lower Buckhorn Lake meets Buckhorn Lake—by the 1880s,

mills had been dumping refuse into the river for more than 50 years. The accumulation on the bottom was immense . . . the debris having settled on the bottom to an average depth of 4 feet 4 inches [~1.3 m] and extending 425 feet [~130 m] down the river. This fluid, formless ooze was difficult to lift. It could not be raked and could not be scooped up in buckets but had to be screened out of the water. (p. 173)

In the 1910s, during construction of the lock at Port Severn, on Matchedash (Severn River), after a section of the river had been emptied of Water to facilitate work, the refuse on the river bottom had to be “piled up and burned. Having been exposed to the sun and air all summer, the logs and sawdust had dried out and would have floated to the surface when the pool was filled, causing endless trouble in the lock gates and valves” (Angus, 1988, p. 380). “Consequently, huge clouds of black smoke hung over Port Severn by day and flames from the massive bonfires illuminated the sky at night” (Angus, 1988, p. 381).

Similar to what had happened with Purdy's dam, the sunken, decaying wood also caused fish to die "by the thousands . . . Residents everywhere complained about the odours released from decaying wood and rotting fish. Little Lake, below Peterborough, was so polluted that residents were forced to move away from the vicinity of the lake to escape the noxious smells and unhealthy living conditions" (Angus, 1988, p. 119). James T. Angus (1988) attributes significant losses of salmon to the dumping of logging refuse, writing that "Atlantic salmon, once abundant, were totally obliterated from the streams" (p. 119).

The Land can also be understood as acting out of politicized anger against the logging industry, by resentfully refusing to hold Water, as "[e]xcessive stripping away of the forest cover in the Trent watershed, followed by extensive settlement, reduced the water-holding capacity of the ground" (Angus, 1988, p. 103).

In the spring of 1870 disaster struck . . . Spring floods were frequent, but an unusually heavy snow fall in the winter of 1869 – 70, followed by a rapid spring thaw, caused a flood of unprecedented proportions. The level of Rice Lake rose four feet above any previously known high. As the water poured out through the Trent, the lake's only outlet, severe damage was inflicted on public and private property. So great was the rush of water that the course of the river was permanently changed in places. Although badly damaged, the locks and most of the dams held, but the [timber] slides were decimated. (Angus, 1988, p. 103-104)

Resentment Against Celebrating the Waterway

Politicized other-than-human anger can also be imagined in ways that weather stymied efforts to celebrate a number of milestones during the Trent-Severn Waterway's construction. A snowstorm welcomed the first boat travelling through the lock at Paub-boo-kaije-wenum / Bob-cajewon-unk (Bobcaygeon)—the first lock of what would become the Trent-Severn Waterway. As James T. Angus (1988) describes,

[o]n the night of Monday, 5 November 1838, a barge, the *Sir George Arthur*, arrived at Bobcaygeon from Bridgenorth . . . The next morning, in a blinding snowstorm, the barge was locked through into Sturgeon Lake. This lockage of the *Sir George Arthur* was the Trent canal's first. There were, of course, no cameras present to record the event; no reporters, no politicians, none of the hoopla that would mark the opening of locks in the next century. There were just a few workmen [*sic*] looking on as a bewildered and half-frozen immigrant family neared the end of a long and arduous journey that had brought them from the amenities of Tretherne, Gloucestershire, to this snow-shrouded wilderness. (p. 47)

It was "a heavy thundershower and rain [coming] down in torrents" (Lowe, 1964, p. 1) that welcomed the official opening of the Peterborough lift lock on Odenabee (Otonabee River),

on July 9, 1904. In a 1964 newspaper article commemorating 60 years since the lift lock opened, Earl Lowes (1964) relays how “a shoreline had been cleared and landscaped for [the officials] to stand. But, the area set aside on shore for the officials was never used for that purpose because the rain soaked the ground into a slippery mass of mud” (p. 1).

[M]ost at the scene were drenched by the rain. Many women, dressed smartly for the occasion, wore hats of material not suitable to withstand a downpour. The colors in the hats “ran” and they were spoiled. Numerous women who brought parasols as shade from the hot sun while watching the official opening used them to keep off the rain. Many of the crowd flocked into the liftlock [*sic*] tunnel and other sheltered areas to get out of the downpour. (Lowes, 1964, p. 1)

Jack McCabe, a local resident, recounts that he and a cousin “were going to the liftlock [*sic*] but never got there. ‘We were downtown when the rain came and it was a deluge,’ he said. He remembers that the downpour lasted more than an hour and was one of the heaviest storms he has ever seen” (as cited in Lowes, 1964, p. 1).

And at the official opening of the Kirkfield lift lock—on a canal connecting Canenandacokauk (Balsam Lake) with Nummaibene Seebe (Talbot River)—it was resentful “blistering July heat” (Angus, 1988, p. 253) that stifled the fanfare.

* * *

Resentment—borne from politicized, loving anger—offers yet another perspective for speculating on other-than-human survivance against the settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway. And, like the stories of other-than-human resistance and refusal, stories of other-than-human resentment can help settlers to imagine the realities of Nishnaabeg thought worlds and Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood.

RESURGENCE

As a final example of the dynamic and varied forms of survivance, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011) and other Indigenous scholars and activists promote ideas of Indigenous resurgence, which “refocuses [Indigenous Peoples’] work from trying to transform the colonial outside into a flourishing of the *Indigenous* inside” (p. 17; L. Simpson’s italics). As L. Simpson describes, Indigenous Peoples

need to rebuild our culturally inherent philosophical contexts for governance, education, healthcare, and economy. We need to be able to articulate in a clear manner our visions for the future, for living as *Indigenous Peoples* in contemporary times. To do so, we need to engage in *Indigenous* processes, since according to our traditions, the processes of

engagement highly influence the outcome of engagement itself . . . In essence, we need to not just figure out who we are; we need to re-establish the processes by which we live who we are within the current context we find ourselves . . . We need our Elders, our languages, and our lands, along with vision, intent, and commitment, community and ultimately, action. We must move ourselves beyond resistance and survival, to flourishing and *mino bimaadiziwin*.⁸ If this approach does nothing else to shift the current state of affairs—and I believe it will—it will ground our peoples in our own cultures and teachings that provide the ultimate antidote to colonialism, which I believe is what Indigenous intellectuals and theorists have been encouraging us to do all along. (2011, p. 17; L. Simpson’s italics)

The prefix “re-”, in the word “resurgence,” can suggest that Indigenous Peoples are *now*, *newly* ‘surging’ against settler colonialism again, overlooking that Indigenous Peoples have never ceased ‘surging’ against settler colonialism. For L. B. Simpson (2017), *radical* resurgence—specified as radical “because the word *resurgence* is now used in all kinds of ways, some of which feed nicely into discourses around reconciliation and neoliberalism” (p. 48; L. B. Simpson’s italics)—“channel[s] the vitality of my Ancestors to create a present that is recognizable to them because it is fundamentally different than the one settler colonialism creates” (p. 48). “[T]he theories or stories or philosophies of resurgence inherent in Indigenous thought were the ways my ancestors had always lived” (L. Simpson, 2016b, p. 28).

