

BEYOND THE BORDER: BUFFALO AND BLACKFOOT TENURE ON  
TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GEOGRAPHY

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

December 2019

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## ABSTRACT

The international US-Canada border divides and dissects the ancestral territory of the Siksikaitsitapi Indigenous nations. This thesis examines Siksikaitsitapi experiences of the border as a settler-colonial method of containment and their resistance to these processes through the reintroduction of the buffalo. The reintroduction of the buffalo to Siksikaitsitapi territory represents Siksikaitsitapi worldviews and relationship to the lands which extend across and beyond the imposed border. The buffalo are powerful within Siksikaitsitapi ways of knowing, and their return signifies a resilience in a host of sacred, social, cultural, and traditional principles that underpin Siksikaitsitapi life. This study shows that through the cross-border movement of the free-roaming buffalo, the Siksikaitsitapi are asserting their ongoing presence, relationship to the land, and sovereignty by using Indigenous-led conservation to challenge the divisive nature of the border. This research highlights how Siksikaitsitapi thought and worldviews are continuous and offer a sustainable and meaningful practice for conservation governance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge that the land on which I learned and lived, and from where this thesis and research is rooted and belongs, is the ancestral and traditional territory of the Siksikaitsitapi, Niitsitapi, or the Blackfoot Confederacy. Today, as it has been since time immemorial, this traditional territory – the land, water, air, animals, and plants are all interconnected and hold significant meaning to the Blackfoot Confederacy. The central themes of this thesis, including sense of place, movement, ecology, relationships, community, and geography have been important to and practiced by the Siksikaitsitapi for tens of thousands of years before I began thinking or writing about them. I am forever grateful for and humbled by my time on Siksikaitsitapi lands, and from these experiences I will continue to grow, learn, and interrogate my relationships to the places and spaces I take up as a settler.

I want to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Libby Lunstrum for her continuous support of my M.A. study and research, for her patience, motivation, enthusiasm, guidance, and endless knowledge. As my supervisor, she has taught me more than I could ever give her credit for here. She has shown me, by her example, who a good researcher and academic should be.

I wish to express deep gratitude to my committee member: Dr. Peter Vandergeest, for his encouragement, substantial intellectual support, insightful comments, and hard questions. To my external examiner Dr. Carolyn Podruchny, for her enthusiasm, sincere engagement, and thoughtful contributions. My warm thanks also extends to Dr. Robin Roth whose many discussions, valuable suggestions, and expert advice have been invaluable throughout all stages of my work.

I am grateful to all of those whom I have had the pleasure of working with during this project. To Mike Bruised Head, Jaron Weaselbear, Ira Provost, Michael

DesRosier, Joycelyn DesRosier, Robert DesRosier, Kim DesRosier, Terry Tatsey, Wilton Goodstriker, Darlene Munro, Harry Barnes, Joyce Spoonhunter, Ervin Carlson, Kirby Smith, Penny Fox, Tim Davis, John Murray, Keith Heavyrunner, James McNeely, Marie Weasel, and the A.R.M.P. team. For the sake of anonymity, I will not name everyone involved but I trust you know who you are. My sincere thanks especially go to Sierra Shade, Kimmy Shade, Deanna Shade, Zane Chief Moon, and Riel Houle for their unending warmth, welcome, kindness, and support.

The thesis also benefitted from comments and feedback made by my friends and colleagues who read through the manuscript. I take this opportunity to thank them. Thank you for your time, comments, and conversation. Each of you have taught me a great deal.

Special thanks to my family, and specifically my parents—whose love and guidance are with me in whatever I pursue. They have taught me my love of learning, and I am forever grateful for their constant encouragement.

This research would not be possible without the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, including the Canadian Conservation in a Global Context (CCGC) project, and York University.

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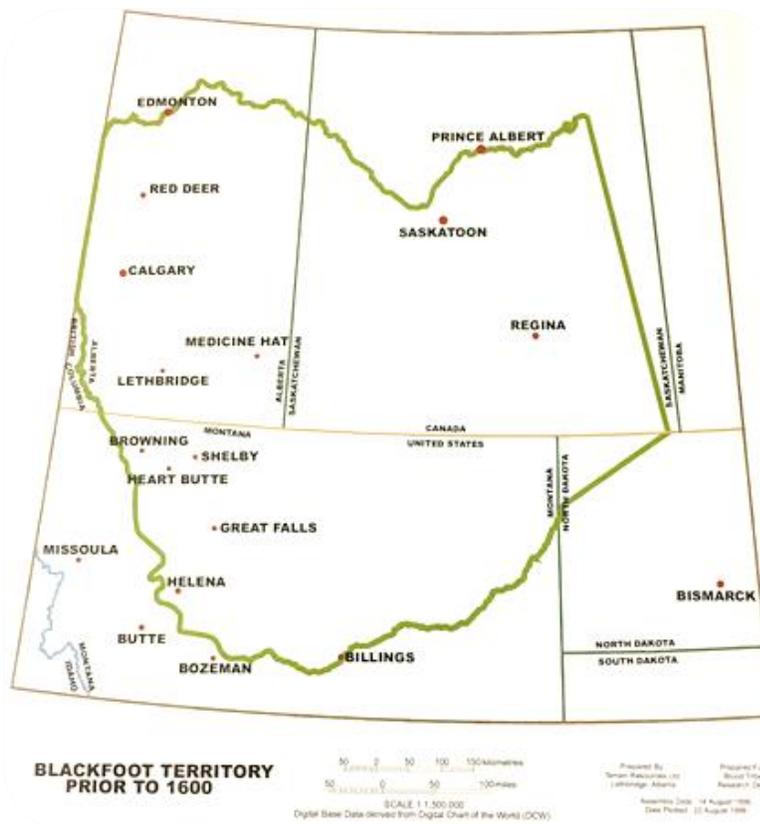
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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Dispossession is historic, ongoing, and incomplete. Settler-colonialism seeks to rupture the connection between Indigenous peoples and the land in order to own, accumulate, and gain access to resources. “The primary motive of settler-colonialism is . . . access to territory. Territory is settler-colonialism’s specific, irreducible, element” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). Facilitating dispossession is an explicitly geographic exercise that functions to transform the landscape and inscribe imposed national space.

For the Blackfoot Confederacy, also known as the Siksikaitsitapi or the Niitsitapi, dispossession has taken place through a strategy and spatial logic of containment. Siksikaitsitapi traditional and ancestral territory was, and remains, expansive, but today the lands are categorized and restricted by colonial renderings of reserves, reservations, borders, parks, and private property. Spatial containment opens up the territory for



*Photo 1 Siksikaitsitapi Territory: these boundaries are meant to be suggestive rather than definitive (Source: S. van Beek, photo taken at the Blackfoot Confederacy Conference September 2018)*

settlement while creating conditions for colonial control. On the prairies, this is seen in the entangled processes of the destruction of the buffalo and the building of the border.



Photo 2 Reserve and Reservation locations (Source: Google Maps)

International borders in the North American context were created by colonial governments with little to no regard for Indigenous peoples, their ways of life, or the boundaries of their territories. The building of the border and the implementation of related border practices have played a significant and enduring role in dispossessing, displacing, and separating the Siksikaitsitapi.

The Siksikaitsitapi have been on these lands since time immemorial; the international boundary was surveyed in the late 1800s. Currently, the Blackfoot Confederacy is made up of four nations: Kainai, Siksika, and

Apatohsi-Piikani north of the international border, and Amskapi-Piikani south of the border. The border demarcates settler-colonial nation-state territorial claims, divides the Siksikaitsitapi, dispossesses them from their ancestral lands, and obstructs traditional travel practices.

Traditional travel practices refer to how the Siksikaitsitapi moved throughout and occupied their large territory while following the buffalo. The buffalo provided the Siksikaitsitapi with food, shelter, teachings, and sacred knowledge and practices. In

both Canada and the United States, buffalo were hunted to near extinction in order to contain and control the Plains Indigenous peoples who relied on them.

Travel, trade, migratory routes, seasonal camps, ecological practices, following and hunting the buffalo, as well as visiting relations and special sites, informs Siksikaitsitapi traditions and is traditional. Siksikaitsitapi knowledge, sacred social systems and ways of being, come from the lands. As a result, the building of the border and the loss of the buffalo were huge impediments to Siksikaitsitapi ways.

The ongoing nature of dispossession demonstrates that it requires maintenance; it is impermanent and fallible. Indeed, settler-colonial geographies and logics of containment are continuously contested, resisted, and refused. On Siksikaitsitapi territory, colonial legacies are being challenged by Indigenous-led conservation. In a partnership between the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Blackfoot Confederacy, a program entitled the Iinnii Initiative (Iinnii is the word for “buffalo” in the Blackfoot language) has been established to restore the buffalo population. The intent behind the initiative is to return the free-roaming buffalo to Siksikaitsitapi traditional territory, where they can move across the border and throughout the Montana and Alberta plains. The vision of the Iinnii Initiative is to “restore the ecological, spiritual, and cultural integrity to the ecosystem” (Gladstone, 2018). The Iinnii Initiative has inherently political aims, as Siksikaitsitapi connection with the buffalo asserts their ongoing presence and their relationship to the land beyond the reserves, the reservation, and beyond the border. As free-roaming animals, the buffalo will not be contained to the parks or spaces of designated wilderness. This pathway creates the possibility for refusing colonial containment and affirming Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty and traditional territory.

## 1.1 Research Question and Methods

This thesis emerges from my study of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Iinnii Initiative, and the international border. With an increased focus on the geographies of borders, specific discussions of in what ways, and with what consequences settler-colonialism is entangled in the borderlands remain under-developed. I seek to apply the theoretical foundations of border studies, political ecology, and Indigenous conceptions and assertions of sovereignty to signify the political potential of conservation and non-human actors across boundaries. While benefiting from academic sources, this research approaches interviews and Indigenous knowledge as local critical theory and conceptual frameworks (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013). The case study of the Blackfoot Confederacy and the borderlands has broad implications for understanding the dynamics of natural spaces and borders. Through this analysis, there is critical scope to discuss the devastating capacity of colonialism while also holding space for Indigenous strength, agency, and resilience.

My research questions focus on the Iinnii Initiative, its relationship to the border, and its significance for the Blackfoot Confederacy resurgence. I address this through the following questions:

- How has the border impacted the Blackfoot Confederacy, both historically and contemporarily?
- How are the Siksikaitsitapi attempting to challenge or reconfigure the border through the reintroduction of the buffalo, the Iinnii Initiative, and the resurgence of the Confederacy?
- How is Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty expressed through the reintroduction of the buffalo and the Iinnii Initiative?

Drawing from the literature on border studies and using a framework of Indigenous sovereignty and nonhuman agency, I highlight how settler-colonialism

operates through a geographic logic of containment which is reproduced and reified at the international border. I examine how the establishment and maintenance of the international border, along with the destruction of the buffalo, operated to constrain Siksikaitsitapi mobility. Furthermore, I analyze how Indigenous movement across territories and across the border became characterized as lawlessness and threatening, a characterization that was used as justification to contain and control both the Siksikaitsitapi and the buffalo. I question the settler-colonial assertion that a claim to space is solely achieved through permanent sedentary occupation, and I argue that the return of the buffalo is a refusal of this spatial logic: it is an enactment of Siksikaitsitapi traditions and territory. This territory spans across and beyond the border.

## **1.2 Contribution**

I draw on concepts and approaches from three fields: border studies, political ecology, and Indigenous sovereignty. My thesis is primarily shaped by two key concepts from these bodies of literature: the colonial dream and the politics of refusal. These concepts frame my analysis, address my research questions, and inform the central aim of this thesis. The central aim is to explore the following:

- a) how the international border between Montana and Alberta is implicated in settler-colonial geographies of displacement and containment and
- b) how these spatial logics are being contested and refused by the Blackfoot Confederacy through continued tradition and the reintroduction of the free-roaming buffalo.

### ***1.2.1 Border Studies***

Border Studies scholars approach borders as socially constructed sites of power and as an instrument or strategy to impose spatial order, separation, and domination (Anderson & Samudzi, 2018; Newman, 2006; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Zimmerer, 2000).

Borders are foremost about creating a recognizable institution that demarcates nation-state territorial boundaries and sovereign control, meaning that borders are a territorial practice (Noe, 2010; Paasi, 1998, 2009). Territorialization is “an act aimed at asserting control over a certain space, or capturing a certain space, delimiting and securing its borders, and overseeing, dictating, constraining, or enabling what can and cannot transpire within these borders” (Lunstrum, 2007, p. 12). Nation-states are territorial entities and spatially defined entities, and in this context, border demarcation, delimitation, and maintenance are integral areas of study (Lunstrum, 2007). I draw on these considerations and propose a shift to studying not only how borders are active and instrumental in creating nation-state networks, but also how these processes and practices take place on Indigenous lands. Borders and boundary-making are central to settler-colonialism. In Chapters 3 and 4, I elaborate on the historic and contemporary ways the border has been a site of dispossession for the Blackfoot Confederacy. The creation of the border confined Siksikaitstapi people to obstruct mobility and cohesion. This process rendered the Siksikaitstapi peoples invisible and thus created the narrative of *terra nullius* or “space available” for settlement and open to be controlled by the nation-states.

### *1.2.2 Political Ecology and Conservation*

Political ecology frames changes to ecology, biodiversity, the environment, and nature-society relationships as being embedded in power dynamics and processes (Robbins, 2011; Roth, 2008, 2015). Political Ecology is a mode of explanation that challenges “apolitical” approaches to studying the environment, instead seeking to understand ecological changes and human-environment interactions as taking place within the intersections of social, political, and economic influences (Robbins, 2011). This framework of analysis is central to understanding the nature-culture dichotomy and how certain things come to be viewed as natural while others do not (Braun, 2009).

To political ecologists working within the field of conservation, the notion of pristine nature is central to protectionist paradigms that separate and displace people from sites of wilderness. This concept is central to my case study in two ways. First, the idea of pristine wilderness separates civilization from nature, producing a racial hierarchy that has actively denied Siksikaitsitapi ways of living and being on the land— simultaneously dispossessing them of and displacing them from their lands. Second, utilizing a political ecology analysis allows for the possibility of dismantling this top-down power and control-laden conservation practice. On Siksikaitsitapi territory this possibility is seen in the Indigenous-led Ininii Initiative, which highlights the relationship between the land, the Siksikaitsitapi, and the buffalo, rather than separating them ontologically or containing the buffalo physically.

### *1.2.3 Indigenous Theory and Sovereignty*

The notion of sovereignty is an underlying and integral aspect of any discussion of borders, nations, and dispossession. Canada's and the USA's sovereignty exist in a power dynamic wherein colonial power is produced, represented, and enshrined by geographic apparatuses which situate space as owned or operated in certain ways. Scholars in the field of Indigenous Studies and Theory discuss the ways in which settler-colonialism operates through power and control to create and sustain nation-states and to dispose Indigenous peoples of their territories (Barker, 2017; Coulthard, 2014; Daigle, 2016; C. Harris, 2004; Kauanui & Wolfe, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Razack, 2000; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Veracini, 2011, 2019; Watts, 2013; Wolfe, 2006). Canadian and American sovereignty are dependent upon access and control of territory demarcated, bounded, and enclosed by borders. Indigenous theorists take up a politics of refusal, denying the totalizing and exclusive political authority of colonial states (A. Simpson, 2014; L. B. Simpson, 2017). Refusal is not merely rejection but is rooted in a pre-existing order and way of being or "actual histories" (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 22).

Refusal informs Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty, as it does not rely on or replicate nation-state supremacy or hierarchical governance structures. In Chapter 5 I draw on Indigenous Theory to discuss how Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty operates outside of upholding barriers: barriers as borders and barriers between humans and nature. Indigenous theorists have emphasized a sense of sovereignty that centres the principles of relationality wherein political life is based on equal and reciprocal relation and obligation to any and all forms of other life including the land, the winds, the waters, and their plant and animal inhabitants (Barker, 2015; Coulthard, 2014; Justice, 2008; Rifkin, 2009a; L. B. Simpson, 2008; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Indigenous Theory and Sovereignty Studies gives this case study the tools of analysis for both comprehending the ongoing nature of settler-colonialism and a basis for imagining and living alternatives. This thesis employs pertinent<sup>1</sup> Indigenous Theory to conceptualize the intertwining relationship between the Siksikaitsitapi, the buffalo, the lands, and sovereignty.

Indigenous Theory informs a political ecology of borders to both problematize the making and maintenance of nation-states and the exclusion of nature from the Western political realm. Rossiter posits that political ecology and an analysis of the non-human are integral elements of border studies, as “nature does not encounter or cross the border; rather, nature is (re)produced as it engages border space” (Rossiter, 2011, p. 109). Borders shape and are shaped by what they enclose and exclude along with what crosses them or what is prevented from crossing them (Cunningham, 2009; Noe, 2010). The Ininii Initiative challenges this narrative by reimagining who and what can be an

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<sup>1</sup> It is my aim to engage with and contribute to the field of Indigenous Studies and Theory but also to remain committed to the specificity of the Siksikaitsitapi, rather than applying or presuming a pan-Indigenous or homogeneous set of truths or conceptual framework.

actor occupying space and land. Through crossings, buffalo complicate nation-state colonial power and political entanglements over the landscape. My thesis and discussion of the border and the Linnii Initiative examines how buffalo take on a role in Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty and how free-roaming buffalo will cross the international border, asserting Siksikaitsitapi traditions, territory, and place-making through relationality.

### **1.3 Structure of Chapters**

The thesis is organized into six chapters following this introduction. In Chapter 2 I describe the specifics of my field site and detail my research design and methodology. In Chapter 3 I trace the historic dispossession of the Siksikaitsitapi through three intertwined strategies of colonial containment. Containment and immobility were created on the plains through the loss of the buffalo, the building of the border, and the making of reserve and reservation spaces. In Chapter 4 I continue to detail Siksikaitsitapi dispossession from the past into the present. Dispossession is impermanent and requires ongoing maintenance. Contemporarily, Siksikaitsitapi dispossession is sustained through colonial structures which control and survey Indigenous movement. In Chapter 5 I outline the fallibility of containment. The return of the buffalo, the Linnii Initiative, signals a refusal to be contained and is an enactment of Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty, traditions, and territory. In Chapter 6 I summarize my findings and analysis and I discuss future pathways for research. The thesis approaches ‘practical’ and ‘conceptual’ entities of knowledge as intertwined and co-constructive, rather than separate and relegated to strict binaries. With this work, I intend to unsettle dominant ontologies and meaningfully engage with Siksikaitsitapi ways of being and knowing that are “not just words on a screen, theorizations, discourse analysis or a case stud[y]” but also “lived, practiced, and relational” (Hunt, 2014a, p. 29).

## CHAPTER 2 – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls for research models that go beyond *empathetic* ethnography in order to “address the issues that are going to make a difference” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013, p. 292). Similarly, Russell Bishop argues that non-Indigenous researchers have a treaty obligation to support Indigenous research and be allies and colleagues who forgo control over research, accepting that research will take place within alternate conceptions of the world (Bishop, 1994, 1995). What this means to me as a student-researcher is that my practice throughout my research design, implementation, and thesis is bound up in my roles, responsibilities, and duties to the communities who share with me. This chapter discusses my research methods, data sources, and means of analysis, and details how these processes shaped the research. All research tells a story. The story that is told in this thesis is enabled and limited by my empirical and theoretical interests and my identity, actions, and relationships.

### 2.1 Data Sources

I conducted research for this thesis over a five-month period, from July to November 2018. The research design focuses on one case study of the international border between Alberta, Canada, and Montana, USA, in the context of Siksikaitstapi territory and the reintroduction of the buffalo. I chose to take an ethnographic approach to research, using qualitative methods including interviews, informal conversations, participant observation, and analysis of relevant documents. I use these terms and describe my research in this way here because it is standard practice for the academic setting. However, I turn to Mohanty, who writes that language is very imprecise and inadequate—I am employing language and terminology in a manner which most closely and clearly articulates what I am trying to convey, but I realize it is fraught (Mohanty, 2003). I was not a “participant” in Siksikaitstapi culture, nor do I claim to be. In using the term “participant,” I intend to denote participation in a process rather than

a culture or identity. Moreover, the language and tenor typically used in thesis methodology chapters tends to take on an instrumentalist tone, looking at how the work done was a means to an end: the final product, the thesis. To be clear, this is not my intent, nor is it congruent with my values or experience conducting research. Every person I met, each conversation, cup of coffee, movie, meal, walk, drive, or activity, contributed to my learning and growth. Everything I have gained is only in relation to and by the generosity of others, for which I am thankful for and humbled by. As my project and research have benefited from a methodology of learning, I hope academic language will evolve to comprise terminology which more fully encompasses and expresses empathic and reflective modes of ethnographic research. These terminological discussions do not end here, as I will return to this idea of academic incompatibility later on in my findings.

Throughout my research I aimed to ground my work in the ongoing relationships I formed, as well as uphold those formed by my supervisor and colleagues and situate my research and research design in accordance with the desires expressed by the Siksikaitsitapi people we engaged with. Across multiple site visits, the reintroduction of the buffalo and the role of the border in dividing Siksikaitsitapi territory came up consistently as priorities to be addressed. In accordance with this prioritization, my research questions were as follows:

- How has the border impacted the Blackfoot Confederacy, both historically and contemporarily?
- How are the Siksikaitsitapi attempting to challenge or reconfigure the border through the reintroduction of the buffalo, the Iinnii Initiative, and the resurgence of the Confederacy?
- How is Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty expressed through the reintroduction of the buffalo and the Iinnii Initiative?

My research questions are based on what was shared with me and represent the ongoing nature of learning and the will to expand knowledge and to hear varying perspectives.

### *2.1.1 Fieldwork*

Siksikaitsitapi traditional territory expands beyond and across the contemporary colonial international border separating Alberta, Canada, and Montana, USA. Although it is not indicative of Siksikaitsitapi traditional land use or inhabitation, there are currently three Blackfoot reserves north of the border, Siksika, Apatohsi-Piikani, and Kainai, and one Blackfeet<sup>2</sup> reservation south of the border, Amskapi-Piikani. During my fieldwork I lived primarily in the town of Waterton Park, Alberta (or Paahtokoosiikoomii in the Blackfoot language), then relocated to Lethbridge, Alberta. Since Siksika, Apatohsi-Piikani, Kainai, and Amskapi-Piikani are geographically distant and separated, I often travelled to or stayed in one area or another for a short period of time.

