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Relationships, Language, and the Land: Language Revitalisation in the Cree Community of  
Wemindji, Eeyou Istchee

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## **Contribution of Authors**

Chloe Boone (first author) and Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish (second author), Wemindji Cree Language Coordinator and CLWA teacher, co-authored Chapter 6 (Manuscript 2). We conceived of the ideas presented in Chapter 6 together. We chose to apply a lens of wellbeing and present the process of mobilising a language reclamation movement, in order to offer ideas to other communities who wish to undertake a similar project. Chloe developed the theory, and Theresa contributed the descriptions of her work in mobilising a iiyuuayimuwin revitalisation movement in her community. We have worked together on several initiatives described in Chapter 6, including the development of a community survey and two presentations to the community, both of which contribute to the development of this research, which in turn should support Wemindji's project of language reclamation.



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## List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
CLIP	Cree as the Language of Instruction Program
CLWA	Cree Literacy for Wemindji Adults program
CNG	Cree Nation Government of Eeyou Istchee
CSB	Cree School Board
CWD	Wemindji's Culture and Wellness Department
JBNQA	James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement
LR	Language Reclamation

## CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction to the research topic

Several prominent Indigenous scholars have written about the inextricable links between language, land, and worldview, and the powerful potential of reclaiming these elements of culture (Simpson 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, Coulthard 2014). Indigenous languages are critical for the retention and transmission of tradition, history, philosophy, and knowledges that emerged from life on the land since time immemorial (Hinton 2001; McCarty, Romero, Zepeda 2006). In an auto-ethnography, Belinda Daniels-Fiss (Cree) (2008) reflects that,

Language and land are inextricably bound together in the Cree way of life ... By coming to know and understand the language, I find the intention to discover where I fit in this world and to explore my connections to Cree values, traditions, and customs. (243-244)

Indigenous languages are often positioned as being “at the center of well-being, culture and social structures, and what it means to be human” (Fitzgerald 2017, 285). However, Louellyn White (2015) recognizes that these elements of Indigenous culture have frequently been interrupted by colonisation, and that individual realities must be supported and respected in the process of reclamation and healing. For people and communities who have been disconnected from their culture by the dispossessive forces of colonisation, connecting to language and land can be keys to healing. Benefits can be observed in terms of emotional, mental, physical, cultural, spiritual, and social wellbeing, and educational attainment (McIvor, Napoleon and Dickie 2009; Wexler 2009). This is particularly so for residential school survivors, and the generations that came after them (intergenerational survivors) (Hoover 1992; Sarkar and Metallic 2009).

Through my research, I explore Eeyou (Eastern Cree) language reclamation (LR) through a lens of miyupimaatsiun (wellbeing) for adult participants of the community-based program, *Cree Literacy for Wemindji Adults* (CLWA), an initiative of the Eeyou community of Wemindji’s Culture and Wellness Department (CWD). I focus on cultural relationships between ischii (land) and iiyiyuuayimuwin (Eastern Cree language) and explore processes that led to dispossession from both, in order to underline the deep roots of language shift and its connections to wellbeing through community-based programming and mobilisation. In this discussion of Eeyou wellbeing, I refer to Naomi Adelson’s (2000) exploration of miyupimaatsiun, which shows that this Eeyou

concept means being able to live in order with ischii and community, learning from Elders and ancestors according to Eeyou culture, and maintaining a sense of identity and wellness distinct from ‘the whiteman’s’ (settler) influence.

Indigenous language loss has become an important international concern. This year, 2019, is named the International year of Indigenous languages. In January, the Government of Canada announced the tabling of *An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages* (Bill C-91), 2019, which proposes to recognise “that the rights of Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* include rights related to Indigenous languages.” Nonetheless, Indigenous languages and lands remain under constant challenge and threat in Canada, and around the world.

Curiously, the impacts of LR programs on this unique group of adult survivors and intergenerational survivors is underrepresented in scholarly literature on language revitalisation. A gap also exists to explore the importance of cultural inter-relatedness to land in language programming. Finally, limited literature exists outlining program organiser’s efforts *to mobilise* a community-based language revitalisation movement, which represents a particularly challenging step in the process. Through my research, I explore these relationships by working with adult CLWA program participants from the Eeyou (Cree) community of Wemindji in Eeyou Istchee (Eastern James Bay, northern Quebec).

Set within Wemindji’s larger movement of land-based programming, this research project responds to Wemindji’s CWD’s and Band Council’s request for an inquiry into the impacts and effectiveness of the CLWA. In order to evaluate this impact from my etic (outsider) position, I have spoken with community leaders and CLWA participants about CLWA and the role that it plays in their lives and community. In order to honour their words and nuanced responses, I have included long quotations throughout my manuscripts. Overall, I applied a two-tier approach in my investigation of the following over-arching questions:

1. What does CLWA represent to Wemindji’s community?
2. What is the role and impact of the CLWA on program participants personally?

In order to do this, I have had conversations with (See Annex I for my guiding questions):

- A. Community leaders and program organisers about: the state of *iiyiyuuayimuwin* (Eastern Cree language) in Wemindji; relationships with ischii; and CLWA’s place within this context and impacts on the community.

- B. CLWA participants, the personal meaning that they perceive CLWA having to the community, and to their lives, with an accent on relationships with ischii; the state of iiyiyuuayimuwin in Wemindji, and the impacts of CLWA.

Given the broad scope of these topics, and the intimately cultural and personal meaning associated with it, I have left my questions open to interpretation and drawn parallels from participants' responses (See Methods, section 3.7 for further details on how I have carried out these activities; See Annex I for guiding questions).

## **1.2 Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. The first introduces the framework of my research including a personal introduction, statement of purpose, and important terminology. The second chapter is a literature review that brings together various academic threads, including: First Peoples Studies, Language Revitalisation, and Geography. Chapter Three outlines my methodology, guided by Indigenous and decolonising methodologies, a Treaty approach that bridges Indigenous and settler epistemologies, and a case-study approach (Hill and Coleman 2018; Kovach 2009; Latulippe 2015; Smith 2013; Wilson 2008).

Chapter Four gives overview of the Eeyou community of Wemindji, with and for whom this work was undertaken. In this chapter, I explore relevant topics including regional and local: connections to iischii; iiyiyuuayimuwin and literacy; experiences in residential schools; history of negotiations with the Governments of Quebec and Canada; strategies for maintaining cultural heritage during times of rapid change; and finally, the current state of iiyiyuuayimuwin and introduction to the CLWA program.

Chapters Five and Six take the form manuscripts (academic articles), which respectively: explore the relationships between Wemindji Eeyouch' iiyiyuuayimuwin and ischii as they have shifted in response to colonial and extractive forces of dispossession and highlight community efforts to maintain cultural relationships (MS1); and (MS2) an exploration of program organisers' efforts mobilise adult Wemindji Eeyouch, providing a road-map for other communities and, through a lens of wellbeing, inquiring into the impacts of CLWA language reclamation for participants and the community, and organisers' efforts to mobilise their community. Chapter 6 (Manuscript 2) is co-authored by Chloe Boone (first author) and Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish (second author), Wemindji Cree Language Coordinator and CLWA teacher.

Finally, my conclusion (Chapter 7) presents a selection of quotations, insights and stories, shared by participants of various generations, particularly Elders, which encapsulate the messages and stories held here within. I chose this approach because it strikes me as an expressive method, imbued with Eeyou knowledge and daily life, another way of honouring the perspectives of those who shared with me and contributed to this journey, and as an alternative to repetitive analysis and summarising.