Speculating on how other-than-human persons survive *against* the Trent-Severn Waterway through resurgence and flourishing, “re-establish[ing] the processes by which [they] live who [they] are within the current context [they] find [them]selves” (L. Simpson, 2011, p. 17), also offers insight into Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood. Like human Indigenous Nations, talking of other-than-human persons’ *resurgence* is not to say that other-than-human persons ever stopped ‘surging’ against settler colonialism; speculating about other-than-human resurgence recognizes how other-than-human persons continue to live “the ways [their] ancestors had always lived” (L. B. Simpson, 2016b, p. 28). Moreover, acknowledging and celebrating other-than-human resurgence along the Trent-Severn Waterway is not to deny or diminish the beings who have been lost due to the construction of the waterway; the relations that have been forcibly interfered with, altered, or ended; or the ongoing violences faced by Nishnaabeg and other-than-human nations along the Trent-Severn Waterway. Other-than-human resurgence is enacted in the myriad beings who continue to exist along the waterway, fulfilling their responsibilities to Creation, and sustaining and promoting life, *even with* the settler-colonial

⁸ See L. Simpson, 2011, p. 109 for discussion of this term.

imposition of the waterway. Waters continue to flow. Rocks and earth shape the landscape and direct the Waters. A variety of plants grow in, on, and alongside these Waters, rocks, and earth, some even growing on and out of the wooden, stone, and concrete walls of the waterway's locks and dams (see Figure 37).

Figure 37

Plants growing on Hastings lock, Lock 18, on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River)



Note. Photo taken by author, October 10, 2021.

*The Waters and all of the beings in here
are making their way in different circumstances.
And it's important to not devalue what is here now,
as if it's only here because of the construction of the waterway.
I think we can mourn what has been lost,
without, at the same time, pitying what is here now.*

-Edited from recording along Ranney Falls flight lock, Locks 11 and 12,
and Campbellford lock, Lock 13,
on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River),
August 22, 2021

On my visits to the Waters along the Trent-Severn Waterway, I met with grasshoppers in the periphery of the waterway's structures, spiders making webs on railings, pigeons roosting on locks (see Figure 38), a variety of other birds, as well as fish and insects, turtles, and rodents who

I was not able to identify. As discussed in the previous chapter, over a century after a canal was dug through Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), it no longer looks like a Waterbody constructed by humans. Trees and other plants line its banks—the canal allows a new array of life into the space where it flows.

Figure 38

Pigeons roosting in Swift Rapids lock, Lock 43, on Matchedash (Severn River)



Note. Photo taken by author, August 27, 2022.

Resurgence of Turtles

Turtles continue to live “the ways [their] ancestors had always lived” (L. B. Simpson, 2016b, p. 28) in the Waterbodies that the Trent-Severn Waterway now imposes upon. In my interview with Jane Gray—a non-Indigenous faculty member at Trent University in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former policy analyst for the Manitoba government, who lives adjacent to a wetland near Odenaabe (Otonabee River)—she discussed the resurgence of turtles:

I just cannot tell you how loud this waterway has become in a couple years, with the pandemic, because everybody wants to get outside. And they’re getting out on their motorboats, and that’s good that they want to get outside. But, if you put your head under the Water and hear the constant roar, I just cannot imagine how that’s not affecting and disturbing the turtles. But, yet, every year you see many snapping turtles come up and lay their eggs as they have done for hundreds and hundreds and thousands . . . of years. And I don’t know if I would say that that’s resistance or not, but persistence for sure. And they’re going to keep doing that long after this, long after us.

Turtle resurgence also demonstrates how developing relationships with other-than-human persons can help to unsettle the dominant settler Canadian thought world. Leora Berman—a settler, and founder of The Land Between charity and Turtle Guardians—discussed in our interview how she “very consciously use[s] [turtles] in my care to introduce them to kids and communities . . . I always say that they are a flagship, or a gateway—they are an introduction to nature”: “we use turtles to remind people that animals are sentient, and speak, and have souls”—“[i]t’s a weird thing, but you can tell when a turtle’s happy. All of a sudden, it looks like the turtle’s . . . facial expression has changed, [although] they can’t move their mouths, they’re beaks.” “And if turtles have souls and personalities and communicate, then why doesn’t a snail or a snake or a bird or a fish?” (L. Berman, personal communication, August 1, 2022).

Resurgence of Manoomin

The resurgence of manoomin along the Trent-Severn Waterway is particularly notable. As previously mentioned, manoomin “grows abundantly only in flowing or agitated shallow water, around 50 cm depth” (Yu & McAndrews, 1994, p. 150). When the dams of the Trent-Severn Waterway raised Water levels higher than these ideal conditions, it drowned out manoomin where it grew along much of the waterway.

However, in my interview with Heidi Burns—a manoomin-harvester, scholar researching connections between manoomin gathering and intergenerational relationships, and activist with Community Voices for Manoomin—she mentioned how manoomin seeds are able to germinate even after being dormant for significant lengths of time, if the conditions are right to do so. Over the past several decades, manoomin has been returning to many of the Waterbodies along the Trent-Severn Waterway that it was flooded out from, aided by Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous caretakers and harvesters.

Moreover, many of the spots where manoomin is now reemerging are places that were *above Water* until the Trent-Severn Waterway flooded them. The places with the best conditions for manoomin to grow are the Lands that were flooded by the Trent-Severn Waterway—the Water level above these flooded Lands being the most suitable for manoomin to grow. In what can be seen as a remarkable act of resurgence, the manoomin that was drowned out by the Trent-Severn Waterway is now making use of that same flooding in order to return to the territory. As Kelly King—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous folks in

Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former Education Director with TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—told me when I interviewed her,

it’s interesting to look at maps of where manoomin beds . . . are now . . . because manoomin usually likes to grow in one-to-three feet (~30 cm to ~90 cm) of Water. . . . [I]n Rice Lake, it’s named that for a reason, of course, and I’ve heard . . . that the whole lake was basically three feet in depth before the Trent-Severn, so it was just this perfect depth for manoomin. . . . And, of course, the Trent-Severn Waterway comes in and floods that entire region . . . [and] it can’t support manoomin in the ways that it used to. But, what’s interesting is that where the Land was flooded, manoomin is coming into those spaces now. Of course, that Land would be closer to the surface of the Water than . . . where the depths of the Water used to be. . . . [T]hose [flooded] spaces are seen as more intentional locations . . . to be re-seeding manoomin, when people are going out and taking manoomin seed, and . . . throwing it into the Water—those spaces have been sought out. . . . [H]umans and manoomin itself can take advantage of the places that used to be Land, but that the Trent-Severn Waterway has attempted to destroy.

Resurgence of Water

Although they did not use the terms “resurgence” or “survivance,” several of the people who I interviewed also spoke about Water in ways that echo ideas of resurgence. Alix Taylor, a settler who is a founding member of the Sacred Water Circle in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), mentioned how there is “serious erosion of shorelines that happen[s] all the time,” along the Trent-Severn Waterway. “Rivers and wetlands have been moved, removed, and reconstructed to fit within the design of cities and urban plans,” and “erosion and flooding are an indication that this is not how [the Water is] supposed to be running. There’s a demonstration of [Water’s agency] through those processes” (A. Taylor, personal communication, July 28, 2022).