During my fieldwork, I spent a substantial amount of time driving and travelling. While fieldwork is often thought of as work done “away” or somewhere “out there,” the act of constantly driving—an amount of driving that does not begin to rival what most locals do—consistently reminded me of the vastness and realness of the physical land and space I was on. To me, this became an important way of viewing the space, as it spoke not only to how profoundly the lands and surroundings sustained me and many others, but also to how pervasive colonial logics could be to parcel and categorize those storied and deep-rooted Siksikaitsitapi sites and territories, which have been travelled since time immemorial. The act of driving often reminded me of the

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<sup>2</sup> Both “Blackfoot” and “Blackfeet” refer to the Siksikaitsitapi. Typically, “Blackfoot” is used in Canada and “Blackfeet” is used in the USA.

ecology of the lands I was on and the importance of patience and willingness to connect and learn, which substantively impacted my conception of ethical research methodology. Everything in the landscape is relational and interconnected, ephemerally and spiritually, which is further significant in considering the role of the buffalo in the landscape and ecosystem. If or when the Innii Initiative is able to reintroduce free-roaming buffalo to the landscape, they will traverse large portions of Siksikaitsitapi territory between Badger-Two Medicine in Montana to Jasper and Banff Parks in Alberta. In this corridor, there are questions about human obligations to the buffalo (for instance, what if a buffalo is hit with a car?). Interconnectivity reminds me of the importance of the buffalo spiritually, and the role it plays in maintaining ecological and social balance in the region.

I am thankful that I had the opportunity to live and learn on Siksikaitsitapi territory. Learning on the land impacted the shape and organization of this thesis and my understanding of my role as a settler on those lands. I am deeply aware my privilege afforded me to have travelled, stayed, and studied on Siksikaitsitapi territory when others, especially those who are not settlers, may not have that same opportunity. This is something I grapple with but for which I do not have answers.

### *2.1.2 Interviews*

I interviewed 22 people between September and November 2018. I chose to interview Siksikaitsitapi community members. Seven women and 15 men participated. I had one participant from Siksika, seven from Apatohsi-Piikani, four from Kainai, and 10 from Amskapi-Piikani. All participants have been anonymized, and no one is referred to by their real name in order to protect their anonymity. Participant quotes have been edited to remove linguistic fillers (examples include “um,” “hmm,” “so,” and “you know”) and personal information.



*Photo 3 Flags of the Blackfoot Nations (Source: S. van Beek, photo taken at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage Site)*

I knew a number of participants before interviewing them and used a snowball method of sampling whereby participants suggested other people who might be interested or willing to speak with me. Each interview was approximately 1.5–2 hours, although some took as long as 3.5 hours. Upon receiving consent, I audio-recorded the interviews and often took notes as we talked. After each interview I made notes of new themes that had emerged, themes that overlapped with previous interviews, or new ideas that I wanted to explore further. The purpose of my interviews was to learn about how people interpreted and experienced the border, and how they viewed the reintroduction of the buffalo in relation to it. I also often used interview time to check my own understanding of what had been shared with me.

I began interviews with a set of topics and open-ended questions. If interview participants wished to view my questions at any time, I provided a copy. When this happened, it tended to open up the conversation, as the person I was speaking with could see new directions or address new avenues of inquiry — in this way interviews often involved collaborative meaning-making as they flowed into new areas or ideas.

While conducting interviews, I endeavored to always allow the conversation to be shaped by the participant's interests rather than sticking to or steering the conversation back to a set of rigid questions. Throughout the process, the interviews would take shape based on the person's interests, set of knowledges, and experiences which pertained to the project at hand.

For developing my research methodology, I wanted to be intentional about deferring to what other scholars before have written and recommended. Todd and Donald write about conducting research based on an "ethical relationality" (Donald, 2009; Todd, 2016). The concept of ethical relationality resists a knowledge production predicated on individuality or purported expertise, instead invoking intricate and intertwined webs of reciprocity and relationships to which we are accountable for our knowledge. We are positioned within pluralities of thinking, acting, ways of being, and governance, which requires us to be thoughtful and conscientious of "who else is speaking beside us" and what our duties and obligations are to the territories we are on; the people we engage with; those who came before us and will come after us; and the animals, plants, waters, sun, and air surrounding us (Todd, 2016, p. 19). An "ethic of relationality" obligates me to go beyond the categories of research subjects, participants, and vague collaborators to meaningfully, directly, and unambiguously engage with Indigenous philosophy, epistemes, and thought as valid and complete in their own right (Todd, 2016, p. 7). This ethic calls for us to de-centre ourselves from the institutions or universities we are "from" and to localize our time, energy, responsibilities, and intentions within the communities—and to seek direction and guidance from them (*Toolbox of Research Principles in an Aboriginal Context: Ethics, Respect, Fairness, Reciprocity, Collaboration and Culture*, 2018, p. 29). As Marlene Brant-Castellano and Kovach suggest, developing an appropriate research methodology and working ethically with an Indigenous community can never be limited to a set of

defined rules; rather, a commitment to learning protocols, practices, values, and relationship-building allows for the opportunity to shift research from being about an *end* to a reflexive *means* (Brant-Castellano, 2014; Kovach, 2010).

In following an ethic of relationality and grounding this research in the community, in addition to interviews, I also participated in Elders Dialogues. An Elders Dialogue is a knowledge gathering which applies Blackfoot research methodology honouring traditional protocols of prayer, tobacco, food, and gifting ways to demonstrate intention and the balance between knowledge gathering and giving. The gatherings took place with Knowledge-Keepers, Memory-Holders, and Elders from the community coming together face to face. The Elders Dialogues took place in a roundtable discussion format which did not have a schedule or a set of predetermined open-ended questions. Instead, it was a time of attentive listening, observing, experiencing, and reflecting.

As is standard practice, when conducting interviews with Elders, I would gift them tobacco, sweetgrass, charcoal, and an honorarium as a sign of respect and appreciation for their time and knowledge.

### *2.1.3 Observation*

Observation and fieldnotes are often used in qualitative research to triangulate data. While living on Siksikaitsitapi territory, I spent a great amount of time taking in the ecological, cultural, and social surroundings. Although Waterton Lakes National Park is a major tourist attraction, the number of permanent residents and workers is small, so relationship-building was an integral and fun part of my time. Everything that I have learned or gained I owe to these relationships.

During my fieldwork there were three major events that impacted my course of study: the Blackfoot Confederacy Conference, the Border Delegation, and the Buffalo Harvest.

The Blackfoot Confederacy Conference took place in Red Deer, Alberta, and spanned three days in September 2018. The conference was a meeting of political leaders, Elders, and community members to discuss the ongoing priorities for the Confederacy. During this time, I was able to make connections and learn about how the Confederacy organizes and prioritizes different events and approaches.

The Border Delegation involved numerous Amskapi-Piikani community members and leaders, and the tribal council of the Tohono O’odham Nation. For a week in September 2018, I was able to shadow and observe as community leaders discussed various border issues, including the ways in which their border crossings are similar and how they differ. During this time, I was also able to attend meetings between the Blackfoot Nation, the Tohono O’odham Nation, and border patrol and customs agents from both Canada and the United States.

The Buffalo Harvest was a one-day event in October 2018 that took place on a ranch in Amskapi-Piikani. The Iinnii Initiative organized a day for high school students to come to the reservation to learn about the importance of the buffalo to Siksikaitstapi culture and to experience a local buffalo kill. I was able to observe the event and speak with the community members and Elders present about the importance of the buffalo<sup>3</sup> and the goals of the Iinnii Initiative.

Additionally, this research was informed by written materials. These included pamphlets and media from the Blackfoot Information Centre in Waterton Lakes National Park, brochures and reports from the Blackfeet Agriculture Resource Management Program in Amskapi-Piikani, and documents made available by the

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis, I choose to use the word “buffalo” (rather than the word “bison”) because it was the predominant term used at events I attended, and interview participants expressed to me that it is their preferred terminology.

Blackfeet Tribal Historic Preservation Office, Innii Initiative, and Blackfeet Bison Program.

Each event and all written materials contributed to and complemented the information I gathered from interviews. My intent was to conduct research with a methodology which ensures lived realities, experiences, and perspectives are made visible and represented on their own terms. By attending events, conducting interviews, and analyzing written materials, I was able to compare and study different sets of knowledges, which in turn provided perspectives and information that built from one another and informed my research questions.

## **2.2 Data Analysis**

### ***2.2.1 Oral Knowledge***

In conducting research, there are ethical risks in enfolded or subjecting Indigenous epistemologies to Western academic validity. Instead, validity should be determined by the methodologies and by the community (Bastien, 1999; Kovach, 2010). One such example would be the importance of oral language and of understanding Siksikaitsitapi knowledge from that context. Orality is used not only to recall events or histories but to apply place-based and cultural meaning (Kovach, 2010). I aimed to maintain this holistic and contextualized meaning within my research by utilizing a methodology which was congruent with oral knowledge transmission.

In considering the colonial legacies, and indeed the many ways academia and research continue to perpetuate and reinforce asymmetrical power relations, developing a methodology requires sincere reflection on whose and how voices and knowledges are being communicated. Todd and Watts write that inclusion of Indigenous voices is not enough, as inclusion often exists only to misinterpret, appropriate, or distort the knowledge in a manner which denies or erases the epistemes from which it comes (Todd, 2016; Watts, 2016). It is not enough, nor is it responsible, to

reduce the dislocation and exclusion of Indigenous epistememes from the academy to a superficial reading of difference—a reading which leaves systemic oppression unaddressed and situates the dominant status as detached from a position of power, as disembodied, objective, and universal (Mohanty, 1989; Ng, 1993; Razack, 1998). It would be an act of “epistemic violence” to utilize or turn to Indigenous thinking while dislocating or denying it as a living body of knowledge practiced by peoples who share reciprocal duties with both ephemeral and physical shared territories (Hunt, 2014a, p. 24).

In locating Blackfoot knowledge as living and practiced, I turned to oral tradition as methodology. Prior to transcribing interviews into text, I analysed the data by listening to the interviews repeatedly while taking notes of themes, patterns, or key ideas that arose. With repeated listening, I was able to note where the interviews overlapped and diverged, letting the data create complexity in the narrative that was forming. It is worth noting this is an imperfect methodology, as audio recording also makes the story and knowledge static, but from repeated listening and hearing the tone shifts, laughs, and pauses in the dialogue, I believe the process was meaningful and enlightening.

Once I had finished the process of listening to the interviews, I transcribed them and sent them back to the interview participants. I intended for this to be a show of thanks, but also a way to share the information and for me to receive feedback or make any amendments to the research in an ongoing way.

### *2.2.2 Textual Analysis*

Upon my return to Toronto, I began uploading the approved transcriptions into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software program. Using NVIVO I was able to store, code, and organize the interview transcriptions and other textual documents and media I had accumulated. The process of transcription also further allowed me to pull key

quotes and concepts from the interviews. In this way, I aspire to engage in a citational ethic where quoting can take place directly from the people I worked with, rather than situating myself as an intellectual intermediary (Todd, 2016).

The process of using NVIVO allowed me to make further clarifications and connections between data sets and ideas that had emerged. As my research is primarily about relations between various subjects, oral methodologies, interviews, and qualitative methods were appropriate for my research questions. For more technical or specific information pertaining to the buffalo as wildlife or the border as a maintained structure, I defer to studies previously conducted.

### **2.3 Power and Positionality**

To simply redefine the “informant” as an “equal partner” would work to conceal the power relations which still allow the gathering together of the ethnographic document. In other words, the narrative of overcoming relations of authorization in traditional ethnography constitutes another form of authorization . . . So, it remains the ethnographer who is praised for giving up her or his authority. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 56)

In conducting ethnographic qualitative research, I would be remiss to conclude a discussion without reflecting on how my power and positionality as a researcher may have affected the data.

The Blackfoot Confederacy has had previous experience with researchers (including my supervisor) and has an internal project and ethics review board through the Blackfeet Community College in Amskapi-Piikani. As such, people often knew about my role as a graduate student and would feel comfortable either expressing interest or declining to take part in research.

Being mindful of the frequently extractive and exploitative methods of research, which have taken place and continue to take place in a settler-colonial society, I tried to let the research be shaped by the desires and interests of the people I worked with,

always looking for cues of disinterest or indicators that I was unwelcome. How I was received greatly impacted whether community members would grant me an interview, and it would also tend to shape the content of interviews. Some community members were reluctant to be interviewed and frustrated by what they saw as a pattern and trend of indifference from settler society in response to their needs. Even in instances of denied interviews, I was able to learn and listen to what community members expected from me and my research, and what their hopes are for future changes. I feel accountable to what was implicitly shared with me in those simultaneous requests for silence and action.

Most often, interviews would emerge from lengthy relationship-building. Conversations shifted over time as people moved towards speaking freely with me. Both the manner of conversations and their content were shaped by my visible identity. As a young white settler woman, how I was perceived impacted the relationships, experiences, and events that I took part in. For example, sentiments that were discussed with me in informal settings would often vary from what the same person would express during a recorded interview. While this impacts the data collected, I see it as valuable to consider the importance of what was intentionally shared in those moments. I do not feel that these instances skewed my data, as there are points of convergence, points of divergence, and anomalies within the data set which can be seen as new lines of inquiry for analysis.

My position as a white woman and academic affected how my project and research were understood; to ameliorate this I was upfront about the slow pace of academia, and I verbally dissuaded participants from the idea that I held influence. While my position is limited, I do hope that my research will benefit the community, but the validity and impact of it has yet to be seen and is to be determined by the community.

In reflecting on my own positionality, I struggle with the ethics of conducting research along unequal axes of power. I am reminded that part of taking on settler-colonialism is embracing missteps over abdicating responsibility. Research can be a tool for highlighting injustice, resisting, and imagining “new worlds.” I respond to the call of de Leeuw, Cameron, and Greenwood to be mindful of relationship-building for productivity or strategic purposes, and instead insist upon intimacy and friendship beyond the confines of my research project (de Leeuw et al., 2012). Much of my time and energy is unaccounted for in this methodology chapter, but it contributed nonetheless to the humility, honesty, and insight that I have gained from my networks. I am grateful to all my friends and participants for their hospitality, humour, kindness, knowledge, and patience—this research would not be possible without them.

### *2.3.1 Ongoing Learning*

In this chapter on methods, I want to resituate the focus of research onto the means, the methodology and the process of the production of knowledge; by doing so, we can conceptualize it as ongoing, as learning. An ethic of relationality and a methodology of learning insist on an approach which denotes not just seeing, hearing, or observing, but a coming to understand based on reciprocal relationships. Relationality centres an obligation and responsibility to act and think based on our relationships and to uphold with integrity the experiences and perspectives that are shared with us. We are asked to acknowledge and be accountable for our position in the world, our privileges, our multiply situated identities, and the historical, cultural, and social context in which we live. From the conversations, ceremonies, lives, and lands shared with me I know that I am accountable to my community relationships and have a responsibility to the knowledge imparted to me.

Donald writes that an ethic of relationality is about a production of knowledge, learning, and understanding, rather than an “imparting of authoritative knowledge,”

explicitly creating it as an ongoing and continuous practice (Donald, 2009, p. 445). Given this context, it is imperative to make a distinction between the *means* and *ends* of research, between learning and knowing. Knowing implies an entitlement and ability to know and to own (Kuokkanen, 2007). This does not leave room in the process for reciprocity or an engagement with learning which takes place based on participation and is characterized by a responsibility and respect for what is studied. A methodology of learning is an ethic which takes place within reciprocal relations as “there is an implicit future commitment to social justice and social change in return for the gift of learning” (Richardson, 2012, p. 72). The continuous process of learning tells me that knowledge is not finite, while the relationships I build and the people and communities who share with me remind me that not all knowledge is accessible, and that there are proper and appropriate protocols, duties, and expectations that come with knowing. At best, the epistemological curiosity universities value requires an openness to the world. Learning and coming to know-in-relation confronts decontextualization and colonial legacies through love, accountability, and attention to our positionality. This shifts my time as a researcher out of a place of being an “expert” and drives me to become a scholar partaking in collaborative conversations (Holmes et al., 2014, p. 565).

Collaborative conversations are key for both the ethics and methodology of this research. In conducting research and writing my thesis, I hope to have created a project that can meaningfully and substantively contribute to the Blackfoot Confederacy’s goals. Mohanty writes that there “can be no apolitical scholarship,” and that instead the production of knowledge should be understood as purposeful and ideological, and at its best, “seen as an intervention” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). It is not for me to define or determine the validity of my work or its impacts, but I endeavour to produce scholarship that demonstrates the pervasiveness of settler-colonialism while speaking truth to the immense strength and resilience of the Siksikaitsitapi and their enduring

connection to their lands, territories, and traditions. I hope my thesis supports ongoing activism around both border politics in the region and valuing the Linnii Initiative.

In September 2019, I had the opportunity to present my project design, findings, and analysis at Blackfeet Community College in Amskapi-Piikani. Presenting was a valuable exercise and an opportunity to engage in continuous learning, responsibility, accountability, and collaboration. During this event I was able to discuss my work and receive valuable feedback and insight from community members. Meaning-making occasions such as this have been central to positioning my thesis as contributing to existing and ongoing community goals and practices.

These conversations and examining my role in knowledge production and legitimization as an academic, give me an opportunity to envision new possibilities and reintegrate voices, lived realities, and ontologies into knowledge creation. J.K. Gibson-Graham writes that knowledge is always “implicated in being and becoming,” and she thus places a radical impetus on those of us who conduct research (Gibson & Graham, 2008, p. 626). She posits that “new worlds” can be brought into being by more equitable processes of creating, hosting, and articulating knowledges—and that these processes make new worlds more real, viable, and “present as everyday realities that touch all our lives and dynamically shape our futures” (Gibson & Graham, 2008, p. 618). As researchers, our challenge becomes to critically and deeply engage with colonialism so that we can envision and enact modes of being and producing work which resists it (Nason, 2013).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

To resist exploitative research practices, I am taking up the four key principles proposed for conducting research with Indigenous communities: ownership, control, access, and possession (Schnarch, 2004).

Ownership assumes that a community owns cultural knowledge or data collectively, in the same manner that an individual owns personal information, and so the community's consent is required to use its knowledge. The principle of control asserts that First Nations people have a right to control various aspects of the research on them, including the formulation of research frameworks, data management, and dissemination. Access is the ability for Indigenous people to retrieve and examine data that concern them and their communities. The principle of possession refers to the actual possession of data. (Kovach, 2010, p. 145)

By honouring the spirit and intent of the knowledge that has been shared with me, I recognize and acknowledge the limits to my intellectual autonomy or freedom. As Vine Deloria says, "*individual self-determination and intellectual sovereignty* are scary concepts because they mean that a whole generation of Indians are not going to be responsible to the Indian people, they are simply going to be isolated individuals playing with the symbols of Indians" (Deloria Jr, 1998, p. 28). In recognizing this, I do not see it as a limitation on my ability as an academic, but as a responsibility I now have to the knowledge shared with me and to the relationships I have formed with those who taught me. In this way it is about accountability and ensuring the integrity of what is presented in my thesis, along with respecting boundaries of what is public, what is sacred, and what can be known. Furthering this, I do not discuss any knowledge or information that the Siksikaitsitapi have expressed that should not be made public, including information that exists in print elsewhere. As with scholarly publication, there is the potential risk that readers assume what is printed is a tribally authorized interpretation without regard for the research practice (Davis, 2004; Kovach, 2010). As knowledge is created in a process of relationality and reflexivity, I endeavour to write only about what I understand. In doing so, I admit my limitations to understand the full reality of which I write, due to its complexity, my own biases, and other limitations applied to the study. As such, I take full responsibility for any mistranslations,

misinterpretations, or misunderstandings, and I recognize my responsibilities to the people and communities to whom this knowledge truly belongs.

## CHAPTER 3 – CREATING CONTAINMENT

How has the border impacted the Blackfoot Confederacy, both historically and contemporarily?

Discrimination against [buffalo] is just the way there is with us. It is, because in the beginning they were killed off to get rid of us too. But those animals are still here, and we are too. And I always look at it that way. How we were put here on a reservation, we weren't allowed to leave, we were treated that way and that's just the same way as buffalo. They want to be putting them in an area and say, "Hey, you can't come out of there," "You're not a wildlife like the rest of the wildlife," "You're different and you gotta be here and you have to stay here." And look, that's what happened to us. "Hey, put them here on this reservation. You don't leave. You don't belong out here." It's the same thing.... That's our connection. It is. (Interview, 10.18)

Well, the border actually is from the US and Canada and it has very little to do with anything of the Confederacy that we have ever even acknowledged or appreciated. It's divided families, it has divided our lands, it has divided our culture, our history, our sense of being. They more or less prisoned us. (Interview, 09.18)

Settler-colonialism seeks to rupture the connection between Indigenous peoples and the land in order to own, accumulate, and gain access to resources (Arvin et al., 2013; Coulthard, 2014; Daigle, 2016; C. Harris, 2004; Hunt, 2014b; Kauanui & Wolfe, 2012; Lawrence, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Veracini, 2019; Watts, 2013). These two quotes from Blackfoot Confederacy members demonstrate that colonialism is inherently a territorial and spatial logic, strategy, and structure. This is then intimately tied up in categorizing land, space, and human and nonhuman inhabitants. The first quote details the manner in which the Siksikaitsitapi were confined to reserve and reservation spaces through policies which sought to separate them from their lands and lifeways which have been intertwined and informed by the buffalo. The policies to eliminate the buffalo

on the plains were intentionally created as a means to vanish<sup>4</sup> the Siksikaitsitapi peoples and their relationship to the lands and ways of being on the land. This includes their knowledges, sacred-social bonds and traditional legal orders, and their travelling ways, which extended across their vast traditional territories. The second quote echoes these geographic methods of containment. The creation of the border represents a colonial understanding and ordering of space. This boundary was and is used to mark, code, and categorize land as within the control and purview of the settler-colonial state. As stated above, the border goes through Siksikaitsitapi territory but was created without any processes of consultation or consent, as Siksikaitsitapi claim to space was not seen as legitimate or longstanding. While the making of the international border between Canada and the United States was primarily about forming a territorial boundary and asserting the sovereignty of the two settler-states, it resulted in claiming lands as property of the settler-state and led to Indigenous immobility. What both quotes reveal is that colonial spatial logics of control and confinement continue today through new and emerging discourse in regard to ongoing bordering policies which divide and cross Siksikaitsitapi lands.