I use English and iiyiyuuayimuwin throughout this thesis. iiyiyuuayimuwin is expressed in both syllabics and roman orthography. I use syllabics to transcribe titles and conversations held in iiyiyuuayimuwin with participants of CLWA, out of respect for organisers and their work. I also use roman orthography to describe terms that I use frequently (such as iiyiyuuayimuwin and ischii) to make it more accessible to readers who are more commonly familiar with this literacy and/or alphabet. While this approach may seem confusing at the outset, it is also representative of the reality frequently facing contemporary Eeyou relationships to iiyiyuuayimuwin.

### **1.3 Personal introduction**

For a researcher to locate one's self and the personal relevance (purpose) of a research project is an important part of doing work within an Indigenous research paradigm, as one's story defines the way they interpret and relate to the world around them (Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008). This section is part of a reflective process that helped me to orient myself ethically as I established relationships throughout this process. I tell the story of where I come from and how I arrived at this point: I am a Canadian woman of European descent in my early 30s. My ancestors have settled on Kanien'kehá:ka land at various times over the past 353 years. The most distant of my ancestors who lived here came from France - their legacies I am not proud of. My most recently arrived ancestors, on the other hand, were my Bubbeh's (grandmother's) family, who arrived here in the early 1900s, from a Jewish *shtetl* near Minsk. They were fortunate to find shelter on this land as refuge from the Russian pogroms. As with many people of European Jewish descent, I matured critically aware of oppression and empathy. My social positioning as a settler Canadian is why I came to study healing in the colonial context of this country. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has inspired many people of my generation to take action in this regard, and its teachings have inspired my current orientation. As the authors of the TRC Final Report identify, "We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation" (2015, 11). They highlight the need for settler Canadians to take responsibility by becoming informed about this country's history, the cultures



of the Indigenous peoples of these lands, and to develop mutually supportive relationships between communities.

At the start of the 2017-18 academic year, when I knew I would be studying in Wemindji, I proposed to research healing relationships between Indigenous and settler people in the context of protected areas conservation. Dr. Mulrennan, responding to a community need, presented me with CLWA as a possible case-study instead of Wemindji's protected area. I began planning to study Indigenous-settler relationships in this context, with verbal support from community organisers. In March, however, a contact in the CWD informed me that that topic was no longer of interest and suggested that I realign my focus to ensure the relevance of my work toward meeting community objectives, one of the fundamental tenets of research in Indigenous and community contexts. As Margaret Kovach (2009) reminds us, though, it is important that a researcher be grounded in their work in order to properly honour the relationships involved, and that being upfront about one's orientation is key to avoiding perpetuating the harms of objectivist research. While for me, working with CLWA responded to the TRC call to become informed and build supportive relations, I am not a linguist, and I felt a need to produce from my knowledge something that would speak to the Canadian settler context. Far from discounting my responsibility to Wemindji Eeyouch, which is fundamental, I see this as a responsibility to all of *my relations*, accounting for my position as a settler Canadian. Further, I feel uncomfortable with the idea of writing about someone else's cultural understanding of the world. Nonetheless, this is what was implied in what was asked of me, and so I have done my utmost to honour what community members chose to share, while staying true to myself and my own goals, which has been challenging at times. This shift in focus set off a cascade of changes in my personal life as I realized that by changing my focus away from protected areas, I would not gain the skills and knowledge from my master's that I hoped for, and I have decided to continue my education with a second master's degree in Environmental Impact Assessment in order to play a role in decision-making around land and perhaps the consultation process, informed by everything I have learned during this journey. So, the knowledge that has been built between Wemindji community members and I, plays an important role in my story, where it will hopefully contribute both to the continuation of Wemindji's project and to the next chapter of my own.

#### **1.4 Statement of purpose**

I am honoured to have been asked to contribute to the recently established literacy program, *Cree Literacy for Wemindji Adults* (CLWA), which is an important effort by Wemindji's Culture

and Wellness Department towards revitalising the local Northern East Cree dialect. My supervisor, Dr. Monica Mulrennan, has been engaged in a collaborative research project with the Wemindji community for 20 years that has involved and continues to involve several other graduate students working with Wemindji (many of whom were participants in the Wemindji Protected Areas Project). This relationship has facilitated and supported my engagement. Selecting my research topic has been an ongoing process. I was fortunate to receive funding from the *Northern Scientific Training Program* (NSTP), and through Dr. Mulrennan's association with the *Centre for Indigenous Conservation and Development Alternatives* (CICADA).

Begun in September 2017, CLWA is funded by the National Indian Brotherhood and Wemindji's Chief and Council, and is intended to reconnect survivors and intergenerational survivors with language through lessons and cultural activities, to promote language reclamation in Wemindji, instill pride and enjoyment culture, and uphold community values (Katherine Scott, unpublished data). There is a great deal of energy and optimism at local and regional levels about reclaiming *iyyuuayimuwin*. Much of this discussion is attributed to the 'language keepers' work. My thesis inquires into CLWA's contributions to Wemindji's larger vision of maintaining cultural connections to land-based tradition. The results of this study offer insight into the impacts CLWA is having in the community, a qualitative case-study on the benefits of programs for survivors and inter-generational survivors that is rarely presented in academia. By inquiring into language-land relationships, this work presents a holistic perspective that deviates from a conventional academic focus. It is my understanding that the community is interested in publishing results in order to raise the profile of their work, and support other similarly located communities, given scarce literature and resources available to small language groups. I intend for Manuscript 1 to be published in *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, and for Manuscript 2 to appear in the *Journal of Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, where much of the literature that I have drawn on appears. I have designed this research to ensure the relevance of findings to the community and have worked in close collaboration and in service to organisers. I, along with Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish, co-author of Manuscript 2, have sought to understand the needs of program participants in order to support CLWA's mandate of contributing to individual and community *miyupimaatisiun*. I have also been asked to return to the community to present my findings.

### **1.5 Use of terms**

**Endangered / ancestral languages:** Languages which are (Hinton 2011),

not the majority language of the country, languages that may not have been heard or learned in the least by people who see them as an important part of their identity ... I am also using the term 'endangered languages' rather loosely here to cover even those languages with no speakers left at all, but where revitalization might ... take place. (308-9)

**Eeyou:** Eastern Cree, also spelled iiyuu.

**Eeyouch:** Eastern Cree people

**Eeyou Istchee:** Cree Nation of James Bay, refers to:

the territory represented by the Grand Council [of the Crees] in our dealings with federal and provincial governments, and with other entities in Canada and abroad. Simply translated, Eeyou Istchee means 'Cree Land', but at a deeper level, it declares awareness of our cultural self. (Mark et al In Press)

**iyyuuayimuwin:** Eastern Cree dialect

**ischii:** Eeyou (James Bay Cree) land

**Language contraction:**

When speakers tend "not to know certain domains of vocabulary or certain aspects of grammar" that have fallen into disuse due to changing lifestyles or contexts (Hinton 2001, 5).

**Language loss:** In contrast to language shift, this term refers to,

the attrition of specific language skills such as knowledge of grammar and vocabulary or more general "frustration and/or loss of ease with the language" (Kouritzen 1999, 18). What is lost, however, "is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children . . . families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings." (Wong Fillmore 1991, 343)

**Language reclamation:** According to Fitzgerald (2018),

Leonard (2012, 359) defines language reclamation as 'a larger effort by a community to claim its right to speak a language and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives' ... language revitalization may be ... geared toward acquisition

and proficiency in second language learning, Leonard's usage of reclamation provides a direct contrast through its orientation toward community goals. (285)

**Language revitalization:** According to King (2001), the process of,

moving toward renewed vitality of the threatened language ... Similarly, although more focused on home-family use of the ... language, Spolsky (1995:178) views language revitalization as a process of restoring vitality which may add 'both a new set of speakers and a new function, spreading the language to babies and young children who become its native speakers ... [adding] functions associated with the domain of home and family, resulting in various kinds of informal and intimate language use and the related emotional associations of the language. (23)

I use this as an umbrella term to refer to the diverse goals that a community may have toward maintaining, strengthening, reclaiming, renewing their language, etc. In Ch. 6, co-author Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish and I use *language reclamation* to distinguish the process of empowerment associated with the program from Western linguistic models of revitalisation (above) (Fitzgerald 2017).