When visiting the lift lock in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough)—Lock 21—on May 27, 2021, I noticed—as documented in a recording—that,

*walking up to the top of the lift lock
it’s all wet at one portion.
I think there’s constantly
Water seeping out.
Even this Water is eroding holes.*

-Edited from recording at Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21,
on canal parallel to Odenaabe (Otonabee River)
May 27, 2021

And visiting the Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22, on Odenaabe (Otonabee River), on May 28, 2021, I noted that

*on the west side of this dam . . .
you can see some real erosion in the rocks.
I don't know how long that's been going on,
but I imagine that's
not just the pre-existing rock.
There's also brick and concrete
that are really eroded out.*

-Edited from recording at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22,
on Odenaabe (Otonabee River),
May 28, 2021
(see Figure 39)

Figure 39

Evidence of erosion along dam at Nassau Mills lock, Lock 22, on Odenaabe (Otonabee River)



Note. Photo taken by author, May 28, 2021.

A couple of my interview participants also reflected on how the resurgence of Water can help to maintain the sovereignty of Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations. Taylor Wilkes—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, who was a facilitator and program coordinator with Our Living Waters at the time of our interview—shared that she had been thinking about

[how] Water is not covered in treaties . . . and Water courses are often used as sort of boundaries to demarcate the treaties: Treaty 20, [the] Rice Lake Treaty, it will say “from the western shore of this, to the eastern shore of that” and “along the bank of this.” But, the

Water isn't included, which means that . . . there's spaciousness there for Indigenous rights [specifically concerning manoomin planting and harvesting] to come through.

Or, there was a big conflict about . . . saving a wetland up on Stoney Lake a number of years ago, the Fraser Wetland. And because of an island in the Watercourse—in that lake—that was under Indigenous jurisdiction, that wetland was saved.

And so, Water seems like this sort of sneaky avenue for Indigenous rights to come forward, and I like that. I like that form of disruption. And Water has power to wear away at really strong structures, like canyons and different geological formations . . . and so I've been thinking a little bit about jurisdiction, and Water as part of jurisdiction, and how we can leverage it for change.

Summarizing the resurgence of Water, Kelly King—a settler working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous folks in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) and former Education Director with TRACKS, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Youth Program—shared how, when working on a project “about lost waterways and lost rivers in Toronto,” she listened to the late Stó:lō Elder Lee Maracle speak about

how Water always remembers. Water will always go where it has, for thousands of years. And for us to think that we can actually redirect it or ‘calm’ it . . . or do anything that means that Water isn't doing what she's always done, is a little mind boggling when you actually consider the timeline of it. . . . [W]e think we know best, and [yet] we don't consider what a thousands-of-years timeline looks like, and [don't] consider the agency of that being [Water]. And look at the destruction that that leads to—when you're not actually thinking about how relationship is the center of everything, and that agency of those beings is also how everything has been governed forever.

Barbara Herring—a settler researcher and consultant specializing in equity and diversity, and member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough's Indigenous Allies Working Group and the Indigenous Allies Forum—mirrored the idea of Water remembering, when she spoke generally about other-than-human resurgence and survivance against the Trent-Severn Waterway:

The Trent-Severn will not resist time. Things will change. Change is always there. [The construction of the waterway] may have eradicated some plants, but other plants are there. . . . And they've put up these walls, which is a form of rock, but the Water will wear them away, as it does. Water plus time, it'll wear them away, back to some other form—another form of being. Fish . . . will be able to navigate [the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon]—maybe not salmon, maybe not eel—but maybe something else that hasn't been able to navigate the Waters. . . . It just goes on changing . . . without humans being at the center of it—it's just change, but without humans having a special place in that.

* * *

Speculating about other-than-human persons' long-term resurgence and survivance reminds me of a passage from Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999):

[s]keptical non-Indians, and representatives of other religions seeking to discredit tribal religions, have sometimes deliberately violated . . . [Indigenous] holy places with no ill effects. They have then come to believe that they have demonstrated the false nature of Indian beliefs. These violations reveal a strange non-Indian belief in a form of mechanical magic that is touchingly adolescent, a belief that an impious act would, or could, trigger an immediate response from the higher spiritual powers. Surely these impious acts suggest a deity who guards his or her prerogatives and wreaks immediate vengeance for minor transgressions—much as some Protestant sects have envisioned God and much as an ancient astronaut wanting to control lesser beings might act. (pp. 331-332)

I suspect that some people may attempt to dismiss or disregard other-than-human survivance on the basis that the Trent-Severn Waterway continues to exist and to impose its existence on myriad other-than-human persons. However, that reasoning assumes that other-than-human persons are impatient and that they operate on the same timescales as humans. When considering the timescale of rock, as an example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2015) provides the analogy that humans are like “mayflies who live and perish in less than a blink” (p. 30).

*Indigenous cosmologies understand
who has power and where power lies
in different ways.*

*It's not humanity dominating everything
and everything else having to survive against us.*

*Indigenous cosmologies draw different lines of power
and who's really in charge.*

*Maybe the Water doesn't need to burst through all the dams right now,
because it can outlast them.*

*When the Water has been here for so long,
maybe the imposition of the waterway is just
a blink, nothing that is going to have lasting impacts.*

-Edited from recording at Burleigh Falls lock, Lock 28,
where Cheboutaiken / Kawakonikong / Asin Saagegun (Stoney Lake)
meets Sheboctecon / Shebaughtick (Lower Buckhorn Lake),
August 25, 2021

However, showcasing that I am still on a learning journey, I also worry that some people may attempt to use other-than-human survivance to avoid being accountable for how they support, are complicit in, or benefit from violence against other-than-human persons, using arguments that other-than-human persons are always changing, so no violence has occurred, or that it does not matter that violence has occurred, because *some* other-than-human persons will survive that violence. As previously discussed, although the canal built through Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) now allows a new array of life into the space where it flows, viewing this development as an

unequivocally positive thing obscures the rocks, earth, and other relations that were sundered and removed in the construction of the canal.

*I'm thinking about the memory of Water,
and how the Water will be able to flow its old paths again, one day,
and that the Trent-Severn Waterway may be just a tiny blip
in the history of the Water.*

*And, at the same time,
I'm thinking about the longevity of the rock.
Is the blasting of this canal just a blink of the eye for the rock?
On one hand, likely yes.
But at the same time, how quickly will the rock be able to fix this damage?
Is this sudden damage actually something traumatic for the rock?
Traumatic for the earth, here?*

*How much does focusing only on Water's capacity to bring life into an area
overlook the harm done to the rock and earth?*

-Edited from recording at canal between
Couchiching Lock, Lock 42, on Matchedash (Severn River)
and Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching),
November 20, 2021

The dynamism of other-than-human resurgence, survivance, agency, and personhood ought to be recognized and celebrated; but humans also have a role in preserving Creation and promoting life. Settlers ought to be accountable to how we support, are complicit in, and benefit from violence against other-than-human persons. As Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999) writes,

[i]t would be impossible for the thoughtless or impious acts of one species to have an *immediate* drastic effect on the earth. The cumulative effect of continuous secularity, however, poses a different kind of danger. Long-standing prophecies tell us of the impious people who would come here, defy the creator, and cause the massive destruction of the planet. Many traditional people believe that we are now quite near that time. (p. 332; my italics)

OTHER-THAN-HUMAN SURVIVANCE AND SETTLERS' DECOLONIAL PRAXES

As I have presented throughout this chapter, speculating on other-than-human survivance against the Trent-Severn Waterway illustrates the sort of thought worlds that settlers may begin to realize if we work to engage with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous conceptions of other-than-human personhood. Moreover, as I maintain throughout this dissertation, engaging with Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous conceptions of other-than-human personhood is not merely an intellectual exercise, and neither is imagining alternative settler thought worlds.