Territory is settler-colonialism's "irreducible element" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). I argue that dispossession is a geographic strategy, facilitated through a logic of containment. The building of the border and the destruction of the buffalo are entangled methods of creating colonial control and Siksikaitsitapi immobility. Siksikaitsitapi understandings of the land and enactments of mobility run contrary to settlement patterns employed by colonial states and are thus situated as in need of state regulation, control, containment, and surveillance. The opening quote demonstrates

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<sup>4</sup> I am using the term "vanish" as evoked by Philip Deloria (2004) to refer to a process of elimination which obfuscates colonial violence and instead appears or seems "natural."

that this is a powerful position of both subjection and resistance: “But those animals are still here, and we are too.”

In this chapter, I draw from this case to show how settler-colonialism has constructed and utilized confinement as a territorial strategy to claim land. I begin by briefly returning to the literature to more fully describe colonial geographic logics, and more specifically I expand on the concept of the *colonial dream*, which I use to structure the remainder of the chapter.

### 3.1 The Colonial Dream: Containment

At the heart of colonialism are land and space. Patrick Wolfe argues that “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure, not an event” (Wolfe, 1994, p. 96, 1999, p. 2). As Wolfe explains, settler assertions of sovereignty are grounded in a “logic of elimination” (Wolfe, 1999, p. 162, 2006, p. 388). Elimination entails the erasure of Indigenous peoples. These methods are twofold, as elimination refers to the *destruction* of life through denying humanity as well as the *production* of life through methods of amalgamation and assimilation of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and lands into the settler nation (Wolfe, 2008). Elimination (and amalgamation both) operate to erase the possibility of distinctive Indigenous peoples who can challenge the settler nation and the nation’s claim to lands.

Indigenous scholars Philip Deloria and Audra Simpson use the term colonial dream to describe the structures that operate to envision the “fixity, control, visibility, productivity, and . . . docility” of Indigenous communities to render their “lives and lands” accessible (Deloria, 2004, pp. 27, 50). Simpson states that “pacification, containment, and demobilization” are integral to colonialism, as these methods allow settlers to perceive Indigenous populations as naturally “vanishing,” which obfuscates the violence of dispossession (Deloria, 2004, p. 50; A. Simpson, 2014, p. 127). I demonstrate that the policies of buffalo elimination and border policies are meant to

reify the state and delegitimize Siksikaitsitapi claims to territory, space, and mobility. Further, I illustrate that the border is deeply implicated in the making of space and the realization of the colonial dream by directly and indirectly impeding Siksikaitsitapi mobility across the line.

I engage with the concept of the colonial dream by focusing on the case of the Blackfoot Confederacy on Siksikaitsitapi territory and their experiences with the buffalo and the imposed international border. In this chapter, I use a chronological method to discuss how the colonial spatial strategy of territorialization and containment took place within the historical context of the loss of the buffalo on the plains, the building of the border, and the implementation of reservation and reserve spaces. The destruction of the buffalo and building of the border are interconnected methods of creating Indigenous immobility that sustained and created conditions for the reserve and reservation systems as sites which sought to establish isolation and fixity in accordance with settlement.

The Blackfoot Confederacy, the buffalo, and the international border have been entangled in methods of colonial containment. The colonial dream is useful for understanding how these processes have come to occur and how the coding of land, animals, peoples, and territory has been used in the making of a white settler nation. Settler-colonialism is a spatial strategy of elimination that uses a combination of direct and indirect control to assert authority and police movement across the border. Historically, direct control operated through policies and practices that physically manifested, maintained, and enforced the border. Indirect border control strategies attacked Siksikaitsitapi motivation to move and to cross the border through the destruction of the buffalo, and the creation of reservations and reserves, Pass Laws, allotments, rations, and annuities.

### 3.2 The Elimination of the Buffalo

The buffalo were, and continue to be, an integral part of Siksikaitsitapi lifeways. Siksikaitsitapi followed and relied upon the buffalo. During the destruction of the buffalo, their understandings of the land and enactments of mobility were cast as incompatible with settlement and were thus found as in need of state regulation, control, containment, and surveillance. This is to say that settler-colonialism is a spatial strategy, wherein both the Canadian and American nation-states employed a combination of direct and indirect border control strategies to assert their authority and to police movement of the buffalo and the Siksikaitsitapi across the border. In this section, I will detail the historic proceedings and impacts of the loss of the buffalo.

Prior to settlement, the Siksikaitsitapi hunted the buffalo by foot. These times are often referred to as the “dog days” as dogs assisted in the hunt. During this time, the Siksikaitsitapi also used spears, bows, and arrows (Feir et al., 2017, p. 7; Isenberg, 2000; Zedeño et al., 2014). Pedestrian buffalo hunting involved highly specialized practices and strategies on a large scale which developed and changed over time. The Siksikaitsitapi reliance on buffalo hunting created a society with territories and hunting grounds, complex kinship networks, communities and sites of residence, power and economic structures based on accessing the buffalo herds, and land cultivation through grass burning to incite the growth of short grasses most preferred by buffalo (Zedeño et al., 2014). As one interviewee explained:

They followed the buffalo, the food source, and they also had a real strong and well-developed practice of ecology and control over the ecology. [. . .] They effectively managed the grasslands and the forests through the use of fire. That would create green grass in the spring. It would promote growth. That would also move the buffalo to another area [. . .] that managed the local environment and ecology. [. . .] Because they burned everything off to keep the grasslands intact and they were so nutritious that the buffalo thrived and the buffalo were so nutritious, our people thrived. (Interview, 10.18)

The Siksikaitsitapi socially segmented and migrated mirroring the patterns of the buffalo. During the summer the buffalo would congregate in the short grasses; then for the remainder of the year, they would search for food and water and disperse to avoid overgrazing (Interview, 10.18). The Siksikaitsitapi followed and hunted the buffalo, setting up seasonal Summer and Winter Camps (Interview, 10.18). After the introduction of the horse to hunting practices, the constant and long-distance movement and range continued and fostered a communal economic ethic rather than one of accumulation. Space and storage were prioritized for implements rather than belongings, customs that were at odds with the European trading practices (Isenberg, 2000, p. 78). Traveller John McDougall wrote of the Siksikaitsitapi in 1865, "Without the buffalo, they would be helpless, and yet the whole nation did not own one. To look at them and to hear them, one would feel as if they were the most independent of all men; yet the fact was they were the most dependent among men" (McDougall, 2012, p. 261). The Siksikaitsitapi used every part of the buffalo: as food, clothing, lodging, and tools. McDougall recalls, "They lived and had their physical being in the buffalo" (McDougall, 2012, p. 261).

The buffalo were a constant in Siksikaitsitapi lifeways, both substantively and spiritually, but to settlers the buffalo were a resource and commodity. Interviewees reported that the construction of the railroad in the 1800s, the demand for leather factory belts and tanned hides, and the expanded settlement population all prompted the killing of buffalo. An Amskapi-Piikani community member relayed that:

The buffalo were nearly hunted to extinction . . . the buffalo were used for drive belts—it was very strong, and it was resilient, and it could remain flexible. And so, they used the buffalo hide, and that drove all those wheels of the industrial revolution back east. And so, the buffalo were hunted and hunted. (Interview, 09.18)

Settler-colonialism was facilitated by the expansion of both European ecology and economy (Isenberg, 2000, p. 32). As land was claimed through settlement, settlers cleared trees and put up fences for agriculture and livestock, opening up the ecological communities and Indigenous lands to new plants, animals, and disease through “ecological imperialism.”<sup>5</sup> The simultaneous accumulation of lands and the new spatial ordering of private property reveal that the transformation of the lands and the emergence of capitalism were mutually reinforcing systems. Buffalo were perceived as both a resource to be exploited for economic gain—their hides as drive belts in the Industrial Revolution reflected a preoccupation with progress—and wild beasts to be eliminated, so as to not impede progress or civilization and to make way for the domestic animals involved in agriculture, farming, and ranching (Mayer, 1958; Oetelaar, 2014, p. 98). The connection between the Siksikaitstapi and buffalo was readily apparent, and so settlers saw the Siksikaitstapi as inevitably following the buffalo towards either civilization and agriculture or elimination. The asymmetrical power of settlers asserting dominion over lands, animals, and peoples is evident in the avowal that nothing should stand in the way of their civilizing mission or social and economic progress.

While neither Canada nor the US had policies to eliminate the buffalo, both states actively pursued their endangerment.<sup>6</sup> Buffalo were a method of containing and controlling the Siksikaitstapi, through a logic of elimination which hastened starvation

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<sup>5</sup> A term coined by Alfred W. Crosby.

<sup>6</sup> Many scholars argue that although the destruction of the buffalo was not legislated, it was deliberately promoted by the two governments in order to force Indigenous nations to give up their treaty rights. See: (Isenberg, 2000)

and a turn to colonial settlement patterns and agricultural practices rather than nomadic land tenure.<sup>7</sup> A Kainai Elder expressed that:

We occupied this land but according to them just because we weren't farmers and all that and we didn't have towns and cities they feel that we didn't occupy this land – the whole farming concept. You've got to cultivate the fields or you have to put a post to mark it as belongs to you. They can't comprehend. They can't get it through their heads that we occupied this without cutting every tree down without drilling oil without damming rivers. It's very difficult to imagine and they say, they make no improvements to the land.... Nobody understands the nomadic patterns. That's why we say we occupied all this land. Not just at one time and staying there but we moved around. Same migratory patterns for thousands of years and another band and another band and another band. All these patterns are still not good enough according to British doctrine of Terra Nullius and Doctrine of Discovery. (Interview, 10.18)

The buffalo was seen as a threat to white settlers' "encroaching civilization," private property, and possessions (Mayer, 1958, p. 152). These rationalizations rest on the racist belief in the superiority of settlers and colonial land use strategies that presuppose the inevitability of colonial progress or advancement in the form of elimination and assimilation – from Siksikaitsitapi to settlers and from buffalo to livestock.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In 1873 the US Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano stated: "I would not seriously regret the total disappearance of the buffalo from our western prairies, in its effect on the Indians, regarding it rather as a means of hastening their sense of dependence upon the products of the soil and their own labors." Secretary Delano, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1873*, iii-ix; *Ibid.*, 1872, 42nd Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess. (Serial 1560), 5. cited in (Isenberg, 2000, p. 152)

<sup>8</sup> These sentiments were expressed outright without concealment. Representative Omar Conger of Michigan said in 1874 that "there is no law which a Congress of men can enact, that will stay the disappearance of these wild animals before civilization. They eat the grass. They trample upon the plains upon which our settlers desire to herd their cattle and their sheep. They are as uncivilized as the Indian." Cited in Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *American Historical Association Annual Report* (1893), 199-227. In 1873 Colonel Dodge wrote: "Kill every buffalo you can, every buffalo dead is an Indian gone." cited in (Butler, 1913, p. 97).

The disappearance of the buffalo created favourable conditions for confining the Siksikaitsitapi to reserves and reservations. Without the buffalo, many of their nomadic customs could not be practiced. A community member commented:

When we signed those treaties we became dependent wards of the US government and that is a legal term [ . . . ] because we were now dependent on the US government. We used to be self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-governing, all of that. We did the hunting, we did the fishing, we did the gathering, we were nomads. (Interview, 09.18)

Removing the buffalo from the plains was a spatial attempt at control and dependence: in the USA missionaries and legal agents could offer rations, supplies, and aid but saved those provisions for people who stayed within reservation boundaries (McManus, 2005, p. 73). In 1855 the Lane Bull Treaty was signed between Siksikaitsitapi Chief Lane Bull and the United States Government. The treaty promised annual goods and services in exchange for the Siksikaitsitapi moving and maintaining sustained settlement on a reservation. While discussing changes that came with the loss of the buffalo, an interviewee said:

We were always a nation. When the government of the Americas side made treaties, it was because we were similar in power. And then agreements came after that because after it became more concentrated with the weaponry [ . . . ] The West was won by eliminating our food supply, the buffalo. That is really what devastated us all. Throughout the Americas. That was our economy, that was everything. That is how the West was won. The whole strategy was cutting off the food. And that is exactly what happened, we couldn't trade anymore, for guns and butter. We had nothing to eat. (Interview, 10.18)

Another interviewee similarly stated:

They were killing buffaloes off [ . . . ] and they were stacking their bones for display. The one thing that they could do to Native people was take buffalo from us at that time and they did it. So, our ways of survival were definitely affected for sure. (Interview, 10.18)

In Canada, the loss of the buffalo incentivized First Nations to enter into treaty negotiations and accept terms of treaties signed between 1874 and 1877. Not only were the Siksikaitsitapi coerced into signing treaties, but treaty negotiations were misrepresented. A Kainai Elder recalled:

There's no fighting allowed, there's no negative relationship allowed, between two people or two groups that form that alliance, it lasts forever for life. That's where it comes from. So when the treaties came along, we were cautioned by some of the old timers that were at *Lame Bull* and cautioned our leaders when they were gathering us for the Blackfoot treaty. Be careful, these people don't tell the truth. Use the pipe, make a sacred alliance with them. So that's how the pipe was used in the treaty making process. But you look at the official documents. No mention of the pipe. No mention of ceremony, just what the commissioners wrote down, that became the official . . . but the stories of our people there was a pipe involved, there was ceremony involved, the smudge was involved. [. . .] We have no concept of distance measurements, mile, numbering system. We were told that it was supposed to be a peace treaty. What it was was the biggest land grab in the history of Canada. [. . .] This was our home. So that was the only time they mentioned land—home. There's totally no mention of surrender and giving up the whole territory, we don't even have a term for surrendering, it's . . . the land is part of us. You don't give away your left arm. No, it's just impossible. It's a concept that doesn't exist. We have a sacred alliance kinship between the universe, life, the land. (Interview, 10.18)

The destruction of the buffalo had profound impacts for the Siksikaitsitapi. The colonial destruction of the buffalo signified the transformation of the landscape into settler-colonial geographies, categorizations, and confinements. Many interviewees reflected on how profoundly their lifeways were affected. Changes were both substantive and spiritual, as one Elder described: “We are connected to the land, innately and inextricably connected to the land. And the buffalo is a link in that. And so, with the loss of the buffalo, it sort of broke that link” (Interview, 10.18).



*Photo 4 Buffalo herd in Amskapi-Piikani (Source: S. van Beek)*

Feir et al. report that “the buffalo were exterminated in northern Montana and Saskatchewan by 1878, in Wyoming and Alberta by 1880, and that the last buffalo in the remaining territory was gone by 1883” (Feir et al., 2017, p. 11). Buffalo were a substantial and sacred-social way of life for the Siksikaitsitapi, buffalo were food, clothing, tools, lodging as well as traditional teachers and spiritual organizational and governance models. Historic evidence suggests that the number of buffalo historically existing in North America was as high 40 million, with the near-extinction of the buffalo taking place over the course of just over 10 years (Blackfeet Nation, 2018; Feir et al., 2017).

The near extinction of the buffalo by the 1870s compelled a small number of preservationists to protect the few remaining animals to be the foundation stock for the private and public herds that exist today. These preservationists were primarily ranchers who saw ownership possibilities and profitability (Interview, 10.18). Those who advocated for the protection of the remaining buffalo recommended a park where buffalo could be protected and “preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness” (Catlin, 1913, pp. 294–295). The buffalo were confined to paddocks in the Rocky

Mountain Park, followed by the Pablo-Allard herd purchase for the Elk Island Reserve and Wood Buffalo Park in Canada. In the United States, buffalo migrated south into Yellowstone National Park to avoid commercial hunters and the destruction of their grazing lands by livestock and farmers (Interview, 10.18). The loss of habitat and vast numbers resulted in an imprisoned and captive grouping which could only be genetically maintained through human intervention (Isenberg, 2000, p. 165). The buffalo became a tourist attraction, a symbol of Canadian and US western wilderness and frontier nostalgia promoting recreation and settlement on the prairies while serving as a subject of research (Dorst, 2007; McHugh, 1958; Oetelaar, 2014, p. 99; Soper, 1941). Even preservationists argued that the near extinction of the buffalo was necessary for the capitalist economic development of the region, situating free-roaming buffalo as “incompatible” with cattle, productivity, and economic growth and thus highlighting the colonial irreconcilability of progress, nature, and frontier nostalgia (Isenberg, 2000, pp. 166–167). The destruction of the buffalo and intertwined ecological and economic practices reinforced the idea of progress on the plains. Like the buffalo, surviving Siksikaitsitapi communities were confined and kept to reserve and reservation spaces.

Seed argues that separating Indigenous peoples from their land is foundational to settler-colonialism, as the economic system is reliant upon owning lands (Seed, 2001). The destruction of the buffalo led to the dispossession of the Siksikaitsitapi of their lands materially and symbolically. Materially, through physical violence and starvation, and symbolically through the devaluation and disparagement of nonsedentary land tenure. Moral denigration was accomplished by contrasting settlement with “unimproved,” “unproductive,” or “wasteful” land practices thought to produce unpopulated and uncultivated lands or simply wilderness (Seed, 2001, p. 50). This process relied upon separating nature from society by creating a moral economy premised on land as an exploitable resource—an economy which allowed unlimited

access and accumulation to those who transformed and controlled land (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004, p. 278).

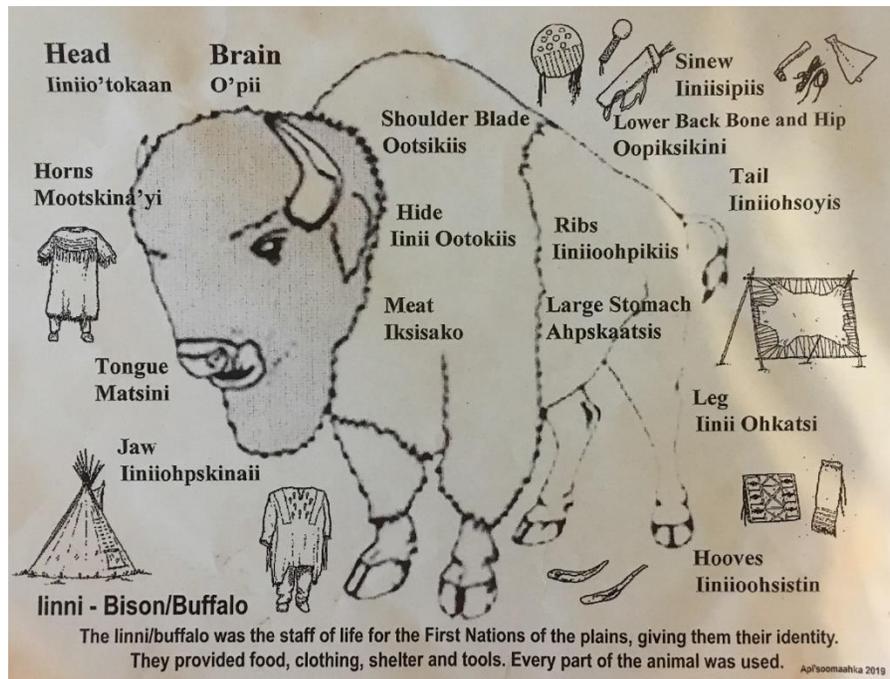


Photo 5 Blackfoot language handout on buffalo parts and uses (Source: Api'soomaahka 2019)

Through the loss of the buffalo, removal and confinement of Indigenous communities to small reserve and reservation spaces became justifiable and the violence obscured. The elimination of the buffalo profoundly altered the landscape and facilitated settler-colonial spatial reconfiguration. In the logic of elimination, Indigenous peoples are deemed to be fragile and in the process of (naturally and inevitably) disappearing (Veracini, 2011, p. 6). Elimination is not just about removing people from the lands but also eliminating practices and customs through ideological domination of cultural difference and political deviance (Brown, 1993, p. 661). Through the colonial destruction of the buffalo, the Plains Indigenous peoples became imagined as communities in need of civilization, control, management, and regulation from a paternalist source. Siksikaitsitapi understandings of the land, customs, traditions, structures, and enactments of mobility were imagined as a threat to settlement and thus

marked as in need of state regulation, control, containment, and surveillance. The destruction of the buffalo facilitated Siksikaitsitapi enclosure onto reserves and a reservation. Containment enables dispossession at a material level while also creating conditions which normalize the development of settler dominion (Federici, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Mawani, 2009). Not only did making colonial territory and space rely upon the confinement of Indigenous peoples, but processes of confinement were entirely dependent on symbolic and substantive transformations of the lands (Sluyter, 2002). Settler-colonialism invests itself in managing and regulating space, lands, and bodies.

### **3.3 Building the Border**

We have always crossed this area, but we have not always crossed a border, this border. (Tribal Border Summit Public Forum, 25.01.19)

With the border, we are separated from our connections—to our family, to our lands. And separating us is the colonial way of assimilating us and forcing us to leave our homelands. (EMRIP Participant, 26.01.19)

I can't go put my feet there as my ancestors did for ten thousand years. (Tribal Border Summit Public Forum, 25.01.19)

At the core of settler-colonialism is land and territory, but territory is not a given or an unmade space. It is a bounded space, confined and controlled by a (nation-)state. How a state comes to gain control of a space, determine a fixed boundary, and whether territory can be exhaustively understood as the spatial extent of the state, are important to underpinning borders as a political strategy. This section will detail the building of the international border across Siksikaitsitapi traditional lands. The building of the border relied upon developing Siksikaitsitapi dispossession through confinement and immobility to declare ownership of the land and create nation-state territory.

Geographer Robert Sack writes that territoriality is “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by



*Photo 6 US-Canada border demarcation (Source: S. van Beek)*

delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” and that “territoriality is the primary spatial form power takes” (Sack, 1986, pp. 19, 26). State territoriality is then a production of the state as a territorial entity by means of demarcating space, drawing borders, asserting control over people and processes as they come within those borders and up against those borders. By understanding territory and the state as the effect or product of spatial practices, we can go further to see that territory is not simply the physical landscape, but how the landscape becomes articulated and transformed in the making and mapping of territorialization (Lunstrum, 2007, p. 12, 2009; Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011; Vandergeest, 1996; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995).