**Language shift:** According to McCarty et al (2006),

the process whereby intergenerational continuity of the heritage language is proceeding negatively, with fewer "speakers, readers, writers, and even understanders" every generation (Fishman 1991, 1). Language shift denotes a community-wide process involving the displacement and replacement of the heritage language by a dominant language over a period of time. (32)

**miyupimaatsiun:**

Eeyou concept closest to wellbeing (being alive well), refers to being able to live in order with the community and ischii, learning from Elders and ancestors, according to Eeyou culture, and maintaining a sense of identity and wellness distinct from 'the whiteman's' (settler) influence (Adelson 2000).

## CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a review of existing literature on themes of: Indigenous cultural reclamation, language revitalisation, and community efforts to maintain and (re)claim relationships to land. In the first section I provide an overview of communities' efforts to reconnect with culture and resist colonial hegemony by revitalising ancestral languages, reasserting connection to land, and healing through cultural practices. The second section addresses literature on Indigenous language revitalisation, which I have organised into subsections drawn from parallels in the literature, including: goals, challenges, keys for success, and benefits and outcomes. The third section is a review of communities' and individuals' projects of reclaiming personal connections to land and maintaining rights and responsibilities through processes of land-use planning, litigation, and protected areas creation. These three sections combine to create an outline of the monumental and nuanced efforts being made by Indigenous communities to protect and maintain their cultures for current and future generations. I have privileged works written by Indigenous scholars, and academics working in partnership with communities. I have attempted to maintain a focus on communities who are proximate to Wemindji culturally, historically and/or geographically, and made an effort to highlight Cree communities where possible. While various auto-ethnographies written by Indigenous scholars have been published elaborating the connections between land and language, these relationships are rarely mentioned in the scholarship on language revitalization or land stewardship/management. I have interwoven these topics in order to highlight parallels in communities' efforts and individual meaning.

### 2.1 Cultural reclamation

In their introductory article to *Decolonization Journal's* special issue on land-based pedagogy, Wildcat (Nehiyaw-Plains Cree), McDonald (Maskîkow-iskwew-Swampy Cree), Irlbacher-Fox (University of Alberta), and Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) situate recent decades of Indigenous communities' experiences across Canada of cultural resurgence embodied in cultural and language revitalisation, political activism, traditional land protection, and personal and communal healing. Jeff Corntassel (Tsalagi, Cherokee Nation) at the University of Victoria, suggests a *peoplehood model* by which to conceptualise the complex interconnectedness of cultural elements that combine to form identity, or peoplehood, the practice of which form the "foundation parts of resurgence" (89). Joe Sheridan (York University) and Roronhiakewen "He Clears the Sky" Dan Longboat (Haudenosaunee, from Ohswe:ken, Six Nations) (2014) refer to

the process of resurgence as *initiating an Indigenous mind claim* as exercising belonging to culture, and ownership of the land through the practice of everyday cultural expression, ceremony, the internalisation of traditional values, through political engagement and activism, and time on the land. In their collaborative research on an Eeyou land-based healing as a mechanism for decolonisation, Radu (Concordia University), House (Cree Nation of Chisasibi), and Pashagumskum (Cree Nation of Chisasibi) conceptualise healing itself as resurgence. In this context healing/resurgence is understood as the redress of loss of culture and identity from historical and contemporary wrongs, by restoring the ways in which individuals interact with the environment, returning order to ones relationships to community, the land and cosmos, and the meaning that one draws from those relationships (94). Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Simpson (2014), uses her Nation's stories "to advocate for a reclamation of land as pedagogy," to renew the role of the land as both way- and place-of-knowing, and in order to educate upcoming generations to carry their cultural roots toward rebuilding a Nation.

### **2.1.1 Embedded language**

Before beginning this section, I clarify that as a native English speaker, I have only learned three languages, all of them of European origin. This section has required a good deal of learning and reflection to wrap my head around. Since I can ever fully comprehend the concepts herein, I use substantial quotations to illustrate the understandings of Indigenous languages of those to whom they belong. According to Daniels-Fiss' (Plains Cree) (2009) autoethnographic telling of her journey to reclaim language, culture and land,

... the "people of Turtle Island" ... called the land their mother, or Mother earth. The Cree word for "land" is *okâwîmâwaskiy*, comprising *okâwîmâw* (mother) and *askiy* (land, country, earth, or world); and *okâwîmâwaskiy* provided everything people needed for their health and well-being, and the people thanked Mother earth daily through prayer, rituals, and ceremonies using the language *kisê manitôw* gave to them. Their language, *nêhiyawêwin*, became known to the newcomers as Cree. Although the language is seen as a gift to the people from *kisê manitôw*, its lexicon comes from *okâwîmâwaskiy*. Just as land is sacred in the Cree culture, so too is the language. These two, the land and language, work in unison, creating an ever-deepening relation between the speaker and the environment. (238)

Much of the literature on Indigenous languages by Indigenous people comes from individuals like Daniels-Fiss, who are, or whose communities are on a journey to revitalise and reclaim the

identities that colonisers tried to take away (Gardner 2009; White 2015; Elizondo Griest 2017; Sable and Francis 2012). Language is a cultural code that is intimately tied to ways of knowing. According to Louellyn White's (Kanien'kehá:ka Akwesasne, Concordia University) (2015) book, *Free to be Mohawk*, which traces the struggle for self-determined education and the creation of the Akwesasne Freedom School, the Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) language "contains nuances and meanings that are distinct from other languages and worldviews. Language shapes how we see and understand the world around us, therefore affecting our concept of self" (134). In his seminal book on relationality and Indigenous methodology, Shawn Wilson (2004) explains the way that relationship and worldview imbue the Cree language,

... rather than the truth being something that is 'out there' or external, reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth. Thus an object or thing is not as important as one's relationship to it. This idea could be further expanded to say that reality is relationships or sets of relationships ... That the Cree language requires but one word to describe something (a noun or pronoun), but many words to describe its use, reveals that the underlying importance is placed on the singular object or reality, rather than on multiple realities or upon one's relationships. A very different epistemology can be seen in the Cree use of the word *chapan*, which describes the relationship between great-grandparent and great-grandchild. Both people in the relationship call the other *chapan*. *Chapan* is a balanced relationship without hierarchy of any sort. (73)

White (2015) elaborates that Indigenous languages allow people to communicate with the Creator, plants, animals, and all of Creation. All of the above cited scholars affirm that the Creator wants Indigenous people to communicate in the languages He gifted to them, (Elizondo Griest 2017; Gardner 2009; Iwama et al 2009; Sable and Francis 2012; White 2015). Sable and Francis' (Maupeltu) (2012) book, *The Language of this Land, Mi'kma'ki*, records the ways in which ancient landscapes, histories, and belief systems of the Mi'kmaq are reflected in their language. The wisdom of the Earth, behavioural codes, knowledge of particular places, life-cycles and parts of animal, plants, the seasons and countless other natural phenomena, a people's ancient history, are expressed in language, words, names, placenames, legends, song and dance.