For Eve Tuck (2009), survivance is a remedy for what she calls “damage-centered” research—research that is “used to leverage reparations or resources for marginalized communities yet simultaneously reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of these people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless” (p. 409; original italicized). Tuck professes, “[w]e can insist that research in our communities . . . does not fetishize damage but, rather, celebrates our *survivance*” (p. 422; Tuck’s italics), “depathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered” (p. 416).

In similar ways, celebrating the personhood and survivance of other-than-human beings *re-stories* histories and manifestations of settler colonialism, including the Trent-Severn Waterway. The waterway is a settler-colonial imposition on Nishnaabeg Nations and other-than-human persons, but *these Nishnaabeg Nations and other-than-human persons are not passive victims of this imposition*. These Nishnaabeg Nations and other-than-human persons are *continuously surviving against this imposition through agential acts*, including acts of resistance, refusal, resentment, and resurgence.

As outlined in “Chapter One: Introduction,” one of my impetuses for undertaking this research project is my conviction that if settlers fail to contend with the disparity between dominant Western anthropocentrism and Indigenous ontologies of other-than-human personhood, we risk diverting from Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism and even contributing to attacks on Indigenous thought worlds and life ways, reifying settler colonialism. When, for many Indigenous Nations, other-than-human persons are part of shared or distinct nations, are kin, or otherwise hold meaningful relations with Indigenous Peoples and each other, then settlers are failing to attend to the full scope of settler colonialism and of Indigenous relations, when we fail to recognize other-than-human personhood. Even though imagining acts of other-than-human survivance may be speculative, it allows settlers to glimpse what *might be possible* within the Indigenous thought worlds that we ought to be engaging with.

Furthermore, re-storying histories and manifestations of settler colonialism also prefigures the potential thought worlds that settlers may be able to discover, develop, and promote among ourselves, as we support Indigenous Nations in dismantling settler colonialism. Returning to Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), Indigenous Nations have long understood other-than-human persons to be agents, allies, and teachers in challenging and dismantling settler colonialism: “the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism . . . is best understood as a struggle . . . deeply *informed* by

what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (p. 13; Coulthard’s italics); “[p]lace is a way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world and with others; and sometimes these relational practices and forms of knowledge *guide forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world* that threaten to erase or destroy our sense of place. This, I argue, is precisely the understanding of land that grounded our critique of colonialism” (61; my italics). If settlers are to contribute to dismantling settler colonialism, acts of other-than-human survivance can serve as examples for what our opposition to settler colonialism might look like.

**CHAPTER SIX:
CONCLUSION
DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH;
INSPIRATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS FOR SETTLER THOUGHT WORLDS**

*I come by my waters honestly.
On these yellow arms
the waters run,
into creosote hair
the waters
bend.*

*Sacramento, Mokelumne, San Joaquin,
Bear Creek, Merced, Colorado, San Juan,
Cumberland, Missouri, St. Lawrence, Genessee,
Clyde, Tweed, Thames, Swansea,
Main, Neckar, Lahn, and Rhine,
Shannon, Suir, Loch Linnhe*

*all the parts
of these moist songs
that follow rain
around the earth*

*plumbing
that shakes and groans
under pressure
of old bones.*

*-Wendy Rose
(1985, p. 11)*

In the preceding chapters, I illustrated how settler colonialism enacts violence against Indigenous Nishnaabeg Nations *and* their other-than-human relations, the latter being an aspect of settler colonialism that settlers tend to overlook. I provided an overview of a settler’s ongoing efforts—my ongoing efforts—to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds, confront dominant Western anthropocentrism, and learn from other-than-human persons directly, as well as providing some insights into what was gained from these efforts. And I began imagining what settlers might realize through engaging with Nishnaabeg thought worlds and ontologies of other-than-human personhood.

In “Chapter Three: The Settler-Colonial Imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway,” I examined how dominant Western thought, manifested in Canadian settler colonialism, generates violence against other-than-human persons. I provided an overview of the construction and history

of the Trent-Severn Waterway and—using Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) and Patrick Wolfe’s (2006) conceptualizations of settler colonialism, the idea of rendering as used by Jairus Victor Grove (2019), and the three forms of settler-colonial violence outlined by Aaron Mills (2018)—I analyzed how the Trent-Severn Waterway is a settler-colonial imposition on Nishnaabeg Nations along its route *and* their other-than-human relations, including manoomin and other plants; salmon, eels, and other animals; and the Waters, rocks, earth, and Land itself.

In “Chapter Four: Developing Relationships with Other-than-Human Persons Along the Trent-Severn Waterway,” I shared my own efforts to learn from Land as an example of what it can look like for settlers to try to engage with Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood and learn from other-than-human persons. I considered how settlers might engage with Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood in a good way, what settlers trying to engage with Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood reveals about dominant Western anthropocentrism, and both how and what settlers might learn from other-than-human persons. I discussed why settlers ought to attend to other-than-human personhood, and I passed on advice from Nishnaabeg Elders and knowledge keepers and settlers working in solidarity with Nishnaabeg Peoples on the importance of developing one’s own relationships with Land and how one might go about developing these relationships. And I reflected on my own efforts to develop relationships with Land and other-than-human persons through use of a walking methodology, explaining why I undertook a walking methodology, what my walking methodology practice looked like, how my walking methodology practice evolved over time, and insights that I gathered when spending time with Land as part of my walking methodology practice.

Finally, in “Chapter Five: Re-storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway,” I continued investigating how and what settlers might learn from other-than-human persons about challenging settler colonialism, focusing more on how other-than-human persons respond to, resist, and survive against settler colonialism. I employed Gerald Vizenor’s concept of survivance to speculate on how histories of and relations with the Trent-Severn Waterway, and the other-than-human persons who it imposes upon, might shift by considering other-than-human persons as actively and agentially resisting, refusing, resenting, and resurging against the Trent-Severn Waterway.

Across these chapters, I centered other-than-human persons in an analysis of settler colonialism, and contemplated what it might mean and look like for settlers to take Nishnaabeg

conceptions of other-than-human personhood seriously, in pursuit of the three motivations that I have for carrying out the research project represented in this dissertation. I want to support the ethical treatment of other-than-human persons. I want to help better align settlers with Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism. And I want to explore possibilities for more ethical, just, and non-violent thought worlds that, I contend, it is imperative settlers work to realize.