The loss of the buffalo and the building of the border are entangled methods of creating containment and colonial control. The destruction of the buffalo was an explicit

method to alter and remove land-intensive forms of political economy and placemaking, while the making of the border between Alberta and Montana operated to establish and enforce the bounds of Canadian and US state sovereignties. To facilitate nationhood and assert colonial state sovereignty over Siksikaitsitapi place and domain, the landscape had to be constructed as abstracted and devoid of Indigenous histories. Setting the boundary and limits of the state clearly demarcated where could be commodified and settled (McManus, 2005, p. 12). Physically marking and coming to acknowledge the border represented the bisecting of two distinct territorial entities, each with their own land-base and governance (Saler & Podruchny, 2010). However, this production of territory and dual states could only be shaped by denying Siksikaitsitapi tenure and by controlling movement across the borderlands. If the Siksikaitsitapi continued to move across their lands and enact their traditional movement, trading, ecologies, and kinship networks, it fundamentally would refute the meaningfulness of the border. The artificial nature of the border is apparent in considering the interconnectedness of the lands through the migratory routes of the buffalo and the Siksikaitsitapi peoples who shaped the plains without consideration of a linear line. Moreover, neither the buffalo nor the Siksikaitsitapi were protected on either side of the line from colonial predation, starvation, or disease (Atlas, 2016, p. 326). The border was made by producing and demarcating a boundary, but also by indirectly attacking Siksikaitsitapi motivations and abilities to cross by implementing confinement through reservations, reserves, and the destruction of the buffalo.

For these reasons, Siksikaitsitapi movement across the borderlands historically and continuously emphasizes the importance of interrogating the lands on which the border operates, the territorial notion of the border, and the contingent assertions of sovereignty the boundary represents. A Kainai Elder elaborated:

Here in Siksikaitsitapi, we were nomadic. So, the 49th parallel is an imaginary line. And so they were not taken into consideration when we say sovereignty for the Blackfeet. [ . . . ] The 49th parallel—there was never any consultation with the Blackfeet people. These were all imposed on us from both sides with the whole colonialism thing, and it is getting to be redundant and no shame. (Interview, 10.18)

As is suggested by this interviewee quote, the concept of mobility is central to the making of the borderlands both conceptually and constructively. Siksikaitsitapi mobility was used to deny Siksikaitsitapi customs, traditions, land tenure systems, and sovereignty. In settler-colonial law, in the case of nonsedentary peoples, mobility signalled the absence of possession and political agency. Movement suggested inoccupancy rather than sustained connection to place or peoples with their own system of placemaking set within a framework of negotiated and distinct socio-legal and sacred spatial formations. For the Siksikaitsitapi, the borderlands are storied spaces of “hunting, trapping, and fishing”<sup>9</sup> in which social networks are organized around trade, exchange, and alliances rather than wandering, self-interested impulse, or mere subsistence (Interview, 10.18). To illustrate this point, an Apatohsi-Piikani Elder recalled:

It wasn't just as though we happened to come across [buffalo]. There's a long history of us using fire for range management. Whenever people moved from their Summer Camp to the Winter Camp we burned up that area as we left to make room for the animals to come back to . . . and there's also some plants that need fire to regenerate too. So, that's why it's range management that we did and not many people know that about us. We're not just nomads who roam the prairie and all that stuff. We had set camps, we had set rotation where we went

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<sup>9</sup> Within the interviews conducted there were differing accounts of how and which hunting and gathering practices were performed. In using this quotation, it is not my intent to discredit other accounts or validate this account only, but instead to demonstrate the sustained and everlasting Siksikaitsitapi networks and connections with the lands and nonhuman inhabitants.

and why we went there and also we have our clan system and family systems that expanded into different areas. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

The border brought the narrative of stability and containment through territorial boundaries. Against these boundaries Siksikaitsitapi movement was cast as lawlessness, trespassing, and incursion, portraying the Siksikaitsitapi as inherently placeless and thus the lands as reasonably within the government's purview (Rifkin, 2009b, p. 137).

The Rush-Gallatin Convention of 1818 defined the straight boundary along the 49th parallel extending from the Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains as the border between the United States and British claims to the interior (Konrad & Nicol, 2008, p. 69). The convention was signed by representatives of the United States and Great Britain in London, England, a location and grouping of people far removed from the local realities. Commenting on this, an interviewee remarked that "the governments left all Indians out of the discussion and the treaty and any consideration for the boundary. And literally drew it through their country" (Interview, 10.18). While the convention sought to establish a frontier line for settlement by colonists, nothing resembling a border existed yet on the prairies (Hall, 2017, pp. 381–382). The Siksikaitsitapi travelled across the border without issue well past 1818. Despite the Jay Treaty of 1794 creating the first International Boundary Commission, and the convention of 1818 delineating the border, it wasn't until 1856 to 1861 that the mountain boundary was surveyed, followed by the survey from Lake of the Woods to the Red River Settlement in the winters of 1872 and 1873, then the survey from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains in the summers of 1873 and 1874 (Konrad & Nicol, 2008, p. 69). This process required an assertion of settler-colonial control and transformation of the imagined and real landscape along the 49th parallel. An interviewee commented that:

A lot of the map surveyors, land surveyors, from the 1800s that did the 49th parallel. They were given a lot of authority. And so, it is like somebody coming into your house, and they rearrange everything and then after they rearranged

everything, they take over your house and you're sitting in there, and you have no say, and when it is all over then, you actually get kicked out of your own house. (Interview, 10.18)



*Photo 7 Border demarcation line (Source: S. van Beek)*

It took a century for the United States and Britain, then Canada, to survey, map, and maintain the border to the point of realization. Throughout the making and marking of the border, the Siksikaitsitapi continued to cross over. As an interviewee explained: “We thought we would continue living the way we were living and go back and forth over the border and follow the bison herds” (Elders Dialogue, 09.18). The path that surveyors followed to identify and demarcate the border was originally a migratory route of the buffalo and the Indigenous peoples who travelled with them (Konrad & Nicol, 2008, p. 69 note 40). Though the border represented an insistence on unity, coherence, contiguity within national geographies, and inherent separation from the other nation-state and territory, the Siksikaitsitapi continued to contest this colonial spatial organization and travel across the border and along their ancestral lands. For many years, more than enforcement of territory, the border could be defined by how

ineffective it was at impeding Siksikaitsitapi movement, and how it was even utilized as a strategic tool for the Siksikaitsitapi.<sup>10</sup>

Seasonal travelling, buffalo hunts, and raids were significant elements of Plains Indigenous culture (Samek, 2010, p. 154). Rather than conceptualizing these activities and crossing the border as a reaction to settler state territorialization, the continuation of these activities after the formation and enforcement of the border is better understood as an enactment of what has been since time immemorial: enduring Siksikaitsitapi occupancy and traditional land use. The border became a part of these activities as it allowed for a swift reprieve from surveillance and policing when national jurisdiction became unclear. This was explained by an interviewee:

The boundary, the Medicine Line as we call it—the reason we call it the Medicine Line is because when people would get in trouble on either side and would flee, once they get to the border and cross, if it was from Canada coming to the U.S. the RCMPs would stop, and the people would be able to continue and vice versa. The soldiers would chase them to the border, and they would have to stop. That's why we call it because our people thought it was big medicine because they stopped right there, they couldn't continue. It's not because it's holy or sacred. (Interview, 03.18)

During this time, there are many stories of crossing the border to visit with relations, to find buffalo, and for ceremonies. For many years the Siksikaitsitapi continued to travel by wagon and camp for weeks or months at a time (Interview, 10.18). Elders noted that “they still ha[d] that mind mentality that this was all theirs. Even a superficial line like the border, it did not stop them” (Elders Dialogue, 09.18).

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<sup>10</sup> This knowledge underscores the importance of complex understandings of the borderlands and considering the role the Siksikaitsitapi played in the historical intricacies of the border. Pekka Hamalainen and Samuel Truett have called for scholars to “ask how [Indigenous peoples] created the conditions for borderlands history rather than simply looking at how they acted within it” (Hämäläinen & Truett, 2011, p. 352).

The loss of the buffalo happened more quickly in the north, so the Siksikaitstapi were encouraged to travel south of the border to hunt and to avoid starvation (McManus, 2005, p. 70). As recalled by an Apatohsi-Piikani Elder, the border was not considered inviolable and the Siksikaitstapi crossed for buffalo hunting:

One of my grandfathers on my mother's side, he went on the last buffalo hunt, and he told his people "I'm going to go look for the buffalo so we can hunt." and so he took his two wives and two children south and they must have gone across the border and they went as far as Great Falls. And then he decided he was going to turn back he said, "I give up because there's no more buffalo here." (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

While the Medicine Line represented a respite for the Siksikaitstapi, it paradoxically allowed state officials to reinforce the notion of separate states by suggesting that the Siksikaitstapi from the other nation (whether that be Canada or the USA) were problematically roaming and causing harm to settlers (McManus, 2005, pp. 69–70). The problems of wandering and warfare were blamed on spatial proximity; officials claimed that the closeness between the Siksikaitstapi nations of the Confederacy was to blame for frequent travel and raids (McManus, 2005, p. 79). An interviewee elaborated, saying:

The intention was to physically separate this Confederacy. So now the Piikani has a small reserve right here, and we have a little bigger reserve right here. And Amskapi-Piikani they have a little reserve like that. Same here. So intentionally it was split up.... There is a buffer zone. A lot of it was due to the American what they call the Indian Wars Battles. [. . .] So when there is conflict there. "What about these Blackfeet to the north? What if they join the fight? We better separate them a little bit more." So our southern border kept moving further north because there was intentionally a buffer zone. And then they made it against the law for us to leave the reserve without a permit. Even to go from one end of the reserve to the other end, you needed a permit from the superintendent. (Interview, 10.18)

Invoking the possibility of raids and wars is directly connected to asserting colonial authority over the lands. Mobility and raids were characterized not only as a

threat to settler safety but also as counter to the law and the legal means by which settlement is legitimized. Under the pretense of a geographic method of peacekeeping and moral lawfulness, physically separating the Confederacy followed from the colonial intent to break Indigenous networks and confine Indigenous peoples within rigid and delineated boundaries. Simply put, one interviewee stated, “the border is meant to divide us” (Interview, 10.18).

For the Siksikaitstapi, referring to the 49th parallel as the “Medicine Line” also signals a recognition that there were contrasting policies and realities on each side of the border. Siksikaitstapi travel and occupancy across the “Medicine Line” challenges the seeming immutability of borders. The border is a site of territorial state making, but beyond discrete nation-states, nation-building takes place through dynamics along and across borders (Lunstrum, 2007, p. 15). Borders are not impermeable, and territorialization patterns could only derive from denying ongoing Indigenous ancestral lands and sovereignty. The border was a central site of scrutiny for the state, a site symbolizing control and containment. It is recorded that legal practitioners noted success when they could report that the Siksikaitstapi “have shown a greater disposition to work this year than last, and I think that their habit of going across the line is almost broken” (McManus, 2005, p. 79).

Among those interviewed, there was no consensus on a specific time when border crossing became difficult, or when there was a restriction to access. As one interviewee put it, “there might be some varying dates, about that nobody is positive” (Interview, 10.18). Many interviewees had stories and associations within their families and relations of how their memory and perception surrounding the border came to be. One participant spoke of their grandfather working as border police, saying that the border came into effect during prohibition when the USA wanted to deny the whiskey trade (Interview, 10.18). Another spoke of her great grandmother travelling south while

pregnant, then upon trying to return north, all of a sudden coming across the border and experiencing fear she would not be able to travel home with a new baby (Interview, 10.18). In each account there was agreement that the implementation of the border came with increased policing and surveillance at the border and enforcement of the border (Elders Dialogue, 09.18; Interview, 10.18). This timeline matches records that show that shortly after Confederation in 1867, a Canadian act of Parliament in 1873 created the North-West Mounted Police, who were tasked with eradicating the whiskey trade and monitoring the movement of Indigenous peoples (Oetelaar, 2014, p. 88). One interviewee explicitly stated: “Well the only problem started when the RCMP, when they came. That's . . . one day we started having that border issues I guess you could say” (Elders Dialogue, 09.18).

Bordering and enforcing the line as a territorial limit of the settler state relied on restricting mobility and who and what were allowed inside and outside of the boundary. Settler-colonialism depends upon exclusivist notions of land ownership and territory demarcated by borders. As activists Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis write, “all borders are acts of state violence inscribed in landscape” (Moctezuma & Davis, 1999). Settler-colonial statehood, sovereignty, and governance are produced in primacy through the border, which marks and maintains territorial “economic, political, social, and cultural” control (Interview, 10.18). The border is meaningfully a site of reifying and consolidating colonial power. An interviewee expanded on this point by saying:

They confined us. When they were coming westward, the westward roll of the Europeans. They set that up as a way to control us. They said it was supposed to protect us but it wasn't really for protection. And when they were setting up to stake claim in the name of the Queen, it was never done in a sense of equal, like equal in law. And that's how come we ended up confined. And so, what is really difficult is there are all sorts of policies and stuff like that which parcels land and locks us in, and I guess it was set up in a way where we were supposed to starve

away. That's my input. It's all a strategy and an issue that we can't go back and forth. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

As this quote indicates, the Siksikaitsitapi understand the border as a mechanism of immobility and as an indicator of the nation-state's reliance on control and ownership of the territory. Regularly, interviewees used words such as "trapped," "contained," "confined," "imprisoned," "separated," and "divided" in reference to the border. Each of these words make evident the border strategy as a spatial transformation characterized by Siksikaitsitapi immobility (Interviews, 03.18, 09.18, 10.19). This was put explicitly by a pair of Amskapi-Piikani Elders:

Speaker 1: That is the European idea of putting ownership on everything. They owned it, they claimed it, and then they regulate it.

Speaker 2: Yeah, and they divided it. They divided it.

Speaker 1: Leaving us totally out. (Interview, 10.18)

Not only did the border serve to justify and maintain the racialized lines of placemaking, control, and a strategy of Siksikaitsitapi containment, but it also served to delineate belonging and divide peoples as contiguous groupings (McManus, 2005, p. 57). The spatial logics and territorial logics of settler-colonialism codify access and relationship to space, and "race is articulated through a discourse of space, specifically an opposition between settlement and mobility" (Rifkin, 2009b, p. 114). While interviewees discussed the loss of nomadic structures, mobility, learning and sharing, culture, language, travel, and visiting that took place after the formation of the border, many also focused on how the members of the Confederacy were categorized and confined. One interviewee said:

For both sides, the border plays an interesting part in our way of life and how it has become.... It separated families, it separated culture, ceremonies, way of life, and that was the beginning of our end as free-roaming people. It imposed a lot of do's and don'ts on our people but now, in the last hundred years we've become

more aware of what it's done.... To us the border is not here in our hearts, but politically we know it's there. (Interview, 03.18)

As Mathew Sparke suggests, “emancipatory possibilities stem from an insistence that as First Nations these peoples also have discrete, territorially defined claims to sovereignty that, in some cases, transcend today’s international border and in all cases go back long before the Cartesian colonization of regional space by cadastral and national borders” (Sparke, 2005, p. 103). While the drawing of the international border has maintained the administrative fiction of domestic space, it has operated to define occupancy through state legal geographies that map over pre-existing Indigenous traditions. The international border rejects the idea of shared use or shared territory; it separates traditional communities and crossing sites, and it desecrates and inhibits access to sacred sites, legends, songs, stories, plants, pilgrimages, gravesites, and ancestral remains. The border mapped out new settler-colonial legal operations onto embodied and storied landscapes that hold Siksikaitsitapi histories, presence, occupation, and socio-legal sacred traditions. Although the imposition of the border was rooted in settler-colonial spatial logics, this is not to say the landscape has been entirely transformed. By crossing and continuing relations with their lands, lifeways, and communities, the Siksikaitsitapi (have) continued to enact their occupancy of the lands. During a group discussion one day, an Elder said quite plainly: “the land belongs to all of us, but the line belongs to them” (EMRIP Participant, 26.01.19).

### **3.4 Reserves and Reservations**

During the formation of the borderlands, the reservation and reserve systems were an explicit and continuous effort by the US and Canadian governments to control the Siksikaitsitapi and to create fixed and dependant peoples. These attempts were predicated on and enabled by the destruction of the buffalo, which “almost annihilated the Siksikaitsitapi,” and were an indirect method of border control maintained by

attacking and limiting the Siksikaitsitapi ability and motivation to access the border (Bastien, 2004, p. 19; Hoy, 2014). The destruction of the buffalo, the formation of the border, and the implementation of the reserve and reservation systems are connected and interlocking processes of colonial containment.

The making of Siksikaitsitapi reserves in Canada and the Siksikaitsitapi reservation in the United States can be understood as manifestations of colonial ideologies enacted to produce dispossession and to establish the sovereignty of the settler state. This production of settler space not only relied on imagining space devoid of Siksikaitsitapi tenure, but also depended on the substantive and practical work of dividing, coding, and mapping lands, and confining the Siksikaitsitapi within the nation-state on reserves and a reservation. Two interviewees remarked:

Speaker 1: We are restricted in private ownership of land, but when the two big players, the Canadian government and the US government, become in a sense private ownership and fence it and restrict it that is even more restriction that we are dealing with now.

Speaker 2: But it is their rules that they decided we need to live by. (Interview, 10.18)

The Siksika, Apatohsi-Piikani, and Kainai reserves were established from the Canadian federal government-imposed Band council governance system—stemming from the Indian Act following the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877. Siksikaitsitapi reserves were created based on spatial and racialized boundaries, which needed to be maintained in order to ensure separation and containment. Similar to border spatial logics, separating the Blackfoot Confederacy and isolating the Siksikaitsitapi from settlers relied upon the Siksikaitsitapi to be bounded by their reserve boundaries, requiring fixity and control (McManus, 2005, p. 91). Legislating boundedness took place in myriad ways and was premised on the spatial categorizing of “Indians” and “their reserves” (Hunt, 2014b).

The racist assumptions underpinning the making of reserves extends to how they were managed, enforced, and policed. One interview participant spoke of the Indian Agents refusing to let the Siksikaitsitapi hunt, instead giving each family one cow and demanding that they reorganize their ways to practice agriculture on the reserve (Interview, 10.18). The interviewee was clear that even though the reserve communities were given cows (which served as a plausible alternative to buffalo hunting) cattle ranching was prevented, constrained, and impeded by the Indian Agents until the 1940s (Interview, 10.18) (Iverson, 1997; Trosper, 1978). Other interviewees spoke about residential schooling and missionaries serving to sever the children from their communities, their language, their lifeways, and their lands. Some spoke of prohibitions of ceremonies and dances, having sacred bundles stolen, or the 1885 ban of the Sun Dance (Comack, 2012). Settler-colonial dominance and enforced dependence created the conditions for Indian Agents to use coercive measures to ensure immobility and maintenance of colonial geographies and boundaries. Elders explained:

They outlawed our ceremonies, and along with that they had a policy which they won't admit to but for our grandfathers if they wanted to go visit relatives anywhere, even going into town, they have to get a permit from the Indian agent. Saying how long we're going to be there and when we come back type thing and if we don't come back they'll send the police on us. So, at that time it was a further impediment to even interact with each other. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

The year 1885 also brought the beginning of what are known as Pass Laws. Pass Laws did not end until the 1950s, as described by Siksikaitsitapi Elders. As is illustrated in the quote above, Pass Laws served to restrict and make visible all Siksikaitsitapi mobility off the reserve. Piikani scholar Betty Bastien describes Pass Laws as creating an apartheid spatial system between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and notes that Pass Laws were never written into law or legislated but were still enforced by Indian Agents and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Bastien, 2004, p. 21). Pass Laws clearly indicate the segregation of space, confinement, and the colonial dream of creating

immobile and controllable populations—in this case under the designation of “common good” or “public interest” (Bastien, 2004, p. 21).

All of these containment methods attempted to legislate sacred relationships to kin and the land out of existence. Siksikaitsitapi lands, legal traditions, and culture were mapped over materially and symbolically. However, these traditions remained (and continue to remain). Many Elders speak of how private homes were used to hold events, while children were stationed outside to watch for the Indian Agent (Elders Dialogue, 09.18). This is to say that colonial space is made but has been and will continue to be resisted in diverse ways.