White (2015) points out that despite the US and Canada's aggressive assimilation projects, which specifically and violently targeted children's Indigenous languages, they did not succeed to fully assimilate Indigenous children to the dominant languages. McLeod (Plains Cree) (2000)

articulates how forced displacement of Indigenous people in the prairie provinces to reserved lands created State-like boundaries around cultural and linguistic groups, dispossessing and homogenising distinct Peoples of linguistic dialects, relationships, and cultural identities. White describes ancestral languages as identity- and life-sustaining, and as sites of resistance and negotiation. Lenore A. Grenoble's chapter on "Arctic Indigenous Languages" in Hinton, Huss and Roche (2018), explains how contemporary disproportionate impacts of climate change on arctic landscapes, plant and animal life, bio-accumulated contamination, which result in significant changes to certain hunting, fishing, and herding practices, traditional food availability, and transport, all of which are "strong domains of language use, and disruption here means disrupting language use" (352). Stelomethet Ethel B. Gardner (Stó:lo) (2009), in her auto-ethnographic piece on revitalising the Halq'eméylem language, *Without Our Language We Will Cease to Exist as a Unique People*, reflects that, her mostly young community needs to "come to terms with managing our ancient, yet persistent language, in a contemporary context, in a context where settler languages have prominence over ours, and in a context of global communication where endangered languages draw little, if any, attention" (76-77). Likewise, White (2015) identifies the need for community members to exercise patience and understanding with regards to community members who do not speak the language, or who struggle to learn. She suggests that the mastery of English, in order to communicate deep cultural meanings, may be more fruitful than a 'cartooning' of one's understanding of Kanien'kéha (231). Likewise, Battiste, Kovach, and Balzer's (2010) introduction to the Canadian Journal of Native Education special issue on Language and Literacy in Aboriginal Communities, suggests celebrating Creenglish – the colloquial hybrid of Cree and Cree – as "distinctive, culturally driven vernacular" (11) and even a form of decolonisation.

### **2.1.2 Place-based knowing**

Indigenous knowledge systems, while very diverse, share the quality of being fundamentally place-based, rooted in relationships of community between humans and other-than-humans that have existed and evolved since time immemorial: *land* – the relational web inextricably tied to place (Simpson 2014). Wildcat et al (2014) describe this way of knowing as, "where we engage in conversations with the land and on the land in a physical, social and spiritual sense" (2014, 3) fundamental to decolonization. Accordingly, land is understood to be more than the physical landscape, as it is conceptualised in Western thought: Sheridan and Longboat (2014) explain that it constitutes a dynamic web of ever-evolving relationships between spirit, people, Ancestors, other-than-humans, and distant connections living in and co-producing reciprocal



community and understanding. Indigenous knowledge is gained over generations from observation of these relationships, experiential, embodied learning, and sharing. Colin Scott's (2006) anthropological work on the communication of values among Eeyou hunters at Wemindji, positions Indigenous knowledge as spiritual and scientific, garnered from oral transmission of norms and rules that are based in intimate observation of, and interaction with the surrounding world. As Marie Battiste (Potlotek First Nation) and James [Sákéj] Henderson (Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne Tribe) explain (2000), "Knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their lands ... All aspects of knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territories of the people concerned" (42).

Leanne Simpson (2014) points out that these interactions are informed by cultural values, and teach how to live "intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty and respect with all elements of creation, including plants and animals" (9-10). *Land is these connections*. According to Harvey Feit's (2004) work with Waswanipi Eeyou hunters in Eeyou Istchee, Eeyou place-based philosophies and life-projects follow a deeply relational vision drawn from life on the land. These perspectives have led them to cultivate relationships with government and industry, despite fraught histories and unequal power dynamics. Ongoing efforts to build healthy reciprocal relationships are rooted in the wisdom that these lead to successful life projects and ultimately survival (ibid). Sheridan and Longboat's concept of *environmental apartheid* (2014) illustrates why the desecration of the environment, species loss, pollution, and development caused by capitalist and colonialist projects can threaten entire worldviews. According to Corntassel (2012), forced displacement by colonizers not only uprooted peoples, it dispossessed entire networks of relationship and understanding that had developed over hundreds and thousands of years. In his examination of place as an orienting framework for anti-colonial resistance today, Glenn Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) describes returning to these relational places as a "place-based imaginary that serves as the ethical foundation" of resistance (2010, 82).

### **2.1.3 Reclamation and healing**

As a primary means for transmitting culture, knowledge, and values, language has been uniquely targeted through official policies. According to Whalen et al (2016), "forced language shifts caused the loss of social and behavioral knowledge and understanding that was created over millennia, ultimately contributing to disastrous, endemic health deficits" (2). Gardner (2009)

expresses the healing of learning their language, “When we begin to understand these precious gifts, our hearts soar, our emotions are stirred, and we feel the healing of coming to know ourselves as Stó:lo people, River people, as Xwélmexw” (76). According to Richmond, Ross, and Egeland’s (2007) examination of the importance of social support on the health of Indigenous people in Canada, by approaching health from a culturally appropriate perspective, which refers not only to the health of the body but of the individual, relations, community, land and culture, healing can occur on a multidimensional scale. Radu et al (2014) describe healing as a “transformative and continuous project ... to empower [individuals] to make the right choices in life” (91). This involves acknowledging the colonial sources of suffering and collective work to create safe spaces for individuals to heal by connecting to Eeyou culture, the language and the land (ibid). Naomi Adelson’s (2000) exploration of Eeyou wellbeing: miyupimaatisiin (to be alive and well), reveals that this Eeyou understanding means being able to live in order with the community and the land, learning from Elders and ancestors, according to Eeyou culture, and maintaining a sense of identity and wellness distinct from ‘the whiteman’s’ (settler) influence. According to Radu et al, being on the land, iiyiyu pimaatisiwin (the Cree way of life), therefore, offers a place to reflect, to practice respectful relationships through traditional activities, and to learn according to reciprocal intergenerational storytelling: “fostering positive relationships is the principal goal of Indigenous healing” (Radu et al 2014, 95). Whalen, Moss, and Baldwin’s (2016) review of research correlating language and wellbeing highlights the critical place that Indigenous languages hold for healing, as an indicator of cultural identity, with belonging to community, and other important indicators of health, including: significantly reduced youth suicide, reduced smoking, diabetes, alcohol and drug use, violence (3). Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, and Bartlett’s (2009) article, *Two-Eyed Seeing and the Language of Healing in Community-Based Research* in Unama’ki, Mi’kmaki, underscores the degree of the entanglements between language, healing, relationality, and revitalisation in their exploration of the endangered healing and spiritual tensions unique to that language, “When you go into that tense somebody has to hear you. So they know you’re beginning to heal and therefore their attitude sort of wants to, has to, change to accommodate you” (18).

Martin Brokenleg (Rosebud Sioux) (2012) reviews research with Native American communities to explain the potential for building resilience by tapping into knowledge that is held within the body and to heal historical trauma through reinvigorated cultural identity and values. Seminal Plains Cree scholar Margaret Kovach (in Ritenburg et al 2014) underlines the importance of engaging with Indigenous epistemologies in recognition of multiple forms of knowing, valorising

traditional and embodied knowledge through practices and storytelling (70). According to Kovach, part of a decolonising approach, these forms of expression look beyond the Western intellectual tradition to valorise personal Indigenous understandings, emotions, interpretations, and experiences of the world. In a review of arts-based programs, for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Archibald and Dewar (2010) suggest that gently allowing people to explore their experiences and express their perspectives within an enjoyable environment of trust, to build relationships with other participants, and to reconnect with culture, represents a potent therapy for the individual, interpersonal, and community. Overall, there is a broad consensus in the literature that to reconnect with values and practices imbued with spiritual or cultural meaning can be invaluable to restoring community health and coherence, particularly when paired with the positive emotional release and social interaction (Archibald and Dewar 2010; Brokenleg 2012; Muirhead and De Leeuw 2012). Chandler and Lalonde's (2008) research, undertaken with communities on the West Coast, has shown that the health implications of cultural reclamation are significant: communities "that succeed in taking steps to preserve their heritage culture, and that work to control their own destinies, are dramatically more successful in insulating their youth against the risks of suicide" (6). Stiles' (1997) review of four successful language revitalisation programs in Canada, the USA, New Zealand, and Hawaii have demonstrated reduced gang activity and alcohol abuse, as well as improved educational results in youth and reduced drop-out rates.