Developing relationships with other-than-human persons and Land, more broadly, is—however—invaluable beyond how it may assist settlers in challenging dominant Western anthropocentrism and may better align settlers’ efforts to dismantle settler colonialism with Indigenous ontologies. Developing relationships with other-than-human persons can open settlers to a richness of Creation that we tend to be alienated from when living according to dominant Western thought worlds. In *Embers*, Richard Wagamese-ban (2016) includes a meditation that names “learn[ing] about your relatives” (p. 41) as “the purpose” of being alive: “[t]he moon, stars, rocks, trees, plants, water, insects, birds, mammals. Your whole family. Learn about that relationship. How you’re moving through time and space together. That’s why you’re alive” (p. 41). My walking methodology significantly shifted my understandings of and relationships with the other-than-human persons who I spent time with, and continues to impact my daily life, influencing—for instance—my relationships with squirrels, birds, and other persons who I share my neighbourhood with and even the Water I drink, wash, cook, and clean with.

To conclude this dissertation and carry forward my motivations for undertaking this research project, I address two final matters in this chapter. First, I outline some of the emerging questions and directions for future research that arise out of this project. Second, I return to my walking methodology to provide some parting thoughts on how Nishnaabeg thought worlds might provide inspirations and aspirations for settlers working to realize new, more ethical, just, and non-violent thought worlds.

EMERGING QUESTIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

As mentioned in “Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Methods,” as I near the completion of this research project, dissertation, and my Ph.D. program more broadly, I am now considering how I might best share my research with individuals, organizations, and communities who may be interested in it and who it is relevant to. After sharing a draft of my dissertation with

Elder Dorothy Taylor—Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation—she invited me to become a member of and to share my research with the Sacred Water Circle, a group which she founded. The Sacred Water Circle is a not-for-profit initiative for “Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work together for the benefit of water” (Sacred Water Circle, n.d., para. 2), “lead[ing] with spirituality but also recogniz[ing] the necessity of working with science and policy to promote positive change in how we live with water” (Sacred Water Circle, n.d., para. 2). And after sharing a draft of my dissertation with Leora Berman—a settler, and founder of The Land Between charity and Turtle Guardians—she invited me to attend “[a] regional series [of talking circles] to share knowledge, identify needs, and find solutions for spaces and species at risk and common but disappearing wildlife” (Land Between, The, n.d.b) in the Lands where The Land Between charity focuses their work; to share my research at one of these talking circles, focusing on fishes, swimmers, lakes, and wetlands; and to create a video related to my research that will be shared on The Land Between charity’s website. Sharing my draft dissertation with other interview participants also garnered suggestions that it might be valuable for me to adapt and publish parts of my research in regional and community newsletters and newspapers along the Trent-Severn Waterway, and I continue to explore other ways of mobilizing my research, in conversation with my interview participants.

And yet, as I have maintained throughout this dissertation, this research project represents an opening exploration of how I and other settlers might begin to cross-culturally and cross-philosophically engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds; I am still on an ongoing learning journey regarding my efforts to engage with Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood and to learn from Land. At the culmination of this research project, I am left with numerous questions and directions for future research. As mentioned in my introduction, this research project and dissertation prioritize theory over action, and I have further research to do regarding how to translate my findings into decolonial praxis for settlers. I am also left with questions, which deserve further examination, regarding theories and ontologies of other-than-human personhood and resulting from reflections on my walking methodology.

When I first conceived of this research project, I was predominantly concerned with how settlers might perpetuate violence against Indigenous thought worlds and life ways, possibly undermining Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism, if we do not contend with the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western thought world and life ways that many of us remain

entrenched in. In other words, I prioritized the theory rather than the action of how settlers might support Indigenous Peoples in dismantling settler colonialism. In carrying out this project, however, I became more aware of the limitations of theory *without* action. Confronting the anthropocentrism of the dominant Western thought world will not *inevitably* lead to dismantling the political and social structures of settler colonialism, unless there is intentional action to do so. It is possible that settlers could engage with Nishnaabeg, and other Indigenous, ontologies of other-than-human personhood—possibly even arriving at new settler thought worlds and life ways—*without* rethinking and redeveloping their relationships with Indigenous Peoples, supporting the sovereignty of Indigenous Nations or the repatriation of Indigenous Lands, or working towards dismantling settler colonialism. There are ontological and other philosophical shifts that ought to happen for settlers to thoroughly attend to Indigenous more-than-human social, legal, and political orders; however, there is also a need for settlers to take action towards dismantling settler colonialism.

I am often reminded, including through my walking methodology, that learning occurs alongside action—it may not be realistic, effective, or proper to suggest that settlers can or ought to do the ‘preparatory’ work of redeveloping their understandings and relationships with Nishnaabeg Nations, other Indigenous Nations, and other-than-human persons *before* contributing to dismantling settler colonialism in more active ways. And therefore, a meaningful next step for my research is to put what I have learned through engaging with Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood into praxis, to support Indigenous Peoples in dismantling settler colonialism. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes, “[t]he emergent qualities of Indigenous intelligence systems means that we have to be engaged with our physical bodies, minds, emotions, and spiritual selves in processes for new ideas and the alternatives to capitalism or heteropatriarchy or settler colonialism to emerge” (2016b, p. 28) and, elsewhere, “the processes of engagement highly influence the outcome of engagement itself” (2011, p. 17).

While recognizing the need to turn my theoretical explorations into action and praxis, I also still have a lot to unlearn concerning anthropocentrism and a lot of work to do if I am to bring theories and philosophies of other-than-human personhood—within and beyond Nishnaabeg thought worlds—into my everyday life. As discussed in “Chapter Four: Developing Relationships with Other-than-Human Persons Along the Trent-Severn Waterway,” even though I would say that I started to develop relationships with many of the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway

imposes upon and with Wonscontonach (Don River), I still have a hard time readily recognizing Waters *as persons*, for example. Making sense of personhood that adheres to radically different experiences of self or, possibly, to no experience of self at all, may not necessarily suggest a new direction for my research. Instead, if I truly wish to develop meaningful relationships with other-than-human persons, then I ought to continue the work that I began in this research project, even as the project formally ends.

An aspect of other-than-human personhood that does require a shift in my research relates to my realization, previously discussed, that attempting to understand Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human personhood begets exploring Nishnaabeg conceptions of *personhood*. Whereas, from a Western perspective, other-than-human personhood may suggest extending an idea of personhood that is currently defined through humans, onto other beings, in Nishnaabeg thought worlds humans have *never* been the only persons and ideas of personhood have *never* been defined strictly in accordance with humans. Nishnaabeg conceptions of personhood are not the same as dominant Western conceptions of personhood, and so taking seriously Nishnaabeg conceptions of other-than-human persons does not entail thinking of other-than-human beings as human-like; it requires questioning ideas of personhood. Conducting further research on Nishnaabeg conceptions of personhood would strengthen what I have explored in this research project.