The Amskapi-Piikani Blackfeet reservation in Montana has a different history from the Canadian reserves, but the colonial dream of control and immobility is continuous. After the formation of the 49th parallel in 1818, the US state began imposing new spatial orders. The Fort Laramie treaty of 1851<sup>11</sup> set aside lands for the Blackfeet without having any delegates for the Siksikaitsitapi people present. An interviewee made the connection:

So, with the Fort Laramie being the oldest for our contact, you know to say okay that's where the border issue started coming up with us because we never agree to it even at Fort Laramie treaty . . . we never agreed to the border, we will never agree to that border. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

The Lame Bull Treaty of 1855 made way for the railroad and set apart hunting grounds and an exclusive Blackfeet reservation. The reordering of space was more gradual than in the Canadian context. Much of the spatial reorganization affected the Siksikaitsitapi

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<sup>11</sup> The Fort Laramie Treaty was a flawed treaty, as it set aside hunting grounds as long as the buffalo roamed, and when signed the state knew the buffalo populations were depleting. Beyond this, the treaty assigned Indigenous land and hunting territory, but allowed settler access to the lands for scientific exploration, land grants, and mining—all activities which fit within the legal grounds to claim settlement. See: (Isenberg, 2000, pp. 125, 128)

during the Starvation Winter of 1883-1884 when buffalo were scarce, and then through the Dawes Act or General Allotment Act of 1887. In speaking with Amskapi-Piikani community members, interviewees see this act as highly detrimental and related to bordering as it separated, regulated, and relegated who was a “Canadian” or “American” Siksikaitsitapi using enrollment, rolls, and registration. An Amskapi-Piikani community member described:

What happened? I guess after land allotment and all of that happened here on our reservation. They start telling the people you have to choose to be a Canadian or a US. So if you're going to be choose to live in Canada, then you can't get rations here no more. So therefore then they start just going, they signed the treaty and there were leaders from all three groups up there that still came here still camped here still took part here, but for annuity and ration see. So we had people coming from Standoff coming down to pay their taxes so they could keep their land. They shouldn't have even had to pay taxes because they were part of us, but some I know came down to pay their taxes and they went before Council and ask for recognition, but because of our enrollment laws, they weren't on well they weren't able to pass their enrollment. So we lost that land to taxes. (Interview, 09.18)

Another community member said, similarly:

We were one, period. But because of hunting and because of where we live when they put the border in, they were there and we were here. (Interview, 03.18)

The Allotment Act also designated that Blackfeet lands could be held as private property. Interviewees felt that designating the area as available for ownership as private property led to a loss of lands to sales and taxation. The effects were explained:

The “in trust” lands we don't pay taxes on because that was in our treaties as to what the lands mean, but the land is still in trust of the United States [. . .] When they created the Allotment Act you were allotted so much land and then you could do what you wanted as an individual with that allotted piece. So if you chose to take it out of trust and put it into fee then it can be taxed and you can use that to mortgage to get financing. That's kind of hard. That's how we've lost a lot of our lands within the reservation that people did take them out of trust and put them into fee and sold to non-members. So then we lost that so and then in

the beginning used to be all just tribal and it probably should have stayed that way, because we wouldn't have lost any. When it's in trust and it is tribal trust or even for mine it can't be sold which is a good thing. So consequently, we lost a lot of our lands. (Interview, 10.18)

Settlement, then, is premised on the process of making space that is commodified, compartmentalized, and defined through Western socio-legal property regimes. Owning, maintaining, and having dominion over property becomes a signal of civilization and lawfulness, while space outside of property forms an antithesis—as wilderness, as uncivilized, as chaotic. This colonial geographic imaginary creates conditions for towns, reserves, and territorial boundaries to be superimposed on Indigenous ancestral lands, demonstrable through legal logics such as *terra nullius*, the doctrine of discovery, and manifest destiny. The making, monitoring, and enforcing of these spatial boundaries separates settler space from Indigenous space, allowing for settler mobility across property and access to lands while simultaneously marking Indigenous spaces and peoples as outside of civilization, as lawless and in need of taming, regulation, containment, or pacification. Blomley writes that “western notions of property are deeply invested in a colonial geography, a white mythology, in which the racialized figure of the savage plays a central role” (Blomley, 2003, p. 124). Colonial geographies codify people and their humanity based on their relationship to property and space, rendering violence as outside of spaces of settlement, or as necessary and under the control of civilizing logics.<sup>12</sup> The territorial project of making the nation-state then is informed and enforced by the colonial dream of containment, which is realized through a combination of direct and indirect border control strategies that assert authority and police movement up to and across boundaries.

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the relationship between wilderness, humanity, and national place making see: (Lawrence, 2004; Mackey, 1999; Mawani, 2007; Pasternak, 2017; Thobani, 2007)

### 3.5 Conclusion

Settler-colonialism seeks to break the relationship between Indigenous people and the land in order to claim, categorize, and commodify it. Colonialism is a geographic strategy, facilitated through a logic of confinement. The building of the border and the destruction of the buffalo are entangled methods of creating colonial control and Siksikaitstapi immobility. Settler-colonialism and the making of the state emerge from a “struggle over geography” where dispossession of Indigenous lands takes place both through force and geographic imagination (Said, 1993, p. 7). Colonial geography is characterized by separate, unequal, and delineated spaces of settlement and Indigenous reserves and reservations—this remaking of the landscape through displacement was facilitated by viewing Indigenous lands as unoccupied, unused, and open for enclosure by asserting private property regimes (C. Harris, 2004; Seed, 1995; Wood & Rossiter, 2011). Dispossession was facilitated by transforming the landscape materially and symbolically through the destruction of the buffalo and the building of the border. These processes enabled conceptualizing Siksikaitstapi movement and traditional lifeways as lacking relationship to or occupancy of the lands (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2013; Blomley, 2003). Colonial geographies and the colonial dream situate mobility as antithetical to settlement, instead insisting on instilling proper productive practices of “improving” the lands to demonstrate and claim ownership.

The destruction of the buffalo and the building of the border marked a transformation of the landscape to one of colonial logics, law, and spatial ordering. The mobility and nature of the buffalo and its ties to the Siksikaitstapi did not reflect the western vision of nature as a resource, as docile and dominated, controllable and commodifiable. Along the western plains, Siksikaitstapi traditional lands and landscape had to be “unmade” to allow for an image of civilization and order, the nation, to be hacked out of the wilderness (Mackey, 1999; Raibmon, 2008).

The loss of the buffalo, formation of the border, and entangled enforcement of reserve and reservation systems demonstrate the goal of the settler nation-state to create Indigenous containment and immobility within bounded territories and sedentary settlement. This colonial spatial strategy, the colonial dream, is one which envisions the “fixity, control, visibility, productivity, and . . . docility” of Indigenous communities to render their “lives and lands” accessible (Deloria, 2004, pp. 27, 50). Deloria states that the colonial dream hinges on the process of marking Indigenous peoples and their ceremonies, kinship relations, governance structures, legal orders, economic trading networks, and ancestrally held lands as “naturally vanishing” (Deloria, 2004, p. 50). These impacts are real and devastating. However, the continuation of Siksikaitsitapi traditions and claims to territory illustrate that space is not static, nor is settler-colonialism completed or uncontested.

## CHAPTER 4 – MAINTAINING IMMOBILITY, CONTROLLING MOVEMENT

How are the Siksikaitsitapi attempting to challenge or reconfigure the border through the reintroduction of the buffalo, the Innnii Initiative, and the resurgence of the Confederacy?

Chapter 3 detailed the historic underpinnings and colonial legacies of the border as a site of containment for Indigenous peoples; I showed that the building of the border and the demise of the buffalo were interconnected colonial methods of creating control. In this chapter I focus on the contemporary period and illustrate that the colonial dream is an ongoing and ultimately incomplete spatial project that relies upon instilling and maintaining immobility. I begin by offering an overview of the Innnii Initiative, a Siksikaitsitapi-led conservation effort to restore the buffalo to the prairies. I then examine the obstacles to having the buffalo be free-roaming and compare these to the obstacles the Siksikaitsitapi face travelling across the border.

The colonial dream is ongoing and incomplete. There are powerful implications both for referencing the pervasiveness and persistence of colonialism and for marking it as contested and resisted. Day describes the goal of the nation-state as creating “a perfectly striated space of social order” (Day, 2000, p. 3). In contrast, I show that along the border, the free-roaming buffalo and the continuation of Siksikaitsitapi traditions and travel demonstrate a space riven with “gaps, and fissures . . . that open[] up possibilities of subversion” (Braun, 2002, p. 24).

### 4.1 Buffalo – Monitoring Movement

#### 4.1.1 *Innnii Initiative*

The food source, the power source that we need to live with. All of the stuff we need, [the creator] gave us, with the buffalo, with fire, with the grasses, with the plants, with the trees, he gave us everything. (Interview, 10.18)

The Iinnii Initiative began in 2005 when Siksikaitsitapi knowledge holders Paulette Fox and Dr. Leroy Little Bear hosted Elders Dialogues and discussed concerns that youth were no longer connecting to Siksikaitsitapi culture, lifeways, and traditions (Interview, 10.18). There was a sense that the missing link was the buffalo, so they decided it was time for the buffalo to “return home” (Interview, 03.18). The Iinnii Initiative emerged from a series of organizations and people who collaborated to create a conservation program that prioritized Siksikaitsitapi knowledge and ways of being. In 2010 Paulette Fox and Dr. Leroy Little Bear began arranging Buffalo Dialogues with Elders from across the Blackfoot Confederacy. Interview participants expressed that the entire Confederacy’s involvement in the dialogues was critical for facilitating meaningful conversations about the buffalo and activating the ancestral landscape beyond the international boundary (Interviews, 10.18). The dialogues went on for four years as Fox and Little Bear met with Ervin Carlson, president of the Intertribal Buffalo Council, and Keith Aune from the American Bison Society, part of the larger Wildlife Conservation Society (Interview, 10.18). The Siksikaitsitapi launched the Iinnii Initiative to “conserve traditional lands, protect Blackfeet culture, and create a home for the buffalo to return to” (Blackfeet Nation, 2018, p. 3). The Iinnii Initiative is a holistic and collaborative Indigenous-led conservation project that prioritizes Siksikaitsitapi knowledges and relationships to the lands and the buffalo. It is about

## A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

In 2009, the **Iinnii Initiative** was launched by leaders of the four tribes that make up the Blackfoot Confederacy (Blackfeet Nation, Kainai Nation, Piikani Nation, and Siksika Nation) to conserve traditional lands, protect Blackfeet culture, and create a home for the buffalo to return to.

Through extraordinary efforts and partnerships with Oakland Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Society, Inter-tribal Buffalo Council, Blackfeet Community College, and American Bison Society, 88 Iinnii were reintroduced to Blackfeet lands in 2016.

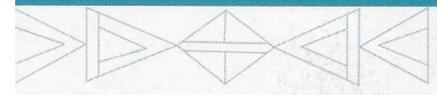
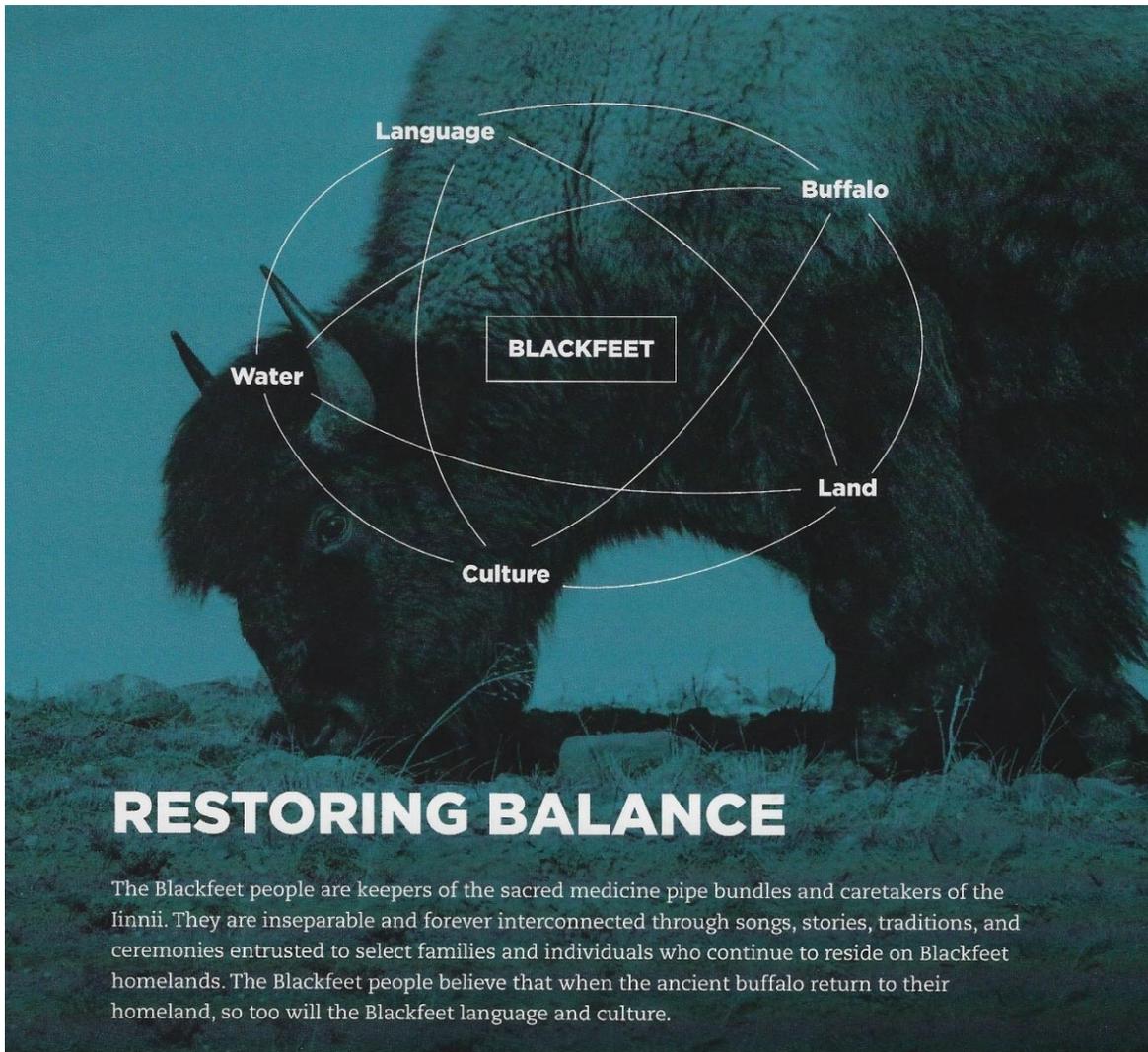


Photo 8 (Source: Iinnii Spirit Centre Brochure)

bringing back the buffalo, which is important for both the ecology of the plains and the lifeways of the Indigenous plains people.



*Photo 9 (Source: Innii Spirit Centre Brochure)*

#### **4.1.2 Obstacles: Destruction**

The Innii Initiative conservation project is restorative to both cultural and ecological environments. Siksikaitstapi community members expect to see revenues from tourism, meat sales, trading, and production partnerships, but the project is not necessarily primarily economic. Cultural absolutism is not a sensible or useful lens to

frame the Linnii Initiative. Ideological differences cut across divides, and for various reasons, not all people in the region are in favour of the return of the buffalo.<sup>13</sup>

Off reserve and on reserve, there is apprehension about the movement and pathways of the buffalo as it is reintroduced. The most commonly noted obstacle to the reintroduction of the buffalo is the private property and infrastructure that could foreseeably be in the migratory routes of the free-roaming buffalo. There is a fear that the free-roaming buffalo could cause damage, because the buffalo are consistently characterized as an impediment to private interests, property, and profitability.

On the plains, cattle culture is a strong and prevailing force, resulting in ranching and outside cattle (cattle that graze on leased reserve lands but are owned by off-reservation interests) becoming major sources of income for Siksikaitsitapi community members. Subsequently, the possibility of free-roaming buffalo has been a source of apprehension. An Amskapi-Piikani rancher explained:

During that time the acceptance of the iinnii or buffalo by our people wasn't all that great, they weren't all that supportive. Because I used to see the different individuals—landowners, farmers, ranchers, and others, non-members—pushing this herd from place . . . property to property. And [the buffalo] would come through this area where I live, we wouldn't bother them that's just part of the way we were raised, they would hang out here for a while and have their calves and they'd move on to another location. But for a lot of people they didn't accept that. They felt they had adopted a new way of life and it was hard for them to

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<sup>13</sup> My analysis is suggestive rather than definitive. It is important to note that there is not a unanimous narrative or unanimous agreement on the Linnii Initiative, and the interviewees I spoke with may not represent all viewpoints. It would be remiss of me to frame the Linnii Initiative and the free-roaming goal as entirely cohesive, and if I were to do so, I would risk replicating colonial tropes of environmental stewardship or create a stark divide between economies and traditions. Such a divide would reify the colonial assertion that Indigenous nations do not succeed due to refusing to participate in capitalist economies. This assertion relies on the belief that culture is static and ignores colonial power dynamics. This notion is also false in looking at the thriving business ventures, cattle ranches, tourism, and enterprises on and off reserves/reservations run by Indigenous peoples.

accept the bison back into their—as we know it—their property. [. . .] We still have our challenges today, some of our local producers and landowners and property owners kinda still are a little fearful that the iinnii or the buffalo might displace them from some of their ranching and some of their livelihoods. And even though they may have a little concern, they're still willing to talk about it and accept the animals when they come through, but they want to really know from the tribe, the governance and the tribal . . . of how can they make this work without them sacrificing their economies, their ways of life. (Interview, 10.18)

As seen in the above quotation, there is apprehension from both settler ranchers and Siksikaitsitapi ranchers about the possible economic impacts of the free-roaming buffalo. However, interviewees reported that there is greater opposition from off-reserve/reservation interests who prioritize their private property and industry over the Iinnii Initiative's plans for future conservation and economic prosperity (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18). An interviewee elaborated:

*Free-roaming* is a nice, feel-good term if you are a buffalo advocate. If you're not, it is an ugly, ugly, ugly term. In central Montana they are trying to create a massive free-roaming area and they are doing pretty well but it is not without opposition [. . .] and then they won't admit it but the underlying reason from way back then is still there . . . it really harkens back to the early days—one of the reasons to kill the buffalo was because they were eating valuable grasslands that the cattle barons wanted. . . . We have grasslands, we don't want to give them up to buffalo, so even though the organization that aggregated all that land in Central Montana, that wants to run buffalo on it, cattle ranchers do not want to because they have now lost a massive chunk of land that is no longer available for lease for cattle. (Interview, 09.18)

The free-roaming buffalo is seen as posing a potential threat to property, private interests, and profitability. Most often, these concerns come from interests outside reserve and reservation boundaries where settler property owners worry about being “displaced” or “imposed upon” (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18). This phrasing reveals a strained attempt at understanding dispossession that emerges from grievance and resentment for the loss of benefits and privileges landowners derive from individual ownership and possession of landed property (Blomley, 2003, 2016; da Silva, 2017).

Those working on the Linnii Initiative have put effort into hosting public consultation, forums, and surveys to contact “non-members” and process feedback (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18). Another obstacle to having free-roaming buffalo that the Linnii Initiative noticed from collecting public feedback is a fear of damage to infrastructure and uncertainty about liability in the event of destruction (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18). Reflecting on the feedback trends, a community member described:

We had some of those that voiced some concerns, which is understandable—they didn't all come from ranchers or farmers or property owners. It was related to safety along the travel routes, highways, and those types of things, so they were sharing some of their concerns with highway transportation safety. [. . .] The way we are addressing that today in the direction that we are looking at going is that this herd will be a wild animal. It's going to be no different from hitting a deer, it's going to be no different from hitting a wolf, it's going to be no different from hitting an elk on the road. It's part of that landscape and it is up to the commuters to just be cautious, there will be signage I'm sure put up should these animals be out there. But that was one of the main concerns. And of course, there was always those that were concerned about property damage . . . We want them to be wild and keep their distance from people and just be a part of the landscape. And so, property damage is always one [concern] of course. Just like those farmers and ranchers that live in areas where there are high populations of deer or elk, there is damage to the crops and those types of things. There's concerns out there . . . a lot of it is economic. (Interview, 10.18)

The possibility of reintroducing free-roaming buffalo to the area is met with concern for damage and destruction to prevalent spatio-economic orderings. That is to say, the movement and mobility of the buffalo run counter to spatial logics of private property regimes and capitalist confinement. Those who oppose the uninhibited movement of the buffalo suggest they be reintroduced as wildlife within contained spaces of parks, ranches, and reserve or reservation grounds (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18). Discussing this, two interviewees commented:

Speaker 1: And even if you think about the land itself. Like where are they going to roam? Our communities have grown so much.... And in each community there is development in all of them, so I don't see where buffalo could roam.

Speaker 2: Well and with all the agriculture too, like there is so . . . I mean if you have some roaming around in Waterton Park, sure that is great, and it is nice. You probably have a few out roaming what little grassland there is on the reserves eh too I guess that is fine too. But I mean the whole relationship is completely different now. So, I would think it's more symbolic than anything else. (Interview, 10.18)



*Photo 10 Herd of buffalo behind fence (Source: S. van Beek)*

#### ***4.1.3 Obstacles: Disease***

The Innii Initiative faces various barriers to having the buffalo become free-roaming. In addition to physical destruction, settler anxieties manifest as concerns about the buffalo carrying disease and genetic impurity. Interviewees commonly noted that opposition to free-roaming buffalo came across through demands for buffalo containment and for buffers preventing buffalo interactions with livestock. In reference to free-roaming buffalo harbouring disease, a term commonly deplored by interviewees was “brucellosis,” an illness that marks the buffalo as unwelcome and contaminated.

The colonial state has further sought to limit buffalo mobility through legal designation. In Alberta the buffalo are legally designated as endangered rather than as

wildlife (like deer, elk, moose, etc.). This classification is due to concerns about the buffalo spreading destruction through disease, and it lawfully confines the buffalo to localized herds that are culled when they get to a size where there is a reasonable possibility of buffalo migration, movement, and inter-species mingling. Since the buffalo are currently unable to move, there is uncertainty about future liability and legal obligations in the event of destruction or disease (Interviews, 09.18, 10.19). An interviewee explained these intertwining obstacles:

So, the main vocal [concern] is they are damaging our property, and they have brucellosis. There has not been a single case of brucellosis transferred from buffalo to cattle. Not a single case. Now, elk have brucellosis . . . But the fear is thrown out there each time. Can they break fences? Absolutely they can. So we have to do a better job of not letting them get out on the highway like that. So that is on us, I believe, okay. How do we ameliorate those two issues? We try to keep them in. (Interview, 09.18)

While disease and genetic purity are contentious topics for bureaucrats and conservation scientists, interviewees consistently asserted that there are no known cases of buffalo spreading brucellosis. Conversely, it is noted that other wild animals do carry brucellosis and they are not subject to the same level of scrutiny and monitoring (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18).

When discussing genetic integrity and buffalo health, many interviewees shifted attention towards the “Elk Island Herd” (referring to the herd of 87 plains buffalo that was transferred in April 2016 from Elk Island National Park in Alberta to the Blackfeet Nation reservation in Montana). As interviewees explained it, the Elk Island Herd originated from a Siksikaitsitapi hunting expedition when Samuel Walking Coyote, a Pend d’Oreille man, took in four buffalo calves. He grew the herd to 13 buffalo then sold them to Charles Allard and Michel Pablo. Allard and Pablo continued to grow the herd. An interviewee explained that they then “sold the herd to Canada because the U.S. did not want Indians or buffalo. [The US] opened the reservations up to white

settlers and so [Allard and Pablo] thought they were going to lose all of the grazing lands so they had to sell the herd and they sold them up there” (Interview, 09.18). This herd has since undergone years of conservation and genetic scientific study, and it is shown to have positively affected the region’s biodiversity through grazing and wallowing behaviours (Knapp et al., 1999; Truett et al., 2001).

While the Elk Island Herd is an ecological success and noteworthy in considering potential genetic vulnerability to disease and the harms of illness, what came across as significant about it to the Innnii Initiative and the Siksikaitaitapi people was their ancestral ties to the land.