## **2.2 Indigenous language revitalisation**

Prior to European colonisation, about 450 languages and dialects were spoken on these lands that we now call Canada (Mclvor and Anisman 2018). However, in their chapter on strategies for Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance, Mclvor and Anisman (2018) affirm that almost 70 Indigenous languages are being naturally transmitted to children in Canada, "testimony to the resistance and resilience of their speakers" (McCarty, Romero, Zepeda 2006). Three Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut are expected to endure and flourish (Mclvor and Anisman 2018). In the first chapter of the seminal text, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* (2001, co-ed. Leanne Hinton and Kenneth Hale), Leanne Hinton (2001), emerita professor of linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, specializing in Native American sociolinguistics and language revitalization explains that language loss in Indigenous contexts is associated with colonial "usurpation of Indigenous lands, the destruction of Indigenous habitats, and the involuntary incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the mainstream society" (4). In their article exploring storywork as an "epistemic, pedagogical and

methodological lens” (160) by which to explore lived experiences of Indigenous language reclamation. McCarty (an educational anthropologist), Nicholas (Hopi), Chew (Chickasaw Nation), Diaz (Pipa Aha Macav), Leonard (Myaamia), and White (Kahnien’keha:ka) (2018) explain that Indigenous languages “are not *replaced* but rather *displaced*” (160-161) through colonial policies that are intended to destroy knowledge and other cultural identifiers that are encoded in language. With the extinction of each language, we witness also the loss of an entire worldview, repository of knowledge, and source of identity. In the “Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization”, Hinton, Huss, and Roche (2018) underline that Indigenous language revitalisation movements worldwide are part of a much larger human rights movement, often that are understood to be paths toward healing and justice, part of a larger cultural resurgence (xxii). McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, and White (2018) underline that rather than being a new phenomenon, language reclamation is a deeply personal, community-informed, dynamic, multi-faceted, and decolonising: “an enduring tradition of Indigenous persistence in which linguistic diversity is the most reliable guide toward the future for Indigenous peoples” (161).

In an edited volume of auto-ethnographies and “how-to guide for parents” titled “Bringing our Languages Home: Language Revitalization for Families” (2018), Hinton describes the family home as the “most important locus of language revitalization ... the last bastion from which the language was lost, and the primary place where first language acquisition occurs” (xiv). Romero (a Keresan language educator), and Zepeda’s (Tohono O’odham) (2006) five-year study of the nature and impacts of a Native language shift in Beautiful Mountain Navajo Nation argues that language is the main vessel by which culture is transmitted from generation to generation, and from person to person, and that the very structure of a language can inform the ways in which we relate to other beings. Belinda Daniels-Fiss’ (Plains Cree) (2008) and S.E.B. Gardner’s (Stó:lo Coast Salish) (2009) auto-ethnographic journeys toward reclaiming language, culture and connection to land demonstrate that language is closely associated with cultural value systems, spiritualities, local Indigenous Knowledge, and the oral traditions through which these are transmitted over generations through story and song, places and homelands from which knowledge and understanding of life and the world have blossomed.

### **2.2.1 Objectives and benefits**

In her commentary titled “Honoring Our Own: Rethinking Indigenous Languages and Literacy,” Romero-Little (2006) argues that the goals of language revitalisation programs should be

community-defined, allowing Indigenous people to redefine the meanings attributed to their languages and literacies, priorities and success. McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, and White (2018) suggest that “success” should be locally-defined, and is closely tied to identity and community, but is also tied globally to other such movements (161). According to Romero-Little (2006), the process and pedagogy should be decolonising and “liberatory,” centered on Indigenous intellectual traditions and values. “Fundamentally, what is done (or adopted) today should not be understood as a loss of culture ... but a link to the past and future existence of Indigenous people” (ibid, 399). Likewise, Fitzgerald’s (2017) resilience-based framework for evaluating success in the context of Indigenous language revitalisation highlights the benefits that the process of (re)learning and mobilising around language reclamation can have for individual and community wellbeing and resilience. Like McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, and White (2018), she argues that rather than evaluating based on quantitative Western linguistic measures which decontextualize language shift from Indigenous contexts and histories, assessing the progress of an initiative should focus on the wellbeing it conveys to participants. According to Hinton (2011), learners and language activists are often motivated by the desire to strengthen and validate a sense of cultural and personal identity, sense of belonging to a community, and knowledge of traditional practices. Hinton (2018) argues that language activists dream that one day their language may be naturally passed intergenerationally within the family and used in daily life (xiv). While elsewhere the “success” of *reclamation* is suggested to be measured according to personal- and community-defined objectives, according to Hinton “true ‘reversal of *language shift*’ cannot be successful in the long run unless families make it their own process” (ibid) (italics mine).

A small but increasingly recognised body of research has evolved over recent decades highlighting the benefits of ancestral language for health and wellbeing, largely as articulated by community members who have experienced the impacts of language shift and/or reclamation first-hand in their community. McIvor and Anisman (2018) summarise research demonstrating reduced diabetes and youth suicide in communities that have maintained their ancestral languages, and language learning contributing to cultural and spiritual healing, increased leadership, and language as a coping mechanism (91). In their article examining the links between adult language learner’s well-being and experiences in a Master-Apprentice program, Jenni, Anisman, McIvor, and Jacobs (2017) found that, “language (and culture) appears to function not only as a protective factor, encouraging the likelihood of positive outcomes or discouraging the likelihood of negative outcomes, but also as a preventative measure” (36).

Bommelyn and Tuttle (2018) further illustrate the effectiveness of family language planning in the home, as parents who attained fluency through their role as parents, with the intention of raising a new generation of fluent Tolowa Dee-ni' speakers. Benefits included important aspects of resilience, such as: finding comfort and achieving sobriety, achieving leadership positions, healing residential school trauma, cultural and spiritual health. Further, McIvor, Napoleon and Dickie (2009) demonstrates that increased language identity has been shown to result in a decrease risky behaviour among youth, including gang activity, substance abuse, and self-harm. The same study found that health benefits of language and cultural retention can emanate beyond this to increased levels of overall health in the community, tied to uses of traditional medicines, foods, emotional wellbeing, and spirituality. Blair et al (2002) found that languages are revalued in their communities as more people begin to pick them up and identify them with a positive sense of self, relating them to academic, and economic success. Other significant aspects of culture, such as ceremony and law may also be revitalised as a result (ibid). Chandler and Lalonde (2008) documented further benefits, including enhanced sense of personal and cultural identity connected to reduced rates of youth suicide. Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan, and Toth's (2014) study about the relationships between cultural continuity, self-determination, and diabetes prevalence in First Nations in Alberta, "measured by traditional Indigenous language knowledge" (1) found that "First Nations that have been better able to preserve their culture may be relatively protected from diabetes" (ibid). In his chapter on Indigenous language revitalization and wellbeing in the Routledge Handbook of language revitalization (2018), Michael Walsh points out that from this point of view, "An Indigenous community may gain benefits to their well-being through something not overly arduous" (8). That is to say, that the project of revitalising a language is immense, and indeed taking it head-on may cause damage to wellbeing, disappointment, struggle, or a sense of hopelessness. However, reasonably portioned goals that can be accomplished with reasonable efforts can reinforce health and wellbeing; Walsh (2018) also calls for increased quantitative data on the subject.