I am also interested in whether and how settlers might, in good and ethical ways, work to engage with and learn from beings who exist in Nishnaabeg thought worlds but do not exist in dominant Western thought worlds. A few of my interview participants—notably, Elder Dorothy Taylor, Nishnaabekwe from Curve Lake First Nation and founder of the Sacred Water Circle—discussed spirits, manidoog, and other related beings. Although they do not exist according to dominant Western thought worlds, these beings *are real* in Nishnaabeg ontologies, are significant relations to Nishnaabeg Peoples and Nations, and are part of Nishnaabeg social, legal, and political orders. Therefore, attending to the true fullness of Nishnaabeg more-than-human social, legal, and political orders requires attending to these beings as well. There are, however, added difficulties for settlers attempting to develop relationships with these beings in a good way. Many of these beings are very powerful and appropriate protocols ought to be followed in order to interact with them. There are also extra ontological hurdles to overcome when settlers need to learn how to even recognize the existence of these beings. Altogether, attempting to engage with and learn from spirits, manidoog, and other related beings necessitates that settlers have well-developed reciprocal

relationships with Nishinaabeg people, who may serve as teachers, and that settlers are extra staunch in their efforts to avoid cultural appropriation and extractive learning.

Beyond still having a lot to learn regarding theories and ontologies of other-than-human personhood—Nishnaabeg or otherwise—I am also left with questions and directions for future research from reflecting on my walking methodology. Again, as discussed in “Chapter Four: Developing Relationships with Other-than-Human Persons Along the Trent-Severn Waterway,” I found it difficult, at times, to focus on developing meaningful relationships with other-than-human persons, even when in the midst of my walking methodology, finding myself distracted by other concerns, obligations, and tasks or anxious about whether my time spent with Land would be ‘productive’—whether I would gather information from spending time with Land, that would be ‘useful’ in my dissertation. In my interview with Heidi Burns—a manoomin-harvester, scholar researching connections between manoomin gathering and intergenerational relationships, and activist with Community Voices for Manoomin—she noted how it can be extremely difficult to have the time and capacity to develop meaningful relationships with Land, when you are trying to survive under capitalism—a situation that both settlers and Indigenous Peoples find themselves in, in settler Canadian society. In calling for settlers to develop relationships with Land, I need to also be aware of these difficulties. A valuable direction for future research would be to bring the work that I am trying to do in this research project into conversation with scholarship examining life under capitalism, as well as the internationalization of capitalism that leads people to police their own ‘productivity.’

Furthermore, although I felt capitalist pressures while undertaking this work and particularly while conducting my walking methodology, I also need to recognize that for the past several years, I have been afforded time and space to develop relationships with Land—a privilege that few people have. Within academia, I have been being ‘productive’ when taking time to develop relationships with Land, even if I did not always readily or bodily realize it.

I also experienced white privilege and other societal privileges when spending time along the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon and along Wonscontonach (Don River), as noted in—again—“Chapter Four: Developing Relationships with Other-than-Human Persons Along the Trent-Severn Waterway.” While I may have sometimes gotten odd or confused looks, when wandering about these Waterbodies and speaking into a recorder, I was otherwise left alone and was free to spend the time that I wanted to with these Waters. At times I worried about being

harassed or hassled while undertaking my walking methodology, if I appeared to be acting in a way that dominant settler Canadian society may deem as strange or wrong. However, my walking methodology was uneventful, in this regard. I have doubts about whether it would have been so uneventful if I were not a visibly white, cisgender man. As mentioned, in the Gaa-waategamaag (Kawartha Lakes) region—where much of the Trent-Severn Waterway runs through—and in other parts of what is now considered Ontario, there is a shameful history of racist violence towards people of Asian descent when they are fishing (see Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). Although I was not fishing during my walking methodology, I suspect that I could have been subject to this racist violence if I were part of a racialized group—an Asian person, Indigenous Person, Black Person, or other Person of Colour. If I were visibly disabled—beyond needing to wear glasses—or were visibly transgender or a woman, I suspect that I also may have been harassed or hassled when undertaking my walking methodology. Therefore, again, when I am calling for people to develop relationships with Land, I also ought to be mindful of the various societal privileges that I experience when doing this work, and of the violence and harassment that I may be, implicitly, calling for other people to subject themselves to. I would like for the concerns that I am attending to in this dissertation to also challenge oppressive structures of white supremacy, heteronormative patriarchy, and ableism, but I have work to do to meaningfully direct this work towards those goals. My exploration, in this dissertation, has focused on my own efforts to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds and learn from Land, implying the positionality of a white, settler, cisgender man, and if I am to broadly help settlers in supporting Indigenous efforts to dismantle settler colonialism in meaningful ways, I ought to expand my analysis to better consider other positionalities as well.

Examining these societal privileges from another direction, I am also left with questions about the ramifications of doing this work when I am visibly embodied as a settler. In this research project, I am, in some ways, conceiving of the Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon and Wonscontonach (Don River) as Indigenous spaces. I am spending time in these spaces, as part of my efforts to engage with Nishnaabeg thought worlds and, given my broader goal of working towards the dismantling of settler colonialism, I also support Indigenous sovereignty on these Lands and undermining settler-colonial Canadian sovereignty on these Lands. However, as a visibly white man—a settler identity within the Canadian state—if other people see me in these spaces, my embodiment serves to code those spaces as colonized spaces, as spaces that it is normal

for settlers to be in, as spaces where settlers ‘belong.’ Therefore, there are ways in which I may be inadvertently reinforcing Canadian settler colonialism when and because of spending time on Land.

These concerns relate back to my prior questions about translating the theoretical work of this research project into decolonial praxis—theory *and action*—for settlers. While carrying out my walking methodology, I contemplated how difficult it is—how, I believe, impossible it is—for settlers to individually remove themselves from settler colonialism. As long as the structure of settler-colonial society remains in place in Canada, I will be a settler. Even if I were to fully immerse myself in and live according to Nishnaabeg thought worlds, I would not extricate myself from being a settler. While I maintain that there is theoretical and philosophical learning and unlearning to do, if settlers are to support Indigenous Peoples in dismantling settler colonialism in meaningful ways, settler efforts to dismantle settler colonialism cannot just be personal and individualistic; they need to confront the ongoing structures of settler colonialism. Further developing these questions and thoughts about both the colonizing power of settler embodiment and the need for collective action over personal development are two more invaluable directions for where my research ought to go, in pursuit of the goals that motivate this research project.

INSPIRATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS FOR ENACTING NEW THOUGHT WORLDS

Exploring these emergent questions may, hopefully, help with providing further inspiration and aspirations for new thought worlds for settlers. I have alluded to this idea at various points throughout this dissertation: that it is imperative for settlers to work to realize new thought worlds in which to live, given the violences and injustices of settler colonialism, environmental crises, and other structures of power, and engaging with Nishnaabeg thought worlds may provide both inspirations and aspirations for achieving these thought worlds and what these thought worlds might look like. To close this dissertation, I want to expand on what I mean by this dual vision of inspiration and aspiration, and share a couple thoughts that came to me, while carrying out my walking methodology, that speak to inspiration and aspiration.