One of the reasons we brought the animals back from the Elk Island area—the Elk Island Herd as we call it—back into the Amskapi-Piikani country is because the connection they had to our ancestors plus the connection that that animal had to their ancestors, and to help reconnect that integrity that we had as a relationship and part of a system that we feel was fully intact way back before a lot of influence came upon both of us. So by bringing the animal back here, reconnecting it to the landscape, reconnecting it to the people, that, uh, we would have an opportunity to maybe potentially reconnect as this animal back to its historic homelands home range.... That it could just live in the wild like the deer, the elk, the bear, the wolves . . . and just be a part of that ecosystem. As they were and we were years ago. (Interview, 10.18)

In conservation, genetics and ecological integrity are a central topic, and these are considerable barriers to the Innnii Initiative. The Elk Island Herd is understood as an effective scientific endeavour, a result of careful study, surveillance, and monitoring. However, these categorizations and methods of control are not at all totalizing. Among those interviewed, the Elk Island Herd is important and celebrated as a rightful coming home of descendants and relations. Not only is this a departure from scientific metrics

of animal viability, but it is a perspective shift to the personal, political, and kinship<sup>14</sup> relationships with the buffalo and lands. As one interview participant put it, the return of the herd is “how it was meant to be from the beginning of time” (Interview, 03.18). Demonstrably, although colonial methods of regulation, surveillance, and confinement are imposed and ongoing, they are incomplete and met with refusal.

#### *4.1.4 Obstacles: Tagging and Tracking*

The final major obstacle to the Innnii Initiative and the free-roaming buffalo that interviewees reported was the possibility of tagging and tracking the buffalo herd. Controlling mobility is not restricted to spatial containment, but also operates through applying boundaries, monitoring, surveilling, classifying, and tracking movement. An interviewee expressed their concern about tagging the buffalo by stating:

And they wonder why we're frustrated. Why we're angry crossing our land to our other land. And then you take the parks. Those were our original sovereign territory. Until they develop laws such as the Dominion Lands Protection Act of Canada of 1884 . . . protect who? Protect those lands from us? Don't let the Indians, the Blackfoots, go back in there. . . . And so here I am helping with this buffalo initiative. I hope our buffaloes don't get tagged. “These are Canadian buffaloes, chase them back over.” “Those are American buffaloes, chase them back.” It is so outrageous, they don't tag the moose or the deer. And so they . . . when I say “they” it's the non-Natives. They've already labelled the buffalo connected to Indian—Indian connected to buffalo, so I don't know if the buffalo will suffer from animal racism, I'll put it that way—because deer and moose cross back and forth, antelope, wolves . . . And yet the buffalo is being given a rough time by modern ranchers, modern communities, and they just can't get over it that that land they're ranching on [is] traditionally sovereign land, on Blackfoot territory. And so, if the buffalo wins, maybe we'll win. (Interview, 10.18)

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<sup>14</sup> Kinship is a refection of all intersecting, multiple relationships within Siksikaitsitapi territory (rather than solely blood relations).

As the interviewee suggests in the above quote, the implications of tagging the buffalo for surveillance and tracking movement coincide with the possibility of the buffalo crossing the international border. Harsha Walia argues that borders “operate not at a fixed site but rather through structures and technologies of power across geographies” (Walia, 2013, p. 50). The border as a site of security signifies not only territory within the nation-state, but “imaginings of who is entitled to protection from the nation-state because they represent the national identity, and who faces violence by the nation-state because their bodies are deemed not to belong” (Walia, 2013, p. 63). Spatial control at the border is enacted through both direct and indirect methods. Direct control operates by determining who may cross the border and by indirect control monitors access to the border and prevents or attacks either ability or motivation to cross the border (Hoy, 2014). Tagging and tracking the buffalo is an obstacle to the Iinnii Initiative and free-roaming buffalo as it is a method of surveillance that fits into the colonial dream of control and spatial logics of containment.



*Photo 11 Tagged buffalo (Source: S. van Beek)*

#### **4.1.5 Analysis**

The colonial dream is an ongoing and incomplete project that relies upon instilling and maintaining immobility. Settler-colonial spatial logics of containment are

both pervasive and contested. The demise of the buffalo was a colonial method of creating control of the Siksikaitsitapi. Contemporarily, the Linnii Initiative and plans to reintroduce free-roaming buffalo to the landscape demonstrates Siksikaitsitapi continuation of travel and tradition, while the obstacles to the initiative illustrate settler-colonialism's investment in maintaining immobility.

During discussions, many participants used the words "discrimination" and "racism" to describe the efforts in place to hinder the buffalo from migrating and living on the lands, often drawing parallels to their own experiences and histories as Siksikaitsitapi peoples (Interviews, 03.18, 09.18, 10.18). As interviewees described, historical processes which led to the slaughter of the buffalo and clearing of the lands for settlement and colonization are continuing today. By denying the buffalo free-roaming agency and access to lands, settlement is once again being re-inscribed and reified above Siksikaitsitapi ways of knowing, being, organizing, and living on the lands.

They're wildlife and then you see deer and elk and all of our other wildlife free-roaming. They go where they want, do what they want. Nothing really much said about them . . . but the buffalo they just don't want them to be free-roaming. And so, I want to keep them as wildlife and always fight for them. It might be something way down the road and a long time coming. But yeah, I want to see them as wildlife and to be able to roam, just to roam like all the other wildlife . . . For buffalo there's so much issues . . . but it's specifically for them. And that's what I'll say. They're just the way we were too. We were put on reservations. We were not allowed to leave in the beginning and we didn't even have a vote to our own country. We weren't until I don't know how many years later made citizens of our own country that we inhabited. That was our country. And buffalo were the same over here that the ones that were left after the all of the slaughtering. (Interview, 10.18)

According to interview data, the most commonly noted obstacle to the reintroduction of the free-roaming buffalo is the private property and infrastructure that could be in the migratory routes of the buffalo; these concerns are followed by

worries about disease and the possibility of bureaucratic tracking and monitoring of the buffalo. Each of these obstacles speaks to settler-colonial anxieties about the free-roaming buffalo causing damage to private interests, property, and profitability. While there are worries from Siksikaitsitapi ranchers and community members, these concerns most often came forward as an expressed settler fear of being “displaced” or “imposed upon” (Interviews, 10.18). Succinctly, one interviewee commented: “there is even a fear that if the tribe prioritizes the wild buffalo over the livelihoods or the ways of life of the rancher that they can become displaced” (Interview, 10.18). This concern comes from an objection to the loss of privileges secured by property’s operation, ideology, and ownership (Blomley, 2014; da Silva, 2009; C. I. Harris, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

The ideology of property is deeply entangled in raciality, capital, and coloniality, emerging materially from these networks by connecting possession, ownership, and desire with profitability, productivity, dominion, and superiority. However, “property is not eternal. It produces unfulfilled desire and anxieties because its promises of security and well-being are fragile” (Bosworth, 2018, p. 7). Fragility is evident within the contradictions of the settler states and the survivance of the sovereign Siksikaitsitapi and the buffalo nations.

The free-roaming buffalo are seen as unpredictable migratory animals that may bring disease and destruction and that need monitoring, control, and tagging. Their movement threatens current spatio-economic structures and is cast as in need of containment and regulation from governing bodies (that is, the tribal council, the reserves and reservation, wildlife management, and the national parks). The material and corporeal ways the buffalo are understood and are being re-enrolled into the plains landscape show the power and presence of containment as a settler-colonial tool and logic. The attempts at spatial control surrounding the buffalo extends onto its body and range through surveillance methods, as well as creating and maintaining boundaries to

its mobility. Rather than uninhibited movement, there are vested interests in having the Iinnii Initiative be limited to keeping buffalo contained, whether fenced within properties, kept on ranches as commercial herds, or kept entirely within the confines of national/state/provincial parks and reserves and reservations and explicitly away from infrastructure, fences, farms, ranches, cattle grazing lands, and national borders. How space is understood, made, and enacted not only denotes landscape and land use but also demonstrates social order and what is within the confines of colonial and capitalist acceptability.

Despite settler-colonialism's persistent, ongoing attempts at spatial confinement, the Iinnii Initiative is a project symbolizing Siksikaitsitapi survivance and living traditions. One Elder described: "But the bottom line for the whole thing is, as far as we're concerned, we don't need them. It's our land of both sides [of the border] anyways" (Elders Dialogue, 09.18).

#### **4.2 Border – Monitoring Movement**

When travelling through their traditional territory, the Siksikaitsitapi come across the international border between Canada and the United States. The placement and enforcement of the border acts to supplant Siksikaitsitapi epistemologies, governance, and sacred social structures which have taken place on these lands since time immemorial. The settler nation builds and legitimizes itself through declaring sole sovereignty and claiming territorial ownership by casting Indigenous peoples and ways of being as devoid of law, without tenure.<sup>15</sup> If the border is about defining belonging and who is welcomed and contained within the nation, it certainly functions to dispel Siksikaitsitapi claim to the lands. The border between Montana and Alberta is a site of

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<sup>15</sup> For further discussion of Indigenous legal pluralism see: (Barker, 2017; Borrows, 2010; Hunt, 2014b; Napoleon, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

imposition: the border reifies its own authority by requiring adherence to colonial policies and by signifying both the territorial acquisition and the reach of the nation-state.

#### *4.2.1 Obstacles*

The border signifies an ongoing colonial spatial strategy of containment, inhibiting the Siksikaitsitapi from practicing traditional and cultural ways that involve trade and travel along, and their relationship with, their territory. Contemporarily, colonialism operates by maintaining immobility; functionally, confinement and immobility are about limiting Siksikaitsitapi access to their lands, sites, animals, and relations. This is substantively illustrated by numerous issues that Siksikaitsitapi peoples face at the border and in dealing with associated bordering policies.

Interviewees commonly reported the following obstacles in regard to the international border. Ports of entry and official border crossings have specified opening hours, meaning travel is temporally and spatially limited, and if another, unofficial route is used, there is a risk of being prosecuted. At crossings, Siksikaitsitapi peoples are often heavily questioned, detained, or even denied entry. During this process, they are always told to speak the national official languages, and signage is in these languages (English, French, or Spanish—currently there are no translators on staff). Community members feel apprehensive about travelling with sacred or ceremonial items, as these items can be searched and sometimes seized, which is entirely against Siksikaitsitapi traditional laws and protocol. Beyond this, some sacred items are not allowed to cross the border, such as bark. The physical line and structure of the border runs through Siksikaitsitapi sacred sites, meaning Siksikaitsitapi people cannot access these sites or sites on the other side of the border if they do not or cannot cross. It is also common for border patrol, customs, and security to patrol and survey the border using vehicles that desecrate the sacred sites. While these are all separate examples of bordering issues, the

pattern that emerges is one of imposing and enforcing state authority and colonial territorial practices without any regard for Siksikaitsitapi tenure. The implications of this were put plainly during an interview:

Speaker 1: We had a special piece of wood I guess you might say just to generalize without getting real specific. The people that have authority or the power to consecrate that item and bless it and make it holy happen to be in Canada and we have to take it across there. And there is a new rule now; you can't bring wood across because of beetles and bugs. But that wood is treated it is taken care of. It is not a piece of something that is going to carry a bunch of diseases. Our ceremonies require us to go get a pure form of wood and the work we put into it; it is special. And then we were held up at the border because of that. We had to kind of argue. They did let us cross with it, but they said well we are making an exception, you just can't bring wood across the border.

Speaker 2: Items like that which are to us religious and for a meaningful purpose. We can't just freely go over with them taken care of the proper way.

Speaker 1: It is insulting. It is insulting to our spirit; it is insulting to our culture, we are part of that wood, we are part of the earth, the earth is part of us. The trees are part of us. The rocks. It is a part of us, and they are telling us no you cannot bring part of you across. Same with the eagle feathers or with other items, different items that are sacred.

Speaker 2: Cigarettes, tobacco, or you know.

Speaker 1: And it is like we are all a part of this whole thing and so I can go across but a part of me can't? Not just our children or the other ones that are restricted because of other rules and laws. But it really is taking a part of us away. And it is part of our traumatic history of loss. Taking that away for a couple hundred years, taking away our language, taking away our freedom to travel, taking away our ability to provide for ourselves, taking away our practices, our culture, our songs, our prayers, our ceremonies. I mean it is just a part of a trauma that Native people still suffer from. (Interview, 10.18)



*Photo 12 Sign at Chief Mountain Border Crossing (Source: S. van Beek)*

There is a vital connection between surveillance and the ongoing and incomplete colonial dream of containment and control via pacification. Pacification is the ongoing process of “civilizing” through political and legal strategies; it is simultaneously destructive and constitutive in its production of a colonial-capitalist order (Neocleous, 2010). This arrangement is contingent on the displacement and containment of Indigenous peoples and social structures; pacification is then implicated in and evoked by the processes of classifying Indigenous subjectivities as risks to be managed, watched, and policed (Dafnos, 2013; A. Simpson, 2014). Consequently, creating mediated and monitored movement falls under the purview of colonial spatial control. The ideology of pacification, and the “colonial dream of fixity, control, visibility, productivity, and most important, docility” has historical roots and contemporary

continuity, but was transformed and intensified at the border by the post-9/11 legislation, funding, and policies directed towards national security (Deloria, 2004, p. 27). The interests of national security function around the nation-state with the goal of securing critical infrastructure from perceived threats (Dunn Cavelty & Kristensen, 2008). After 9/11 this revived and deepened investment in safeguarding critical infrastructure established a direct link between national security practices and the colonial dream, pitting Indigenous sovereignty and claims to land and resources in conflict with state-determined supply chains and safety. This conceptualization of critical infrastructure is “the embodiment of the state’s definition of ‘proper’ land use, while its ‘critical’ status opens the door to state exertion of emergency powers and measures to ensure the continuance of this form of productive practice” (Dafnos et al., 2016, p. 327).

Interviewees often mentioned that the border bisecting Siksikaitstapi lands has seen increased measures of surveillance since 9/11. One participant described:

This is Blackfoot Country so our freedom and our ability to roam and do what we did for hundreds of years was taken during that time. And then the boundary issue going on. Like I say, I think we were okay and then 9/11 happened and it just kind of that's another thing it has taken its toll. (Interview, 09.18)

Even outside of interviews, discussions of the securitization and heightened enforcement of the border since September 2001 arose consistently, at meetings, events, and in conversation. Increased scrutiny is prevalent now for Siksikaitstapi peoples crossing the border, especially with regalia or ceremonial items. Communicating these realities, one interviewee explained:

And so we are all lumped into . . . all their security surveillance operations. And it almost comes down to being a Blackfoot is a threat to them and you have nothing on you, could be standing there naked, but just a mere fact that you're Blackfoot you're a threat.... It's like they're surveying native people . . . and 9/11 just is this another excuse. So, they have spent and wasted millions of dollars on

securities and surveillance on Native people and I wonder how much on Blackfoot people.... We have people going back and forth with our ceremonial bundles being questioned and these are the most peaceful praying people. These are medicine bundles that they want to open and look in there. To find a gun? It's against our cultural laws to have a gun in there. It's against our laws from time immemorial—spiritual laws—to upset the spirituality of those bundles and pipes. So are they fearful of traditional pipes? We're given third degree back and forth.... Once sacred items are being under surveillance that has got to be the most blatant absolute racism and discrimination of Native people. (Interview, 10.18)

The border is a site of surveillance and securitization, but also about maintaining settler-colonial spatial logics of immobility and monitored movement. The border reproduces dispossession and denies Siksikaitsitapi access to traditional lands, practices, and space in the name of national security. The Siksikaitsitapi are restricted in where and when they may cross, what they may bring, and what goods they must pay a fee on. Since 9/11 there have been new roads, sensors, and buildings built throughout the plains and mountains to watch the border; surveying, construction, and patrol have been done without Siksikaitsitapi consultation, ruining sacred sites, vegetation, and wildlife forms and inhibiting traditional events and travel. This vision of proper land use and critical infrastructure at the border, which enables surveillance and ensures state-determined land allocation and decision making, pits Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty and claims to the borderlands against national security measures.

An interviewee reflected on the border as a site of rupture, stating:

We should have total and complete—in my estimation, there should be no restriction whatsoever to cross from Blackfeet to Siksika. And so well you cannot do that because of 9/11 we have to have border security, and we have to do this—no, you cannot have your own border crossing, no. And so all of that stuff is hindering our ability to trade back and forth. We always did it for centuries and centuries, and we did not just do it to get married, we didn't just get together for a big celebration, or a big Sun Dance or anything . . . but we traded amongst ourselves. We swapped this, we traded that. So we had Aboriginal routes that we travelled based on seasons, the hunt, berries and when they got ripe. So when

we did happen to get together, we always traded. So if we bring that to modern day.... Okay so what happens if I want to sell him a truck? What about if he wants to sell me a truck? What about a bag of grain? Can we do that? Is that part of the free trade? Is that what we used to do? Well you did not have trucks back then you could not have done that—well yeah but I could have traded a horse. And so my belief is that we should have total and complete autonomy. (Interview, 09.18)



*Photo 13 Chief Mountain Border Crossing (Source: S. van Beek)*

Bordering takes place using direct methods and also indirectly by inhibiting and preventing movement across the border. As documented in Chapter 3, the RCMP has historically functioned to maintain boundaries, namely the 49th parallel and reserve borders. These histories of the colonial dream continue and are enacted contemporarily; policing and surveillance are central to Siksikaitstapi experiences of the border. Interviewees reported that one's ability to cross the border is often determined by their

interactions with the law: a criminal record or past indiscretion may bar them from being allowed entry at the border. This is specifically significant given that Indigenous people experience increased levels of police vigilance, presence, and surveillance, and are frequently prosecuted as offenders, resulting in them being overrepresented within carceral systems (Comack, 2012; Ross, 1998).

Crossing the border requires official and sanctioned documentation and identification. For community members, identity cards and travel passes serve both to deter travel across the border and to bolster nation-state claims to the territory. While Indigenous people are not required to use a passport to traverse the border, the practice of requiring an identity card or travel pass forcibly locates Indigenous people to specific reserve and reservation boundaries as defined by the settler state. These documents are also an issue of colonial imposition, regulation, and self-perpetuation, as when tribal members have a traditional or out-of-hospital birth, they may not receive a birth certificate or identification. Interview participants often spoke of prolonged crossing when using a status card or tribal ID at the border and being told a passport would be easier. During a border delegation meeting, a council member explained their frustration, responding: “They say ‘Don't you have a passport? It's easier than a tribal ID.’ But my citizenship is Tohono O'odham” (Meeting, 18.09.18). Interviewees also expressed that when community members use tribal IDs, border agents try to instill a fear that these methods are not secure enough and risk copy, theft, or fraud. After inciting anxieties around theft and fraud, border workers encourage enhanced tribal IDs and frame them as in the best interest of the community. Many interviewees spoke dismissively of enhanced tribal IDs as a security necessity, instead worrying about the associated financial costs and risks of privacy violations with new surveillance technology. An interviewee affirmed:

Right now our tribal IDs are working. But the Americans want more of a secure enhanced card that has a chip that they can read your data right quick. And so we are working on that, and I thought we were going to have it by now, but we still don't have it. And that would help us, but some people buy a passport, and it is good for ten years. I think you pay \$80 for the card and then you have to get a \$20 fee for processing, then you got to get a picture and then that costs . . . and you know some people just can't afford that. Even our ID is only \$10, but a lot of people even have a hard time finding that. So, the role of the border is significant with the Blackfoot Confederacy. (Interview, 10.18)

#### *4.2.2 Analysis*

Territory is settler-colonialism's "irreducible element" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). Borders spatially organize territory and produce political authority through settler sovereignty on top of prior and pre-existing legal traditions, lifeways, and sacred-social governance systems of Indigenous peoples on the lands. The border does not simply exist, but creates nation-state territory and makes claims about what can (or cannot) happen within, along, and beyond the boundaries (Lamb, 2014; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). The obstacles that the Siksikaitsitapi currently experience at the border illustrate settler-colonialism's geographic logic of creating controlled and monitored movement or immobility. The colonial dream of containment is ongoing, but it is also incomplete.

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

Then also from there and you talk about the border, that's another thing too that this was our territory, you know, a big vast territory that we did rule, I guess. That was ours and then to have the 49th there which we called Medicine Line is . . . having difficulties at times going back and forth. So even with the project of the iinnii of putting them on the front and working with the Canadian sides and being able for them to roam back and forth freely, I think would also help as to even our concerns about being able to go back and forth without problems. (Interview, 10.18)

The imposition and operation of the border represents the organization and differentiation between two independent sovereign nation-states. Surveillance at the border sets out to determine what is allowable and acceptable movement into, out of,



*Photo 14 Buffalo looking out over the herd (Source: S. van Beek)*

within, and across the colonial nation-state. From the obstacles to implementing the Linnii Initiative and the free-roaming cross-border buffalo herd and the confines faced by the Siksikaitsitapi at the border, immobility, surveillance, and pacification are at the forefront of creating an ongoing colonial spatial strategy.

As an agency and place of hegemony, the border can be conceptualized as space of both control and contestation. Although the ultimate goal is containment and controlled movement, both human and nonhuman actors (i.e. buffalo and bark) come to resist or refuse in myriad ways and scales. Despite scrutiny, Siksikaitsitapi peoples still traverse their territory; ceremonial items continue to be transferred and pass the divide. All colonial borders are on Indigenous traditional and ancestral lands, and Indigeneity as an alternative mode of being, living, and relating to the lands is continuing despite logics of containment and elimination. On Siksikaitsitapi territory, the return of the buffalo and the enduring travel of the Blackfoot across the boundary despite regulation and resistance are powerful indicators of generative refusal to be held within colonial geographies.

Even though the elimination of the buffalo was intended as a method of starving the Siksikaitsitapi people, eventually being used as a method of coercion to create reserves and reservations and enforce immobility across the line, it is significant that today the Siksikaitsitapi are leading the conservation initiative, the Iinnii Initiative, to restore the buffalo populations to the plains. The free-roaming buffalo signals a profound and enduring connection to the lands and what has been since time immemorial. It challenges the colonial containment of boundaries, whether they be reserve or reservation boundaries, park boundaries, or the international boundary. This implication became clear during a meeting about the international border when an Elder opened by asking: "If the buffalo goes where it wants, and I believe in the buffalo, how can you stop me?" (Meeting, 21.09.18).

## CHAPTER 5 – FREEDOM: REFUSING COLONIAL CONTAINMENT

How is Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty expressed through the reintroduction of the buffalo and the Linnii Initiative?