### **2.2.2 Challenges**

Several challenges exist to the process of language revitalisation, all of which are linked systemically and intergenerationally. McIvor and Anisman (2018) and Hinton (2018) identify several challenges that language revitalisation programs face, including: lack of support from policy makers and school officials, inconsistent and inadequate funding, culturally inappropriate schooling, lack of educational materials in the languages or language-learning programs,

cultural hegemony and internalised discrimination, intergenerational trauma and shame, and lack of resources. Hinton, Florey, Gessner, and Manatowa-Bakley (2018) in Hinton, Hess, and Roche (2018) explain that small numbers of trained teachers is a common challenge and communities must often take on the task of “producing” Indigenous language educators. Gardner (2009) picks up the intergenerational thread here: the majority of fluent speakers are elderly and may be unable to take on the demands of teaching or certification programs. It is widely acknowledged that publishers generally do not produce materials for very small language communities, and communities and teachers must often create culturally-appropriate materials or adapt materials from other programs, which can be time-consuming and costly (Hinton 2011; McCarty et al 2006; Mclvor and Anisman 2018). As a result, according to Margaret Noori (2018), Associate Professor of English and American Indian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and Anishinaabemowin language teacher, in her chapter “Anishinaabemowin: Language, Family, and Community,” in Hinton (2018), many communities have recognised this and are working to compensate educators for this work and developing effective models of cooperation (126).

McCarty et al. (2006) identified three related themes: “the politics of shame and caring in school ... the hegemony of English, and the iconic bonding of English with whiteness” (37). These themes repeat in various forms throughout the literature (Mclvor and Anisman 2018; White 2015). These dynamics have profound impacts on individuals’ language ideologies and choices. According to Elizondo Griest (2017), in her comparative exploration of her native Tejano community in South Texas and Ahkwesáhsne Kanien'kehá:ka community on the US/Canada borderland, the choice not to learn or speak an ancestral language can result from shame associated with cultural inferiority, frequently reproduced in mainstream media, and pressure felt to “accommodate the mainstream life” (39). According to McCarty et al (2006) points out that an understanding of English as the language of education and employment may also lead them not to educate their children in the ancestral language. Likewise, most digital programming and other media largely portrays a dominant culture/language, and might make an Indigenous language and tradition appear archaic and obsolete to youth (ibid). According to Jacquemet (2005) analysis of *Transidiomatic practices: Language and power in the age of globalization*, media and technology are having a de- and re-territorialising influence on some Indigenous cultures, in which the language choices and cultural identities of community members are caused to shift toward the dominant ideology or a hybrid of both, rather than remaining tied to “self-contained areas of the globe” (266).

### 2.2.3 Keys to success

Ensuring that language education is tied to culture beyond academic language is paramount for successful learning. As Hinton (2011) explains, cultural and language revitalisation often occur simultaneously, therefore “a goal may be to have the learners themselves become able to carry on and enhance the practice of the traditions of their culture” (310) by learning practices while speaking the language that informs them, including traditional stories and land-based skills in a safe, social, cultural context. According to Fitzgerald (2017), defining the success of language revitalisation on culturally- and community- defined needs and perspectives allows the process of reclamation to confer wellbeing, beyond the intents of Western linguistics. Romero-Little (2006) points out that by centering community needs, goals, and wishes, organisers can work toward developing culturally relevant frameworks imbued with a community’s intellectual traditions. According to Margaret Noori (2018), success can be found in various forms of language-culture learning initiatives, from integrating language educations with arts programming and historical and cultural based initiatives, to linking Indigenous language literacy with pop-culture, and practicing language in traditional cultural ceremonies, in “culturally supportive classrooms” (120), in the local community and through digital media. According to Stiles (1997) study of The Cree Way program, teaching a language only in a classroom setting often ignore the cultural setting from which the language was born. This may be a particularly relevant concern in Indigenous contexts, where land-based activities and ceremony often represent foundational sources of cultural meaning and language, and where class-based learning and Western pedagogy may still be associated residential school trauma. Daniels-Fiss (2009) highlights the rich benefits of LR programming occurring on traditional land, through the performance of traditional cultural practices (ibid).

As described above, language is a thread that ties generations of people, from children to parents, to ancestors, which are critical to language revitalisation. Pyuwa Bommelyn and Ruby Tuttle (Tolowa), in their chapter “Tolowa Dee-ni’ Language in Our Home” in Hinton, Huss, and Roche (2018), vividly describe the ways in which their “natural and culturally appropriate form of learning” (115) from grandmother and mother teaching the children in the family home was “forever changed” by multiple systematic acts of colonisation and genocide over centuries spanning generations. According to Bommelyn and Tuttle (2018), as cultural teachings were lost, so was the language by which families educated their young ones (ibid). As McIvor and Anisman (2018) explain that a reported number of speakers of a language is not the ideal measure of a language’s vitality, rather measures of vitality should concentrate on the rate of



intergenerational transmission, and the number of children inheriting a language (90). A broad consensus in the literature affirms that socialisation in a language is most likely to occur where a language is spoken between parents and children in the home (Fishman 1991; Hinton 2001; Hinton 2013; Mclvor and Anisman 2018). As Bommelyn and Tuttle (2018) put it, “Our homes are the largest domain that we have control of and became the focal point” (118) of their work with Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI). Hinton (2013) affirms that where a language is spoken and nurtured at home, children are much more likely to become literate in their ancestral language and to identify positively with their culture. White (2015) further confirms that even children enrolled in language immersion will not fully achieve fluency if their language socialisation is not supported in the home. McCarty et al (2006) found that youth at Beautiful Mountain Navajo community could be encouraged to maintain their language as part of cultural identity by sharing positive language-oriented experiences with caring and supportive adults. Conversely, when adults dismissed or underestimated youth’s language skills, youth experienced a distancing from their language identity (ibid).

While most academic literature in the area focuses of the broader concept of language, identity, and strategy for revitalization, little focuses on the role of literacy in this context. According to McCarty and Nicholas (2014), the “formidable challenges” faced by school-based language revitalisation often include the development and adaptation of Indigenous writing systems (128). However, according to Montgomery-Anderson (2018), in Hinton, Huss, and Roche (2018), for the Cherokee, an emphasis on syllabic literacy is part of a “macro-scale approach to language revitalization ... the takeover of educational infrastructure [that] expresses a linguistic sovereignty that serves as a substitute for political sovereignty” (174), as intended to protect the language and foster students’ sense of ethnocultural identity (ibid). The Eeyou Cree School Board (CSB) offer an interesting perspective on this as well. According to Stiles (1997), internalised perceptions that languages based in oral tradition are inferior to Western traditions, using the written word in Indigenous language education can validate their everyday and academic use. Prior to the creation of CSB, for example, the Cree Way program intentionally incorporated student literature in reflections on cultural activities such as camps and ceremonies to address this problematic perception (ibid). This manifested as a re-appropriation of culture in which the ancestral, perhaps once a source of shame, can become a source of relief from dominant English, where children can be immersed in ancestral expression (ibid, 256). In Hinton (2018), Margaret Noori explains that one of the first areas to consider in designing language curriculum, is the place of literacy and orthography. While many Indigenous languages may be

expressed in a variety of ways (ex, roman and syllabic orthographies), according to Noori, consistency and basic agreement on conventions is helpful to developing strong literacy. Further, this demands “equality in format and function” (126) to provide students the option of using their Indigenous literacy in every-day functions. On the other hand, Romero-Little (2006) points out that, “Indigenous peoples have had their own distinct understandings, forms, and processes of literacy that provided children with many rich and meaningful daily opportunities to acquire the cultural symbols and intellectual traditions of their local communities ... framed within oral societies” (399) and that these literacies are commonly marginalised because they do not adhere to narrow Western definitions.