The language of inspiration and aspiration—memorable, when the two words are so similar—came to me during one of my visits to Wonscontonach (Don River)—or at least, it was during this visit to Wonscontonach that the idea crystallized for me. Two pieces of background

information will help explain my thoughts during this visit. Firstly, if settlers who are learning about Indigenous thought worlds or are interested in learning about Indigenous thought worlds are asked *why* they are interested in learning about Indigenous thought worlds, I have found that common replies include ideas like, “Indigenous worldviews just make sense to me,” “Indigenous worldviews reflect how I already understand the world,” and “Indigenous worldviews align with my values.” These resonances with Indigenous thought worlds are often framed as being ‘stronger’ than what these settlers feel toward the dominant Western and settler Canadian thought world.¹ I do not intend to be overly critical of these responses—I have these thoughts myself and similar sentiments were shared by a number of the settlers who I interviewed for this research project. However, I will briefly note that I think there is a significant and meaningful difference between ideas of other-than-human personhood—for example—*broadly* resonating with a person and resonating with their experiences of other-than-human beings, and any suggestion that a person *already* understands the intricacies of, for example, Nishnaabeg ontologies of other-than-human personhood, after only a cursory introduction to Nishnaabeg thought worlds and when that person is still immersed in a dominant Western thought world. All that to say, I was reflecting on *why* I and other settlers are interested in learning about Indigenous thought worlds during this visit to Wonscontonach.

Secondly, on the day of this particular visit to Wonscontonach, October 26th, 2021, I had earlier watched an online discussion between Dr. Deborah McGregor—Anishinaabe-kwe, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Environmental Justice—Carolyn Crawley—Mi'kmaw, Black, and Irish member of the Indigenous Land Stewardship Circle and founder of Msit No'kmaq—and Dr. Adrienne Lickers Xavier—Onondaga, Director of the Indigenous Studies Program at McMaster University—on the topic “Taking care of the Dish: Treaties, Indigenous Law & Environmental Justice.”² During this discussion, Dr. McGregor spoke about the complicated inclusion of the Dish with One Spoon covenant in a number of Land Acknowledgements in the Toronto area. The Dish

¹ I have recently started thinking that these claims may be another area for inquiry in future research: why do so many settlers distance themselves—or attempt to distance themselves—from dominant settler understandings and attitudes towards the more-than-human world? And, when so many settlers distance themselves from dominant settler understandings and attitudes towards the more-than-human world, how are dominant settler understandings and attitudes towards the more-than-human world being manifested and perpetuated?

² This discussion was part of the “Polishing the Chain: Treaty Relations in Toronto” seminar series, organized by Dr. Martha Stiegman and Tara Chandran of York University, and co-presented with York University’s Centre for Indigenous Languages & Knowledges, the Indigenous Environmental Project, Jumblies Theatre & Art’s Talking Treaties, and the Toronto Biennial of Art (see *Polishing the Chain: Treaty Relations in Toronto*, 2021).

with One Spoon is a treaty between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Anishinaabe Three Fires Confederacy, made to address conflicts between these Indigenous Nations and Confederacies concerning access and relations to Land in areas around the Great Lakes, by setting out principles and responsibilities for how *these Nations and Confederacies* might all access and work with the Lands in these areas. The inclusion of the Dish with One Spoon in Land Acknowledgements, which ostensibly are meant to remind settlers of the Land they are on and whose Land it is, can give the inaccurate impression that the Dish with One Spoon represents a history of unfettered sharing of Land, which settlers are now part of. Dr. McGregor spoke of how, instead of appropriating the Dish with One Spoon by acting like they are part of it, settlers ought to focus on *appreciating* the Dish with One Spoon, and also mentioned that the principles of the Dish with One Spoon might provide *inspiration* for *how* settlers might access and relate to Land, and ‘share’ Land with other Peoples—ideas that I have also discussed with Dr. McGregor.

Reflecting on these two topics, while spending time with Wonscontonach (Don River), I pondered,

*I'm thinking about other people's reasoning
for learning about Indigenous thought worlds,
and it's making me reflect on
my own reasoning for learning about Indigenous thought worlds.
Why am I interested in Indigenous thought worlds?*

*They can seem intuitive. In some way, they seem
'more correct' than the dominant Western thought world.
Other-than-human personhood seems intuitive,
it seems like something that dominant Western thought worlds
have lost, or forgotten, or lost sight of.
Learning about Indigenous thought worlds can put into words
ideas that already feel real to me.*

*Although, I think there is a difference between
other-than-human personhood, broadly, seeming intuitive
and understanding the specificities of
Nishnaabeg understandings of different beings, for example.*

*And then there's also that being on this Land
and wanting to participate in dismantling settler colonialism on this Land,
then settlers do need to take seriously that there is a philosophical aspect
to dismantling settler colonialism.
If settlers are actually going to work towards dismantling settler colonialism
on this territory, we need to attend to Indigenous understandings.*

*And there feels like an added pressure
to reconsider settler thought worlds,*

*given settler colonialism, and our current climate crises,
and other social and environmental justice issues and oppressions.
Our current ways of being in the world aren't working,
and something else is needed now.*

*So, when there are these Indigenous thought worlds here,
that seem intuitive, then it seems useful to explore them.
It's not about 'becoming' Indigenous;
I'm not looking to adopt a Nishnaabeg perspective
or a Haudenosaunee perspective,
or attempt to adopt myself into being Indigenous.
But, especially because this is the Land that I'm on,
it feels significant to look at what is possible here
and what sort of thought worlds settlers could possibly develop here.*

*That's where, this engagement with Indigenous thought worlds,
I see it as inspirational and aspirational.*

*Deborah McGregor was talking earlier today
about the Dish with One Spoon being inspirational
for settler relationships with Land.
It's an inspirational document of what is possible
and, I think, it's also
aspirational of something that settlers could work towards.
What would that mean and look like, for settlers to work towards
being included in the Dish with One Spoon?*

*I think there's a similar thing with Indigenous thought worlds.
It's a mix of inspiring what else might be possible
by showing an 'other' world that is possible
—providing an example of what an 'other' world could look like.*

*And it's also aspirational, making me reflect on
what settlers might need and what settlers might need to do
in order to live in an 'other' world.*

*-Edited from recording at Wonscontonach (Don River),
October 26, 2021*

I share these reflections on how Nishnaabeg—and other Indigenous—thought worlds may provide inspiration and aspirations for how settlers might realize new thought worlds in order to illuminate a motivation of my research, and to situate two further insights that came to me while carrying out my walking methodology.

While conducting my walking methodology, I often felt anxious about getting it 'right.' Even if I reflexively knew that this was not the case, I often felt like there was a specific 'right' way of developing relationships with other-than-human persons, and I fretted over how I might realize what that is. However, Waters that the Trent-Severn Waterway imposes upon, at places

including Hastings—close to where Saagetay’achewan (Trent River) meets Pimadashkodeyaang (Rice Lake)—and Campbellford—on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River)—helped to remind and demonstrate to me that there is not one right way of being.