“Has anyone told you about the Waterton buffalo?” During the months I spent on Siksikaitsitapi territory, I was asked this question regularly. By the time I settled into my lodgings in Waterton Lakes National Park, the story was an open secret. At the time there were no reports from Parks Canada or the fire crew, but in a town of 52 residents everyone knows someone who knows something.

On August 30, 2017, after an intense thunderstorm, park staff noticed a fire outside the park boundary and began preparing for it to spread. The fire crew and park agents worked together to evacuate the buffalo herd from the paddock with intentions of moving the herd out of harm’s way. After six hours the whole herd had been corralled, except one buffalo. Despite employing many strategies, the last remaining buffalo evaded capture as the fire approached. Workers left the buffalo in the paddock, knowing there was little time left and the fire was growing quickly. Forty-eight hours later, the Kenow fire had come and gone, burning 38 percent of the park. Workers returned to the paddock, expecting to see devastation. Driving up the hill pathway into the paddock they saw burnt grasses all the way to the water hole. Along the water’s edge there were living grasses left protected and made wet by the movement of the water. Inside the water stood the buffalo.

This story was recounted to me on my first day of fieldwork, and then again many times after. Inside the park it was told to me in hushed and hurried tones of excitement. Outside the park, by Siksikaitsitapi friends and Elders, it was told to me in deliberate detail. The story was less about the event itself, but the deeper implications.

Chapters 3 and 4 outlined historic and ongoing dispossession, facilitated by bordering practices and the loss of the buffalo, which operate to produce the colonial dream of Indigenous immobility. Chapter 5 argues that the Iinnii Initiative and the return of the free-roaming buffalo is a refusal of colonial containment; this form of refusal is not reactionary, but generative and representative of Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty. In relation to refusal, three main themes emerged from the interviews: Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty as “freedom,” Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty as tied to territory, and Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty as inextricable from tradition. Chapter 5 begins with a brief explanation of the politics of refusal, then details and discusses these three themes to highlight how the Iinnii Initiative challenges colonial borders and asserts Siksikaitsitapi ways of knowing and being.

### **5.1 Politics of Refusal**

Settler-colonialism and the imposition of two settler nation-states on Siksikaitsitapi territory have operated through a spatial ordering and a logic of containment meant to rupture the connection between Siksikaitsitapi peoples and their lands. The Iinnii Initiative is an enactment of Siksikaitsitapi knowledge and relationship to the lands, to their expansive and traditional ancestral sovereign territory. The return of the buffalo is a symbol of refusal. This refusal is not a reaction to state strategies or colonial practice, but generative and an assertion of what is and what has been since time immemorial. The roaming of the buffalo across the lands and across the border is a claim to space: to ways of being, knowing, and acting. It is an activation of Siksikaitsitapi kinship, relationality, and traditional sacred-social structures. The Iinnii Initiative is reimagining and repurposing conservation as a refusal of colonial containment.

Kahnawà:ke scholar Audra Simpson theorizes that “sovereignty . . . begins with refusal” (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 22). Refusal is not a reactionary politic, it is not an

outright rejection or resistance to the state, it does not offer to resolve or compromise, but it also does not challenge. It is not a turn away from but a turn towards a pre-existing order and way of being or “*actual histories*” (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 22). It is a refusal to “simply disappear,” “to be eliminated,” “to go away, to cease to be” (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 22). This is deeper than defining Indigeneity as “difference,” or “co-exist[ing]” as Indigenous nations and settler nations (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 22). Refusal is an activation and remembrance of what has always been and continues today. It deeply unsettles settler-colonial claims to space and the mythic origins of unoccupied lands. By not seeking recognition or centring and referencing the state, a politics of refusal creates tension with colonial order and “contests” its ability to dominate and silence alternatives (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 22). For Audra Simpson, refusal is “generative” and works “in everyday encounters to enunciate repeatedly to ourselves and to outsiders that ‘this is who we are, this who you are, these are my rights’” (A. Simpson, 2007, pp. 78, 73).

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg author Leanne Betasamosake Simpson similarly takes up the politics of refusal, arguing that living within Anishinaabe networks is an act of sovereignty. She writes:

Our nationhood, my nationhood by its very nature calls into question this system of settler colonialism; a system that is such an overwhelming, violent, normalized and dishonest reality in Canada and so many other places. It is the force that has removed me from my land, it has erased me from my history and from contemporary life. (L. B. Simpson, 2013)

Instead of presuming a colonial sovereignty structure, Simpson asserts that Indigenous sovereignty, governance, and confederacies function differently ontologically than nation-state ideas of law, territoriality, and enclosure. A politics of refusal generatively denies the totalizing and exclusive political authority of colonial states. When being critical of “dispossession in all forms, the forces of capitalism, white supremacy, and

heteropatriarchy . . . in these refusals, we center ourselves in generating the alternatives” (L. B. Simpson, 2017, p. 36). Refusal is active and is embedded in an ongoing relationship between historic, present, and future Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and acting.

## 5.2 Refusal and Freedom

Refusal is generative and rooted in Indigenous ontologies. This understanding affirms that prior to colonial settlement, the Blackfoot Confederacy existed as sovereign nations defined by their traditional ancestral lands, sacred-social structures, kinship relations, travel routes, economic trading networks, and fluid legal traditions.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, the colonial dream of creating “fixity, control, visibility, productivity, and most importantly docility” disrupted pre-settlement Siksikaitsitapi governance orders and practices (Deloria, 2004, p. 27). But the social and spiritual structures, traditions, societies, bundles, stories, dreams, songs, language, protocols, clans, and ceremonies they are embedded in continue today. These ontologies govern and inform the way the Siksikaitsitapi relate to their lands and relations. Siksikaitsitapi ways of being and the practices by which they are transmitted generate an alternative politic to colonial logics of containment and bordered spatialization (Daigle, 2016).

The Ininii Initiative demonstrates a refusal to be contained and embodies Siksikaitsitapi ways of relating to and being on the lands as they have always been. The free-roaming potential of the buffalo geographically exemplifies the co-constitutive nature of refusal and Indigenous sovereignty. Multiple interviewees stated that Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty could be best understood as “freedom” (Interviews, 09.18,

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<sup>16</sup> Borrowing from Val Napoleon, I use the term “Indigenous legal traditions” when referring to living Indigenous traditional protocols and laws. See: (Borrows, 2010; Napoleon, 2013).

10.18). Interviewees reported that they prefer the word *freedom* over the word sovereignty due to sovereignty's Western connotations of nation-state orders, configurations and bounded territorial strategies. According to these accounts, *freedom* better represents Siksikaitsitapi ways of relating to space and sacred-social structures of being. This understanding of freedom is deeply political; it is enmeshed in tradition and territory and contests colonial logics of containment. As an Elder elaborated:

Speaker 1: The buffalo is the symbol for my freedom . . .

Shoukia: Is there a relationship between the Linnii Initiative or the reintroduction of the buffalo and Blackfoot sovereignty in that way?

Speaker 1: Yes, it's what I am saying: that's the symbolism. Bringing the buffalo back and bring all the laws back . . . At least as the buffalo maybe then we will attain our sovereignty. Through the buffalo. (Interview, 10.18)

The Siksikaitsitapi conception of sovereignty as *freedom* is intertwined with their connection to their territories. *Freedom* relates directly to Siksikaitsitapi governing principles and protocols of reciprocal relations with their lands. It differs from colonial understandings of sovereignty as absolute power or as state-like. One Elder, who

despite not using the word "freedom" expressed similar sentiments, said:

I do not use that word [sovereignty] . . . I am not an American. I am not a Democrat, I am not a Republican, I am Piikani. That is the way that I look at myself, my existence is, and the worldview that I live in is established for me, I do not need to borrow them outside words. It is already there. It is just the way that it is. If somebody wants to come from the outside and describe me well then they may want to use that word, but having both feet in the circle, there is no need to even use that word. (Interview, 10.18)

Photo 15 Blackfoot Confederacy Logo (Source: S. van Beek, photo taken at the Blackfoot Confederacy Conference September 2018)



Another Apatohsi-Piikani person echoed this idea, saying:

Sovereignty is kind of a modern context as it is, so I would dare to suggest that our ideology and a lot of the tenets of our ideology rests in our language . . . So, for example when we talk about traditional sites within the territory, like the vast territory that we had, a lot of the language that we speak is tied closely to those kinds of references so . . . it is almost like the land is us and we are the land. And even to go beyond that to say that the universe the way we talk about it, the universe is this territory. The territory the Blackfoot territory the Blackfoot universe. So philosophically speaking, the idea of sovereignty is kind of our relationship with . . . our territory. (Interview, 10.18)

Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty as *freedom* is historic, inherent, and interwoven into the fabric that encompasses spirituality, responsibility, and the living lands. This is a generative refusal, as Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty, territory, and traditions remind the Canadian and American nation-states that “they possess this very history, and within that history and seized space, they possess a precarious assumption that their boundaries are permanent, uncontestable, and entrenched” (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 22). Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty destabilizes settler-colonial spatial renderings, categorizations, and containment regimes; it is an active enactment of the rooted histories and living traditions of the lands and peoples.

Philosophers Hardt and Negri theorize that borders are simultaneously transgressed (when extending the reach of empire) and fortified (when policing the territorial centre) (Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp. 106, 198, 363). However, Audra Simpson contends that for Confederacy peoples, “the border acts as a site not of transgression but for the activation and articulation of their rights as members of reserve nations . . . or Confederacy peoples” (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 116). Thinking through Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty as *freedom* has profound implications. It is an explicit and generative reimagining of space that refuses and counters the colonial dream of containment, control, and compliance. To choose the word *freedom* over the term “sovereignty” unsettles the colonial connotations which underpin the term and function to uphold

nation-state and settler-colonial physical and territorial borders. To cross these borders is an expression of Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty and territorial tradition, and to recognize Siksikaitsitapi territories as incongruent with colonial mappings is to activate the politics of refusal. Spatially and politically, *freedom*—and the potential of the free-roaming and border-crossing buffalo—is a refusal to be contained.

### 5.3 Siksikaitsitapi Territory and the Buffalo

Siksikaitsitapi traditional territory goes beyond the boundaries of reserves, the reservation, and Treaty 7. It is made up of long-standing histories, occupancy, and relational networks within their vast traditional geographies—understandings of Siksikaitsitapi lands and placemaking cannot be minimized or constrained to spaces recognized and delineated by the state or confined to the colonialscape (Hunt, 2014b). As put by an interviewee, Siksikaitsitapi territory is “much deeper than political or economic constructs or anything like that. It is much more. Our relationship goes way back, I mean we talk about time immemorial. The Blackfoot the Siksikaitsitapi that is the epitome of time immemorial, our relationship to the land” (Interview, 10.18).

Siksikaitsitapi traditional territory is bound up in stories, songs, dreams, bundles, ceremonies, and relations with the diverse and autonomous forms of life on the lands, including the buffalo. In the reintroduction of the buffalo to the plains, the Innii Initiative plans to have the buffalo be free-roaming across the border. An Elder noted the importance of the buffalo crossing the border by saying:



Photo 16 Blackfeet lookout south of Carway border crossing (Source: S. van Beek)

They should be able cross like we do but we should be able to cross like they do. Because they're kin to us and I think that statement could be . . . like if they were allowed to roam . . . I think they would migrate back and forth over like the elk do. They travel from Canada to the United States they don't have to go through the border. They just go back and forth. I think the buffalo will do that too. And I think we should be doing that. (Interview, 10.18)

Starting in the south at Badger-Two Medicine, the buffalo will be able to traverse the lands all the way north in the Jasper-Banff area. While this space is not the entirety of Siksikaitsitapi territory, it does refuse the current spatio-legal orderings of the reserve and reservation boundaries, as well as the national border. Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty as *freedom* is inclusive of, and emerges from, the territory. Therefore, the movement of the buffalo is an expression of Siksikaitsitapi tradition, territory, and freedom. The movement of the buffalo is inherent in Siksikaitsitapi understandings of their territory. The social structure and migratory routes of the buffalo are reflections of and adaptations to the physical landscape. In the summers, the buffalo assembled and

organized in large collectivites (nations), dispersing into smaller herds, groupings, or clans in the fall. As I understand it, just as the buffalo nations gathered and dispersed with the seasons, so too did the Siksikaitsitapi. This is not to say that the seasonal cycle was a simple or direct replication of the buffalo social organization, but the buffalo have served as teachers and inform sacred-social practices. An Elder explained it succinctly:

We learn so much from the buffalo. Our people, we learned everything from nature. We learned how to live, our creation stories tell us everything we do and the ceremonies reinforce a lot of those lessons of how to live our lives. And a lot of that is learned from watching nature. And the buffalo were one of the main teachers that is why they are so integral to our tribal societies and history. And because they provided so much but also their hierarchy their social behaviour and their search for food and energy and nourishment and their survival skills we learned from all of that. We followed them. So our history was following the buffalo around. And then all the stuff that went with the buffalo that we learned from the wolves and the birds and we learned how the grasses respond to buffalo, how they recover, how the regrowth starts and how the buffalo move at different times we learn all of that through thousands of years of watching and participating with the buffalo. (Interview, 10.18)

In speaking about land and *freedom*, Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty is inherently tied to the buffalo and the movement and planned migratory routes of the buffalo and the Siksikaitsitapi throughout their territory. The reintroduction of the free-roaming buffalo to the landscape is a refusal to be contained, to be dispossessed. While reflecting on the migratory pathways of the Innii Initiative, an Amskapi-Piikani interviewee emphasized: “so, you're declaring your traditional territory once again, you're letting the buffalo roam there so it's a huge political statement to both governments” (Interview, 03.18). The Innii Initiative is an articulation and activation of tradition, of protocol, of sacred-social structures, and of what has always been on these lands. This enactment of *freedom* and simultaneous refusal sees dispossession as expansive; dispossession is more complex than land loss. The return of the buffalo signals a refusal to be dispossessed of lands, environment management practices, “traditional orders,

intellectual practices, emotions, spirituality, and hubs of networked relationships” (L. B. Simpson, 2017, p. 44). This refusal is generative and enacts a grounded claim to space that contests colonial boundaries and geographies. As it was put by an Amskapi-Piikani community member:

There's such discrimination or prejudice against the buffalo. So, if we're here and bringing them back, it shows that with our sovereignty that we're showing that we can bring these animals and have those animals when everybody else is against it. That it's our right to do that. And if we want to work to try to get them to go, you know free-roaming and that shows our strength. (Interview, 10.18)

Similarly, another interviewee noted:

Well, one part of the Innnii Initiative, the parts that aren't talked about a lot are the indirect messages that this Innnii Initiative could have . . . Because we don't really recognize the 49th parallel the US-Canadian border as a stopper for us as a people. And so, when that animal has that free access to go back and forth and do what it needs to do to survive . . . we hope that that same message can be conveyed to both the US government and the Canadian government— that we as tribal people should have that same ability because it is part of our historical lands and we should have that same right. (Interview, 10.18)

The return of the free-roaming and border-crossing buffalo is a statement of Siksikaitsitapi land, sovereignty, and survival. The free-roaming buffalo is a spatial, territorial, social, and spiritual enactment of the Siksikaitsitapi conception of sovereignty as *freedom*. The freedom to roam is a generative refusal to be bounded by settler-colonial geographies and is an articulation of an Indigenous alternative through what has always been; the rooted history and tradition of the lands.

### 5.3.1 Land Claims

The Innnii Initiative and the political potential of the free-roaming buffalo are part of a longstanding effort by the Siksikaitsitapi to assert their territorial claims across the US-Canada border. The Innnii Initiative fits into a pattern of refusal against colonial containment and dispossession. On February 26, 1999, three Blackfoot band council

chiefs filed a Treaty 7 Statement of Claim against Canada to recognize their Jay Treaty (1794) rights, their inherent and treaty rights to the lands up to the border, and their right to cross the border. They asserted that they had never ceded, surrendered, or yielded their rights and title and that they continued to possess legal interest in it.<sup>17</sup> Someone involved in the filing stated: "It was regarding the border crossing. We filed a statement of claim against Canada. So that we, I guess enforcing our Jay Treaty . . . We said, 'We need to do something. It's time for us to take Canada to task'" (Interview, 08.18).

The Jay Treaty (1794) states:

It is agreed, that it shall at all times be free to His Majesty's subjects, and to the citizens of the United States, and also to the Indians dwelling on either side of the said boundary line, freely to pass and repass, by land or inland navigation into the respective territories and countries of the two parties on the continent of America . . . and freely carry on trade and commerce with each other. (Article III)

The border operates as not only a physical barrier, but also a jurisdictional and commercial barrier. Having the Jay Treaty become recognized and fulfilled with regard to contemporary economic networks is a strong priority for the Blackfeet Nation (Meeting, 19.09.18). They foresee the linnii Initiative as a potential source of revenue, and consequently, a contemporary iteration of traditional trading agreements. The

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<sup>17</sup> Statement of Claim, *Kainaiwa Nation (Blood Tribe) and Chief Chris Shade, suing on his own behalf and on behalf of the Members of The Kainaiwa/Blood Tribe, Peigan Nation and Chief Peter Strikes with a Gun, suing on his own behalf and on behalf of the Members of the Peigan Nation, Siksika Nation and Chief Darlene Yellow Old Woman Munroe, suing on her own behalf and on behalf of the Members of The Siksika Nation, Tsuu Tina Nation and Chief Roy Whitney, suing on his own behalf and on behalf of the members of The Tsuu Tina Nation, Bearspaw Band and Chief Darcy Dixon, suing on his own behalf and on behalf of the members of The Bearspaw Band, Chiniki Band and Chief Paul Chiniquay, suing on his own behalf and on behalf of the members of The Chiniki Band, Wesley Band and Chief John Snow Sr., suing on his behalf and on behalf of the members of The Wesley Band v. Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Alberta*, File No.T-340-99, Federal Court, Trial Division, filed 26 February 1999.

Statement of Claim posits that the Jay Treaty is not an arbiter of rights, but a recognition of rights to both move freely as a people across the border and to commence commerce and networks of trade, as was always done. The Statement of Claim demonstrates a refusal to be contained physically, economically, socially, and substantively. For the Siksikaitsitapi, it is part of a larger network of ways of being and living on the lands. Border crossing includes bringing items and gifts, visiting relations, having mobility, and enacting free trade and economic activity. The Statement of Claim is still in court proceedings.

The border is similarly being challenged by Kainai's Big Claim that was ruled upon in June 2019 after being in the court system since 1979. The Big Claim argued that Canada breached treaty by moving reserve boundaries to decrease their size. According to the Big Claim, the reserve territory should have included all the land from the "rivers to the mountains," or from Saint Mary River in the east all the way to the Waterton River in the west, and then south to the border.<sup>18</sup> On June 12, 2019, a federal court judge ruled that Canada had breached the treaty and the territory should have been 414.4 square kilometres larger. When asked about the intention behind filing the Big Claim, a Kainai Elder explained:

It means we will be closer to [Amskapi-Piikani]. We were supposed to be adjacent to each other, because their territory comes right up to the border. Ours got moved. So, with this claim we can go back to being neighbours. There's been talk for many years . . . about creating an Indian border, just between Blackfeet. (Interview, 10.18)

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<sup>18</sup> Big Claim, *Jim Shot Both Sides and Roy Fox, Charles Fox, Steven Fox, Theresa Fox, Lester Tailfeathers, Gilbert Eagle Bear, Phillip Mistaken Chief, Pete Standing Alone, Rose Yellow Feet, Rufus Goodstriker, and Leslie Healy, councillors of the blood band, for themselves and on behalf of the indians of blood band reserve number 148; and the blood reserve number 148 v. Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Alberta*, File No. T-238-80, Federal Court Decisions, date 09 June 2019

These land claims show a longstanding refusal to be contained. The Siksikaitsitapi have always known their lands and their territory to be beyond the boundaries set by the Canadian and American nation-states. They are continuing to claim and enact their sovereignty by challenging borders and boundaries that do not exist in their traditional ancestral relationships to the lands, plants, waters, air, and animals. There is a refusal to be controlled or categorized that emerges through an insistence on living as one, as a whole Confederacy. While reflecting on tradition, territory, the buffalo, and the border, one Elder commented:

We have strong connections to the land and our stories make references to different places in the land, and that's why it's in our creation stories and the origins of our bundles and there is no—there was no border, you know then and that's how strong it is. Our Napi stories refer to places north and south of the border— for us we're still one. It's just that important. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

## 5.4 Living Traditions

### 5.4.1 *Perpetuity and Futurity*

Colonial transformations of the landscape operated to clear the land of Indigenous peoples, histories, and relationships. For “in Canada, the law . . . layered itself over pre-existing Indigenous legal landscapes, concealing this previous existence” (Borrows, 2010, p. 68). This legitimized the mythic origins of empty land and simultaneously conceptualized Indigenous peoples as unable to create or maintain their own land tenure, occupancy, or traditional legal orders. As settlement and state-making became imposed, Siksikaitsitapi mobility, travel, movement, and migration became characterized as lawless and outside the settler-colonial spatial structure. The colonial dream of “fixity, control, visibility, productivity, and . . . docility” relegated the Siksikaitsitapi to colonial spatial organizations of confinement within reserve and reservation boundaries, and within two separate nation-states by the bisecting of the lands with a demarcated border (Deloria, 2004, p. 27).

That is to say, both the border and policies and narratives around the buffalo bring up concepts of spatial containment and confinement, which are (re)iterations of colonialism and the imposition and assertion of a settler state. Among the Siksikaitsitapi there is a sense of a loss of territory, a loss of culture, a loss of identity, and a loss of relationships—to relatives, the lands, and the animals.

Reflecting on these colonial processes, one Amskapi-Piikani member stated: “In the beginning [the buffalo] were killed off to get rid of us too, but those animals are still here and so are we” (Interview, 10.18). In considering colonial legacies and ongoing refusal, the Iinnii Initiative is an enactment of the living and rooted histories and traditions of Siksikaitsitapi sovereign territories. It is a celebratory refusal to be controlled, contained, and eliminated. An Elder described these implications of the Iinnii Initiative by saying: “That's good to see. A sign that we're not dead. We're still there. We have come from a long way and we hope to be around for a long, long time. Our history goes back millennia” (Interview, 10.18). The return of the buffalo to Siksikaitsitapi lands is an activation of what always has been. The Iinnii Initiative and having such strong activism to have a cross-border free-roaming buffalo, is a material way of pushing back against logics of containment. It can be understood as an attempt to re-establish Blackfoot territorial and spatial orders.