Hinton (2011; 2018) and Mclvor, Napoleon, and Dickie (2009) show that, because few appropriate learning materials exist for most languages with a small speech-community, teachers and communities must work very hard to develop innovative and culturally appropriate curricula and materials. However, Sarkar and Metallic’s (2009) report, which documents a participatory action research project collaboration between Listuguj (Mi’gmaq) teachers and researchers from McGill University, shows that some highly successful programs have been designed by instructors with little formal training. In that study, the creation and development of that program, instructors were able to access their own unadulterated creativity, drawing on their own experiences as language-learners to develop innovative and effective curricula reflexively to meet their participants’ needs (ibid). Mclvor and Anisman (2018) note that, while many communities produce their own printed materials, with advances in technology, communities are increasingly able to “develop and produce culturally relevant curricula” (92), including TV shows and dubbed versions of mainstream film, online and digital dictionaries, and even operating systems available in an Indigenous language (MAC OS in Hawaiian). According to Lenore A. Grenoble’s (2018) chapter on “Arctic Indigenous Languages” in Hinton, Huss and Roche (2018), while internet connections are slow and technology less common in the North, social media and cellphones are providing new domains in which Indigenous languages can be used in oral, written and multi-media forms. There, professional media, including TV and film, are sometimes available, while in many remote locations and small communities, local newspapers are the only source of print media in an Indigenous language.

#### **2.2.4 Language revitalization for adults**

While much language revitalization literature and programming focuses on childhood education as the best means for reinvigorating the transmission of language and culture, as described

above, adults, and specifically teachers and parents, play a critical role in this process (Fishman 1991; Hinton, Florey, Gessner, and Manatowa-Bailey 2018). Sarkar and Metallic (2009) highlight that it is often today's generation of parents who represent the *missing generation* who have experienced the clearest break in language transmission, who may not have learned the language and traditions from their parents, and who also may have been exposed to the abuses of state-run schools. This generation of adults falls within critical phases of the language shift, in which it is still possible, if not optimal to reverse language loss (Fishman 1991). In their chapter on Master-Apprentice Language Programs, Hinton, Florey, Gessner, and Manatowa-Bailey (2018) in Hinton, Huss, and Roche (2018) underline the critical need for adult speakers of professional and parenting age, to fulfill the role of teachers in schools, and urgently (as seen above) in the home, in order to pass the language on beyond today's mother tongue-speaking Elders passing. Louellyn White's narrative in McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, and White (2018) reveals how her own journey of language reclamation toward healing her Kanien'keha:ka identity and building community is both imbued by and imbues her mission to instill pride, sense of self and responsibility to the Earth and in her young son.

Language programs for adults vary, including undergraduate and graduate studies, Master-Apprentice programs, family-oriented programs that train parents to use their languages at home in raising their families, immersion programs, and evening classes (Daniels-Fiss 2008; Gardner 2009; Hinton 2011; Hinton, Huss, and Roche 2018). Much of the literature on adult Indigenous language learning today focuses on such projects as Master-Apprentice and family language planning. However, a few articles outline programs more similar to the one that is the focus of this research: evening classes for adults. Jenni, Anisman, McIvor, and Jacobs (2017) found important measures of wellbeing for members of this generation in their study of participants of Master-Apprentice programs, however little of their discussion focuses on the special significance their findings hold to members of the *missing generation* specifically. While Hinton (2011) articulates that such programs are insufficient to achieve fluency, and are more appropriate to maintenance, they may be more accessible to working adults, and may nonetheless convey benefits to wellbeing, a paramount measure of "success," particularly for the *missing generation* (Section 2.2.1). Sarkar and Metallic (2009) documented the development of a participatory action research project with instructors from Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation and McGill University, in which instructors developed a curriculum to address the problem encountered by members of this generation in 2006, targeting specifically young parents (Sarkar and Metallic 2009).

### 2.3 Land: Maintaining and (re)claiming relationships to place

Since time immemorial Indigenous communities have lived, immersed in responsive socio-ecological systems, which, like language, is understood as a gift from the Creator (Daniels-Fiss 2008). Margaret Kovach's (2009; Ritenburg et al 2014) explorations of Indigenous epistemologies demonstrate the vastly diverse spiritual and knowledge systems emerge from millennia of observation and reciprocity with the Earth. Big-Canoe and Richmond (2013) explore the impacts of colonisation and capitalism on their Anishnaabe community's culture through a framework of *environmental dispossession*, which they describe as, "Direct forms ... processes that physically disable use of land such as contamination events that may sever access to traditional food systems. Indirect forms of dispossession occur as a result of policies, regulation or development whose intent is to sever Indigenous peoples' links to their lands and resources and the Indigenous Knowledge it fosters" (127).

Leanne Simpson (2014) proposes renewing connection to culture by re-learning and reclaiming ceremony, law, language, knowledge based in values of reciprocity, sharing, humility, honesty, respect, and patience, which emerge from traditional relationships to land. According to Parlee and Berkes, in collaboration with the Teetlit Gwichin Renewable Resources Council (2005), and Brown, McPherson, Peterson, Newman, and Cranmerat McGill University of Nursing, demonstrate that maintaining ties to the land offer community members health and wellbeing through traditional foods and medicines, family coherence, cultural continuity, social connection, connection to land and knowledge, self-governance, and connection to the Creator and creation (ibid, 132). Plains Cree scholar Belinda Daniels-Fiss (2008) writes of her journey to reclaim cultural roots, which involved a land-based Cree immersion program, Daniels-Fiss came to understand that to 'remember' the language was to remember the teachings of her grandparents by walking the land in an environment characterised by cultural values. Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee Nation) explains that *being* on the land signals a transition from a place of struggle to everyday cultural assertion. Corntassel explains that, "one disrupts the colonial physical, social and political boundaries designed to impede our actions to restore our nationhood" (2012, 88). This shift rejects state-affirming rights discourse and embraces a way of living informed by place-based relations (ibid, 89). The links between the protection of traditional territories, cultures, languages, and knowledge systems was highlighted in the first of the Terralingua series of reports (Oviedo, Maffi, and Larsen 2000), which outlines the correlation between cultural, linguistic and biological diversity around the world, and has become a driver for the protection of what is known as *biocultural and linguistic diversity* (ibid).

### **2.3.1 Maintaining ties to land**

Faced with significant industrial and commercial pressure, many communities are having to find ways to protect their land and livelihoods for today's and future generations (see Chapter 4 for details on the context of Wemindji). In their review for the McGill Law Journal, Bakht and Collins (2016) argue that the desecration of Indigenous sacred sites constitutes an infringement of Aboriginal Constitutional Rights, and that "Recognition of these principles would signal respect for the equal religious citizenship of Indigenous Canadians" (777). Their argument, which builds on the works of John Borrows and Sarah Morales, is an analysis of the Ktunaxa Nation case against the government of British Columbia in the Supreme Court of Canada. The community sought recognition, through litigation, of their right to freedom of religion based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by protecting their Sacred Mountain Qat'muk, home of the Grizzly Bear Spirit, from ski-tourism development (Bakht and Collins 2016). Christine Schreyer (University of Alberta) (2008) likewise demonstrates how a relational Indigenous worldview comes to bear on a community's resistance or cooperation with industrial encroachment. In her examination of the parallel development of language planning and land planning within the Loon River Cree First Nation in north-central Alberta. Loon River Cree engaged in language-planning alongside their land-use planning, in order to protect their culture from the development of oil-reserves on their territories (Schreyer 2008). With an awareness that use of the land and language are inseparable, and that the language would lose vitality with destruction of the land from which it evolved and the increased introduction of southern oil-workers, the community lobbied for environmental protection by framing the language as a cultural resource. Further, they prepared for this incursion by reinforcing their communities' ties to the language (ibid). By tying language-planning to land-rights and land-use planning, the Loon River Cree were able to mobilise Aboriginal Rights and land-claim consultation stipulations to maintaining land-based livelihoods, as well as language (Schreyer 2008).