During a visit to the Hastings lock, Lock 18, I noted how there were three different paths for the Waters, alongside each other (see Figures 40, 41, & 42):

*there’s a lock on one side,
and right beside that is the dam . . .
and further to the south,
there is also a whole other channel.*

*It might be a canal:
there are dams letting Water into it,
but the Water there is very slow right now.*

-Edited from recording at Hastings lock, Lock 18,
on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River),
October 10, 2021

Figure 40

Water in Hastings lock, Lock 18, on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River)



Note. Photo taken by author, October 10, 2021.

Figure 41

Water flowing through dam, directly adjacent to Hastings lock, Lock 18, on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River)



Note. Photo taken by author, October 10, 2021.

Figure 42

Additional path of Water, possibly a canal, adjacent to Hastings lock, Lock 18, on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River)



Note. Photo taken by author, October 10, 2021.

Being able to see these three different behaviours of Water so close to each other made me reflect on the dynamic and varied, multifaceted and ever-changing nature of survivance:

*in a way, the three different stretches of Water
are three different enactments of survivance.*

*Plants are still growing out of the lock;
there's a way that things are still existing
within what has been built here.*

*The Water rushing through the dam
is actually behaving very much in line
with how it's 'supposed to'
with the dam,
but it does showcase this more
active, forceful aspect of Water.*

*And then there's the stretch of Water that is, perhaps,
more akin to how things would have been
before the lock was built here,
or if it hadn't been built.*

-Edited from recording at Hastings lock, Lock 18,
on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River),
October 10, 2021

Near Campbellford is where, in 1845, the pressure of Saagetay'achewan (Trent River) built up so strongly behind a log jam, that the river eventually burst through, sending the logs hurtling into a series of structures along the Trent-Severn Waterway, damaging locks and nearly destroying a bridge—I previously discussed this incident in “Chapter Five: Re-Storying Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway.” Visiting Campbellford, I expected to see evidence of this forceful nature of Saagetay'achewan (Trent River). However, the Water in the canal that I walked along seemed quite calm. In a recording taken at the time, I note how the Water behaving differently than I anticipated it would, is making me think about how,

*different beings survive in different ways.
And the same being can survive in different ways,
in different places,
at different times.*

Edited from recording at Campbellford lock, Lock 13,
on Saagetay'achewan (Trent River),
August 22, 2021

During both of these visits to Waters impacted by the Trent-Severn Waterway, the behaviour of the Waters led me to reflect on my feelings of needing to develop relationships with Land in *the* ‘one’ right way. In Hastings, I noted how,

*the thought keeps coming to me
that there is not any right way to do this work.
The Water can look and survive in different ways,
in different places.*

-Edited from recording at Hastings lock, Lock 18,
on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River),
October 10, 2021

And, at Campbellford, I mentioned,

*it’s not like Water is always acting the same way . . .
I’m finding my own place;
I’m doing things my way;
I don’t need to do them someone else’s way.*

Edited from recording at Campbellford lock, Lock 13,
on Saagetay’achewan (Trent River),
August 22, 2021

Again, both Indigenous Peoples’ and other-than-human persons’ survivance is dynamic and varied, multifaceted and ever-changing. Although settlers’ efforts to dismantle settler colonialism may not entail survivance in the same way, there are lessons to be learned about not expecting all settlers to behave in the same way as they contribute to dismantling settler colonialism, and not acting like there is one ‘right’ way that settlers ought to behave.

The other insight, possibly contributing to settlers realizing new thought worlds, relates to something mentioned in the same podcast where Susan Blight discusses her developing relationship with concrete. In the podcast, host Uahikeya Maile (2022) expresses that “we live in a society—at least in North America right now—where people can imagine the end of the world because of anthropogenic climate change, but they can’t imagine decolonization . . . they can’t imagine giving . . . Indigenous People their land back” (51:10-52:28). While I tend to use the language of “dismantling settler colonialism” in this dissertation, dismantling settler colonialism, to me, entails Indigenous Nations regaining unquestioned sovereignty over their Lands, i.e., getting their Land back. Dismantling settler colonialism entails dismantling the institutions, society, and thought worlds that *continue* to invade Indigenous Lands (see Wolfe, 2006, p. 388).

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) describe how whenever there are discussions around decolonization or dismantling settler colonialism, settlers often anxiously ask questions like “what

will decolonization look like? What will happen after abolition? What will be the consequences of decolonization for the settler?” (p. 205). Tuck and Yang notably reply that “decolonization is not obliged to answer those questions – decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity” (p. 205).

On November 20th, 2021, I visited a canal between Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching) and Couchiching Lock, Lock 42, on Matchedash (Severn River). While there, I found myself reflecting on similar ideas as the questions set aside by Tuck and Yang (2012)—and I now risk ending this dissertation by seemingly attempting to answer those questions, although answering those questions is *not* my intention. Thinking about those sorts of questions in *that space*, I was struck by what the survival of Land, against the violent settler-colonial imposition of the Trent-Severn Waterway, has to say regarding settlers’ concerns about how they might survive the dismantling of settler colonialism:

*I think for a lot of settlers,
dismantling settler colonialism
leaves them with questions of
‘where does that leave us?’.
But I’m here along this canal,
and I’m seeing all of these plants and everything,
and the way that life continues
even when destruction happens.*

-Edited from recording at canal between
Couchiching Lock, Lock 42, on Matchedash (Severn River)
and Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching),
November 20, 2021

Truthfully, I was continuously struck by the ways that other-than-human persons and Land *continue to survive* in spaces impacted by the Trent-Severn Waterway, all throughout the time I spent along the waterway. That survival is the catalyst for my examination of other-than-human survivance, but also for my thoughts around, for example, *aqua nullius* and the complexities of Water continuing to promote and support life, now within human-made spaces that were previously filled with rock and earth.

*There is this idea of Water being empty space.
We focus on the surface of the Water, and not what’s in the Water:
I’m able to see all of the plants that are in the Water here,
and I’m thinking about the landscapes under the Water,
and there were pigeons flying overhead.*

*As far as learning lessons from Land,
there is something to that adaptation and continuing
despite destruction, despite change.*

-Edited from recording at canal between
Couchiching Lock, Lock 42, on Matchedash (Severn River)
and Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching),
November 20, 2021

Along the Trent-Severn Waterway, many of the longer canals are lined with gabion walls—stacks of rocks held together by meshed wire—in order to limit erosion along their banks. When visiting different parts of the waterway, I often noticed what looked like shale at the bottom of Waterbodies. I suspect that much of this ‘shale’ was rocks that had fallen out of the gabion walls as their meshed wire eroded. Now, those rocks seem to provide habitats and shelter to fish and other beings living in the Waters.

Figure 43

Gabion wall along canal parallel to Odenaabe (Otonabee River), above Peterborough lift lock, Lock 21



Note. Photo taken by author, May 27, 2021.

In terms of settlers realizing new thought worlds, these Waters, plants, rocks, and animals can provide inspiration and aspirations. Dismantling settler colonialism...

*doesn't leave us nowhere
or with nothing,
the same way that a canal dug through here
doesn't mean that it's just empty space now.*

Life continues here.
Land continues here.

-Edited from recording at canal between
Couchiching Lock, Lock 42, on Matchedash (Severn River)
and Gwajienjawjiing (Lake Couchiching),
November 20, 2021

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