These are the lands of the Siksikaitsitapi and the buffalo—the Iinnii Initiative asserts that. There is a sense that this return will bring restoration to the ecosystem and also to the lifeways of the Siksikaitsitapi peoples and the Blackfoot Confederacy. It is understood that these ways were never lost, but the Iinnii Initiative is a current statement of the enduring connection to the lands and creation.

The return of the buffalo is symbolic and substantive. The Iinnii Initiative and having the buffalo on Siksikaitsitapi territory has fostered avenues for practicing Siksikaitsitapi ways of life in myriad ways. In July 2017, the Blackfoot Horn Society, a

sacred society for the Siksikaitsitapi, with protocols, songs, stories, and governance structures, was transferred to Amskapi-Piikani. The importance of the buffalo to this event was recounted by two Elders:

Speaker 1: We learned some more of our history this summer when we transferred the Horn Society down here, they said it was 120 years ago since they had it here. So in that 120 years a lot of thought or the attitude was well we never had that or the horns belong up there they do not really belong here we have our other societies, we utilize these . . .

Speaker 2: Mhmm. We will tend to these ones.

Speaker 1: And we will stick with these and they can stick with those horns up there. But overall the horns just existed within the Blackfeet territory they said for 1,500 years and it was 120 years maybe that is when the border came about. But we did not have it down here, so that is why this summer's ceremony was a historic event. Because it re-established that society south of the international boundary.

Speaker 2: And it was only able to happen because the buffalo came. (Interview, 10.18)

The return of the Horn Society to Amskapi-Piikani is indicative of a broader trend towards “strengthening” the Blackfoot Confederacy, a generative refusal to be contained, controlled, or eliminated (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18). Interviewees reported that recently, the Confederacy has been more active and more “connected” (Interview, 10.18). While the Confederacy was never static or dormant, interviewees commented that they are now “feeling free enough to come back together” (Interview, 09.18). To practice ceremonies, visit, and “challenge the border” or “manage without borders” (Interviews, 09.18, 10.18). These changes were most often attributed to increased sharing and education about Siksikaitsitapi language and traditional ways, a process that has been informed and positively impacted by the return of the buffalo (Interview, 10.18). Referencing the return of the buffalo after 125 years, an interviewee disclosed:

So, even though it was like that . . . We still did have a connection with them as close, we still needed to have things that the buffalo provided for us to run those

ceremonies so that continues from that time. It's still very much a part of our bundles today, very, very much a part of them. So, that's how important the buffalo is to us. It's very important for us, for me, to hold my ceremony, we need those you know, and it's something that's just been a part of this bundle like in the beginning. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

Considering mobility and territoriality, the return of the buffalo has implications for Siksikaitsitapi territory and sovereignty. The potential power of the free-roaming buffalo relates strongly to the Siksikaitsitapi sense of sovereignty as *freedom*. This is a direct way of imagining traditional ways, ceremonies, kinship, relationships, travel, and lands that challenges settler-colonial logics of containment, regulation, surveillance, and control. The free-roaming and border-crossing buffalo is an assertion of Siksikaitsitapi territory and a refusal of strategies of containment and boundary-making. The Linnii Initiative has broad and substantial implications for generating alternative Indigenous-led spatial practices.

#### 5.4.2 *Buffalo Treaty*

The Linnii Initiative is important ecologically, socially, politically, and spiritually to the Siksikaitsitapi. Returning the buffalo to the landscape as free-roaming wildlife is returning them to their territory, their home, and is a substantive reminder that the traditions, histories, and ways of the Siksikaitsitapi are rooted in the lands in perpetuity. Even as outside groups cast the buffalo as dangerous,<sup>19</sup> Siksikaitsitapi interviewees reported to see the free-roaming potential of the buffalo as a refusal to be eliminated, denied, displaced, dispossessed—to adhere to categorizations and confinement. In the buffalo's search for freedom, the Siksikaitsitapi have allies.

Through the leadership of Leroy Little Bear and Amethyst First Rider from Kainai, on September 23, 2014, the Buffalo Treaty was signed by many Indigenous

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<sup>19</sup> For examples look to news coverage of buffalo in public spaces such as Yellowstone National Park.

nations in an international and collaborative commitment to seeing the free-roaming buffalo return to their lands. Original signatories include the Kainai Blackfoot Nation, the Siksika Blackfoot Nation, the Piikani Blackfoot Nation, and the Tsuu T'ina Nation in Alberta; and the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre Tribes of Fort Belknap Reservation, the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck Reservation, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in western Montana. Other Indigenous nations have since signed, or plan on signing. The treaty reads:

To honor, recognize, and revitalize the time immemorial relationship we have with buffalo, it is the collective intention of we, the undersigned nations, to welcome buffalo to once again live among us as creator intended by doing everything within our means so we and buffalo will once again live together to nurture each other culturally and spiritually. It is our collective intention to recognize buffalo as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system; to provide a safe space and environment across our historic homelands, on both sides of the United States – Canada border, so together we can have our brother, the buffalo, lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize the buffalo ways for our future generations. (*The Buffalo: A Treaty of Cooperation, Renewal, and Repatriation*, 2014)

The Buffalo Treaty is the first treaty in 200 years without a colonial signatory. It is exclusively a treaty, an alliance, between Indigenous nations, representing Indigenous sovereignty,<sup>20</sup> political will, and a common goal. An individual involved in the Buffalo

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<sup>20</sup> "It is the first treaty that tribes have signed in a lot of years. But also the first one that's between the tribes. Yeah, and then also I even said this, we went to a meeting in Helena with our state governmental people again and I made a pun there. We were in the meeting and we talked about the Linnii Initiative [ . . . ] we had a meeting with them there and then I talked about the Buffalo Treaty to them. And so I told them "and this is one treaty that will never be broken." All the Indians in there they chuckled and the Non-Indians they just kind of scowled a little bit or whatever, you know, but it's true. The treaties have never been really adhered to or you know, so far held up, so it was just a little reminder. And that's just from that, I like to get those little political puns in there once and a while eh. And remind them. So, I think the treaty is a real big thing. It shows them out there that that's one thing that . . . and it is buffalo that made it happen—that we're going to stick together doing this [ . . . ] even though historically we've been at warfare, with the buffalo we can stick together and make it happen." (Interview, 10.18)

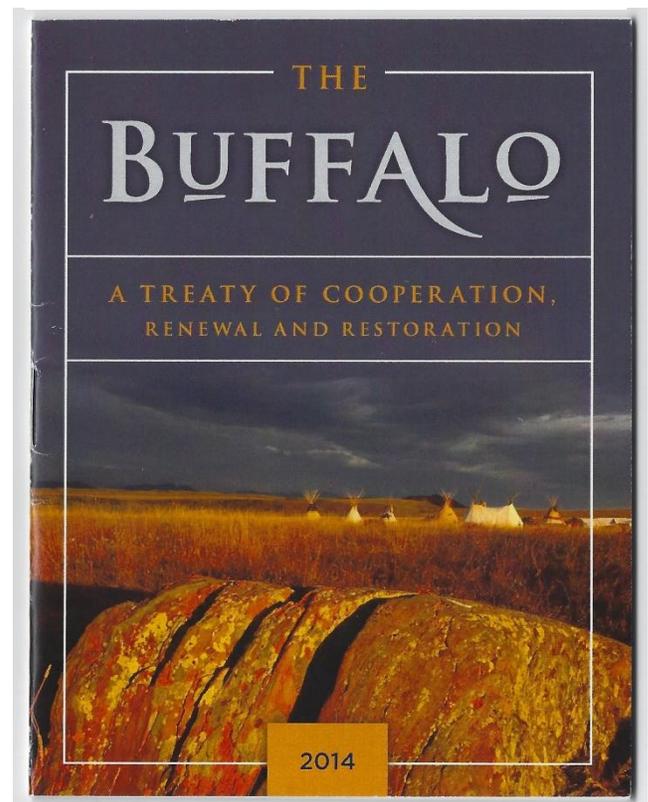
Treaty from Amskapi-Piikani stated that: “It is a symbol of solidarity. We're nations without respecting the border. It's just: we're here, they're back” (Interview, 10.18). The Buffalo Treaty recognizes the shared significance of the buffalo among the diverse cultures, and that the loss of the buffalo was meant to rupture Indigenous nations’ connection to the land. Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard writes that “relational practices and forms of knowledge” can guide “forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 61). Thus, the Buffalo Treaty and its ensured obligations and responsibilities to the buffalo’s freedom are an active refusal of colonial and nation-state legitimacy, authority, control and territorial boundaries. During a discussion about the Buffalo Treaty, one Elder expressed:

I'm glad the buffalo came back because that's one of the prophecies our people said when they signed the treaty. That when the bison comes back in the future we're going to get stronger and smarter. And there's that bison treaty, or the buffalo treaty now – with the plains people that we want to bring it back to free range on the prairies. So, that's what I think today, that's what we need to do. Let Europeans know that the bisons are moving here and I'm moving with them – their fences don't count anymore. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

In its refusal, the Buffalo Treaty upholds Siksikaitsitapi traditions of alliances. A Kainai Elder explained that:

The land is part of us. We have a sacred alliance kinship between the universe, life, the land . . . It's coming to understand that sacred kinship of all things and

Photo 17 (Source: Buffalo Treaty, 2014)



from that understanding comes our worldview. Comes our epistemologies, comes our pedagogies, when they start teaching our way of life. That's where it comes from . . . Iinnii is our brother and sister, the eagle is our brother and sister, the trees are kin. The land is kin, water is so much a part of us, and we have ceremonies acknowledging respecting all of life, all of creation. (Interview, 10.18)

Piikani scholar Betty Bastien similarly writes that “[a]lliances are kinship relationships. Kinship means that Siksikaitstapi survival is dependent upon the cosmic order and that our existence is based on knowing and learning our alliances” (Bastien, 2004, p. 4). The Buffalo Treaty honours the connection to the buffalo as integral within those alliances and within the ecological and sacred-social spatial renderings. The creation of, commitment to, and celebration of the Buffalo Treaty has demonstrated that traditional laws, protocol, governance, and lifeways are living, that tradition is “never static, but rather, lives in each new context” (Napoleon, 2013, p. 232). The Buffalo Treaty and Indigenous nation alliances are a refusal of colonial nation-state boundaries, authority, and legitimacy. The treaty and alliances are an autonomous and sovereign act and a ratification of reciprocal obligations with the free-roaming buffalo. As a Siksikaitstapi rancher maintained:

One of the important factors of the free-ranging herd is, they're part of us. They are part of our history, they are part of this landscape, they are a part of everything in relation to our origin stories about this whole area. They are basically free. They are smart. One of the things our people did is they would follow the animals and they would follow them to different areas that the buffalo knew the growing season was longer, the plants were coming up sooner. So, they were teachers in a way for us. When you look at all that they contributed to us for survival through ceremony through practicality through being part of that system . . . there is a lot of reason to support and have them free and wild along this landscape again. (Interview, 10.18)

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Looking at how Siksikaitstapi sovereignty is expressed through the Iinnii Initiative, Chapter 5 has shown that the return of the free-roaming buffalo is a refusal of colonial containment. Refusal is not theorized as reactionary, but generative and

representative of Siksikaitsitapi traditions and rooted histories of the lands.

Interviewees expressed that sovereignty could best be understood as *freedom*—a direct way of challenging colonial spatial logics of boundaries, control, containment, and confinement. In this way, Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty is inextricable from the territories and living traditions. Freedom is enacted through the return of the free-roaming and cross-border buffalo and demonstrates the enduring and everlasting connection to Siksikaitsitapi lifeways. Profoundly, these feelings were expressed by an Amskapi-Piikani Elder who said:

So when the buffalo moves we want to move with them and we want to maintain that relationship and that partnership. And if they are moving across the border we don't want to have to be stopped and say well the buffalo are leading us somewhere, to greener pastures . . . And where their traditional land and their traditional area is, is also ours. I mean we are so integrated with their spirit and our spirit—that it is one. And that is where it belongs. Our spirit belongs where the buffalo belongs. Where they belong, we belong. (Interview, 10.18)



*Photo 18 Buffalo roaming the prairie grasses (Source: S. van Beek)*

## CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

Settler-colonialism seeks to rupture Indigenous connections to the land, in order to claim, own, and access the territory. While it is well established that Indigenous dispossession is central to settler-colonialism and state-making, I have approached the topic through a spatial framework and conceptualize colonialism as an inherently geographic project and strategy (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2013; Coulthard, 2010, 2014, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Morgensen, 2011; Veracini, 2019; Wolfe, 2006). For the Blackfoot Confederacy, dispossession has operated through the destruction of the buffalo and the building of the border. Working through these events, comparing them, and understanding their contemporary legacies, I have gone beyond recounting historic processes of subjugation and power, to posit that colonialism is current, incomplete, and operating through a logic of containment. I have shown that colonialism is pervasive, ongoing, and also resisted and refused in myriad ways. As such, I examined how the return of the free-roaming buffalo through the Innii Initiative, along with Siksikaitsitapi continued movement across territories and across the international boundary, is a refusal of colonial spatial logics: it is an enactment of Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty, traditions, and territory.

The central aim of this thesis is to explore the following:

- a) how the international border between Montana and Alberta is implicated in settler-colonial geographies of displacement and containment and
- b) how these spatial logics are being contested and refused by the Blackfoot Confederacy through continued tradition and the reintroduction of the free-roaming buffalo.

Starting with a brief overview of Siksikaitsitapi ancestral territory and traditional relationship to the land and movement with the buffalo, Chapter 1 outlines my

conceptual framework and provides context for the thesis and following analysis. I apply theory from three main bodies of literature—border studies, political ecology, and Indigenous sovereignty—to understand settler-colonialism as a geographic strategy that creates dispossession through containment.

Chapter 2 details my data collection, research design, and methodology based on qualitative and ethnographic methods rooted in an ethic of learning and centring relationships. My research took place on Siksikaitsitapi traditional territory, and rightfully belongs to the communities and informants involved in interviews. My research and analysis centres around the case study of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Ininii Initiative, and the international border. Chapters 3-5 consist of my findings, analysis, and conclusions. These chapters address the central aim of this thesis listed above. I address these objectives by referring to the following guiding questions:

- How has the border impacted the Blackfoot Confederacy, both historically and contemporarily?
- How are the Siksikaitsitapi attempting to challenge or reconfigure the border through the reintroduction of the buffalo, the Ininii Initiative, and the resurgence of the Confederacy?
- How is Siksikaitsitapi sovereignty expressed through the reintroduction of the buffalo and the Ininii Initiative?

## **6.1 Opportunities for Future Research**

Border studies and the borderlands paradigm often focus on border crossing as a “transgression” and migration as a rejection of reified notions of space that “presume a particular, naturalized, ideological link between people and place” (Brady, 2002, p. 147; Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 12). Although positively valued, the scholarly relationship between migrancy and occupancy is problematic. Mobility functions to signal the

absence of possession or land tenure in ways that reproduce rather than resist nation-state imperial border logics.

Surely, I see my research as building on and contributing to the existing work, and without the insight I gained from what has been previously written, my research would not be possible. While the findings of my research do not contradict existing understandings of border studies or political ecology, I do hope that my project has highlighted the significance of both more-than-human roles in political realms, as well as how borders function within settler-colonial society.

Borders spatially organize and produce political authority through asserting settler sovereignty on top of prior and pre-existing social governance systems and cultures of Indigenous peoples on the lands. For this reason, all colonial borders bisect and divide the territory of Indigenous nations. Although the situation of the Siksikaitstapi, the Iinnii Initiative, and cross-border free-roaming buffalo are a unique case, they are not the only nation facing these bordering issues. Among the Siksikaitstapi, there is a local awareness of these broader implications, one Elder noted:

So, I'm pretty sure other tribes that have that are close to the border. [They have] what we have, the same story. And they'll probably come back and say well, you know, it's a no communication type of zone area because nobody knows, you go up to the border and you're just all in "okay — am I going to do anything wrong today?" And you know that like somebody is in control of you. They're in control. (Elders Dialogue, 09.18)

The Siksikaitstapi have met with other border tribes to discuss their similarities and differences in having a border built on their lands. In September 2018, The Tohono O'odham nation visited and met with the Blackfeet nation and border officials at the 49th parallel. The US-Mexico border goes through Tohono O'odham territory and separates traditional communities and traditional crossing sites. Similar to the Siksikaitstapi experiences, the border through Tohono O'odham territory desecrates

and inhibits access to sacred sites, legends, songs, pilgrimages, gravesites, and ancestral remains. While the spatio-legal realities and settler states differ, there is a sense of shared cause between the Siksikaitsitapi and Tohono O'odham nations. In January 2019, a Tribal Border Summit and United Nations EMRIP took place for all tribal border nations to come together to share their experiences and to make inter-national recommendations. A key finding of these events was the common ground that they share. A Tohono O'odham Elder summarized: "the border is meant to protect "the nation:" but we want to protect our nations, our ceremonies, our community's traditions" (EMRIP Participant, 26.01.19). Running parallel to the finding of the original case study, this quote illustrates a conception of Indigenous sovereignty and land tenure premised on a free, autonomous, and thriving social order. It demonstrates a commitment to traditional laws, protocol, and social ordering and hope for a free, protected, and prosperous future. As such, an avenue for further activism and research is on settler-colonial geographic entanglements with borders and the enforcement of related border practices. Increased academic attention to and analysis of these dynamics would allow extended understandings of the ways the borders imply the very violence of their formation and maintenance on Indigenous lands.

## 6.2 Concluding Remarks

The acceptance of the Canada-US border as fixed, unchanging, and impermeable obscures the complex set of negotiation involved in its elaboration and enforcement. It also downplays the pre-existing patterns of Indigenous movement and their continued presence in the borderland that the border sought to sever. (Hogue, 2002, p. 10)

The border should not be understood as everlasting or existing on abstracted or un-storied lands. Academics must aim to narrate the borderlands beyond the exclusivist history of nation-state divisions and colonial authority (Saler & Podruchny, 2010). The territories discussed in this thesis are the lands of the Blackfoot and the buffalo. The

Iinnii Initiative enacts the traditional territories and lifeways of the Siksikaitsitapi—in ways that have existed in perpetuity. The Iinnii Initiative is a model for Indigenous-led collaborative conservation governance and offers insights into traditional ontologies of human and non-human relationships that benefit and come from the lands. Given the prairie’s legacies of settler-colonial settlement and geographic divisions, the Iinnii Initiative and the return of the buffalo not only addresses historic loss but is indicative of ongoing Blackfoot presence and perseverance.



*Photo 19 Highway 89 lookout (Source: S. van Beek)*

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## APPENDIX

### **The Buffalo: A Treaty of Cooperation, Renewal, and Restoration**

#### Relationship to Buffalo

Since time immemorial, hundreds of generations of the first peoples of the first nations of North America have come and gone since before and after the melting of the glaciers that covered North America. For all those generations buffalo has been our relative. Buffalo is part of us and we are part of buffalo culturally, materially, and spiritually. Our on-going relationship is so close and so embodied in us that buffalo is the essence of our holistic eco-cultural life-ways.

#### Purpose and Objective of the Treaty

To honor, recognize, and revitalize the time immemorial relationship we have with buffalo, it is the collective intention of we, the undersigned nations, to welcome buffalo to once again live among us as creator intended by doing everything within our means so we and buffalo will once again live together to nurture each other culturally and spiritually. It is our collective intention to recognize buffalo as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system; to provide a safe space and environment across our historic homelands, on both sides of the united states and the Canadian border, so together we can have our brother, the buffalo, lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize the buffalo ways for our future generations

#### Parties to the Treaty

We, the undersigned, include but not limited to Blackfeet Nation, Blood Tribe, Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre Tribes of Fort Belnap Indian Reservation, the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck Indian Reservation,

the Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Indian Reservation, Tsuu T'ina nation along with other nations.

#### Article I – Conservation

Recognizing buffalo as a practitioner of conservation, we, collectively, agree to: perpetuate conservation by respecting the interrelationships between us and 'all our relations' including animals, plants, and mother earth; to perpetuate and continue our spiritual ceremonies, sacred societies, sacred languages, and sacred bundles to perpetuate and practice as a means to embody the thoughts and beliefs of ecological balance.

#### Article II – Culture

Realizing buffalo ways as a foundation of our ways of life, we, collectively, agree to perpetuate all aspects of our respective cultures related to buffalo including customs, practices, harvesting, beliefs, songs, and ceremonies.

#### Article III – Economics

Recognizing buffalo as the centerpiece of our traditional and modern economies, we, collectively, agree to perpetuate economic development revolving around buffalo in an environmentally responsible manner including food, crafts, eco-tourism, and other beneficial by-products arising out of buffalo's gifts to us.

#### Article IV – Health

Taking into consideration all the social and health benefits of buffalo ecology, we, collectively, agree to perpetuate the health benefits of buffalo.

#### Article V – Education

Recognizing and continuing to embody all the teachings we have received from buffalo, we, collectively, agree to develop programs revolving around buffalo as a

means of transferring intergenerational knowledge to the younger and future generations and sharing knowledge amongst our respective nations.

#### Article VI – Research

Realizing that learning is a life-long process, we, collectively, agree to perpetuate knowledge-gathering and knowledge-sharing according to our customs and inherent authorities revolving around buffalo that do not violate our traditional ethical standards as a means to expend our knowledge base regarding the environment, wildlife, plant life, water, and the role buffalo played in the history, spiritual, economic, and social life of our nations.

#### Article VII – Adhesions

North American tribes and first nations, and nations, states, and provinces may become signatories to this treaty providing they agree to the terms of this treaty.

#### Article VIII – Partnerships and Supporters

We, collectively, invited non-governmental organizations, corporations and others of the business and commercial community, to form partnership with the signatories to bring about the manifestation of the intent of this treaty. Organizations and individuals may become signatories to this treaty as partners and supporters providing they perpetuate the spirit and intent of this treaty.

#### Article IX – Amendments

The treaty may be amended from time-to-time by a simple majority of the signatories. (*The Buffalo: A Treaty of Cooperation, Renewal, and Repatriation*, 2014)



Photo 20 (Source: Buffalo Treaty Pamphlet)