#### **2.3.1.1 Protected areas**

Communities, such as Wemindji (Mulrennan et al 2012) (see Chapter 4), opt to protect their territories and cultures through the creation of protected areas (PA), or conservation parks, as elaborated in the following section, however this has not always been the case (Bennett et al 2010; Carroll 2014; Mulrennan et al 2012; Robson and Berkes 2010; Stevens 2014). According to West, Igoe, and Brockington's (2006) work on the social impacts of protected areas (mostly in Africa), a divergence between Western concepts of conservation, which excludes humans and

Indigenous understandings of land-use and protection, saw the exclusion and forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional territories in the name of protected areas (West et al 2006). Stan Stevens' book, "Conservation Through Cultural Survival: Indigenous Peoples And Protected Areas" (1997), explores many areas of interest for conservation, which are rich in biodiversity thanks to communities' long-term stewardship. Indigenous communities' traditions land-use practices, which are grounded in cultural beliefs and values, have important contributions to make to preserving the world's natural diversity and ecosystems, while benefiting from the protection of their homelands and substantially increased autonomy (ibid). Mulrennan and Sayles (2010) have found that Eeyou knowledge of the land and animal behaviour, and landscape modifications, created to improve the predictability and sustainability of hunting sites, are crucial to maintaining ecosystem integrity. In their review of community-based conservation in partnership between Wemindji Cree First Nation and multiple Canadian universities, Mulrennan, Mark, and Scott (2012) note that "deploying protected areas as a political strategy to redefine its relations with government in terms of a shared responsibility to care for the land" (256). Through this partnership, the community has been able to pursue dual imperatives of conserving traditional territory, cultural traditions and livelihoods, while also engaging in economically lucrative resource development projects on their land. In 2017, the Liberal Government of Canada assembled an Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE) in recognition of these relationships. This committee's mandate involved making recommendations for innovative solutions to address reconciliation and conservation through the recognition of different types of Indigenous-defined protected areas. According to the ICE report, common themes further included, "the significance of language to the health of cultures and the land; the need to respect Indigenous laws, knowledge and protocols; the critical importance of ceremony; the need to acknowledge and address past wrongs committed in the establishment and management of parks and protected areas; the interrelationship between the health of land, water and people; and the opportunity for cross-cultural and cross-institutional learning, sharing and collaboration with the intent to improve relationships" (22).

## **CHAPTER 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction to methodology**

In selecting a methodological framework (Castleden et al 2012), as with my literature review, I make an effort to privilege and center Indigenous worldviews and works. Indigenous scholars make clear that their methodologies do not complement dominant Western academic epistemologies, but rather stand on their own, rooted in Indigenous cultures, places, and epistemologies (Hill Sr and Coleman 2018; Kovach 2009; Smith 2013; Wilson 2008). Likewise, the methods (ex. conversation and talking circles) associated with these research paradigms, while comparable to Western methods (ex. interviewing and focus groups), are better placed to accommodate Indigenous people and ways-of-knowing. Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree) writes that, “the focal discussion of Indigenous methodologies ought to be a deep concentration of worldview or paradigm” (2010, 40). Therefore, I privilege relational Indigenous methodologies here, as I have been taught to. I have elected to complement this with a cross-cultural treaty approach by which I can locate myself as a non-Indigenous student, and honour the people, places, and understandings that I carry with me (Iwama 2009; Latulippe 2015). I further concretise my work within a case-study frame, and methods such as conversation, talking-circles, and participant observation.

### **3.2 Indigenous methodology**

Indigenous methodologies emerge from a recognition that research has often been conducted in a way that is culturally in-appropriate, and disrespectful of the needs or values of communities, in service of a colonial agenda (Smith 2013). Science has been utilised to undermine Indigenous people and the validity of Indigenous knowledge (Kovach 2009). More recently, research has been undertaken to examine Indigenous cultures, and often problems encountered in Indigenous communities. However, while this research may be conducted with altruistic intention, Western methods are frequently inappropriate in another cultural context, and researchers may overlook harmful legacies left by extractive research (Kovach 2009; Smith 2013; Wilson 2008). Nonetheless, since the 1970s, research agendas in Eeyou Istchee have been increasingly defined and directed by the Eeyou. According to former Chief Rodney Mark of Wemindji, “research partners add value ... collaboration should result in an ongoing learning process, which you find has resulted in a common vision of how to work together and make decisions” (Quoted in Scott in Mulrennan, Scott and Scott In Press).

In response to historical legacies, Indigenous scholars have developed a body of work by which researchers can locate themselves appropriately (Kovach 2009; Louis 2007; Smith 2013; Wilson 2008). They identify parallels in Indigenous realities, worldviews, and value systems from around the world, carving out space within the academy for respectful, reciprocal research, where knowledge can be created according to an Indigenous perspective. Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) (2008) draws the distinction between Western and Indigenous research paradigms and their relevant worldviews: According to *dominant research paradigms*, “knowledge is seen as being *individual* in nature. This is vastly different from the Indigenous paradigm, where knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge” (2008, 38 emphasis in original). Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree) (Ritenburg et al 2014) defines Indigenous knowledge systems,

Indigenous knowledge systems, which are the heartbeat of Indigenous methodologies, have been associated with descriptors as holistic, inclusive, animate, and pragmatic, and are nested within a relationality that binds both the experiential and theoretical, contests knowledge compartmentalization ... Indigenous knowledge systems that include revealed knowledge (as coming from the intuitive), experiential and holistic knowing, and the oral transmission of knowledge. (70)

Kovach (2009) further builds on an Indigenous methodology characterised by storytelling, creative arts, embodied and experiential knowing, cultural values, and epistemological plurality, by acknowledging that it is necessary to recognise past and present colonial harms, in order for research to contribute to healing with the application of a decolonising lens. The CLWA program has already become quite successful and popular with community members, and this work should support it nicely, without demanding excessive time or energy on the part of admin and teachers. This work should support the community’s program of language reclamation and cultural continuity.

### **3.2.1 Elements of Relationality**

Shawn Wilson’s work, *Research is Ceremony* (2008), describes an Indigenous research paradigm that honours systems of knowledge and protocol, founded in relationship and relational accountability as “a ceremony that brings relationships together” (8). The sharp focus of Wilson’s work on myriad relationships will form the framework upon which I have modeled not only my relational work, but my work which seeks to explore relationality. It is the researcher’s responsibility to earn trust, and build and maintain relationships with community members



participating in the process of knowledge-creation. In fact, unlike Western approaches which focus preparation almost exclusively on literary research and delineating methodology, in Indigenous methodology, relationship-building is also an important part of preparing for research (Kovach 2010). This implies a researcher's responsibility for locating themselves, their connections to the research, and their objectives within knowledge-creation. Research must be relevant to the community, in that it must meet their needs and goals, and help to move the community forward. Any research undertaken with Indigenous people must be informed by the "collective value of giving back to the community" (Kovach 2009, 149), which suggests not only "the dissemination of findings, it means creating a relationship throughout the entirety of the research" (ibid). Knowledge creation should be considered a shared process, rather than the work of an 'expert' or 'academic' as in the Western tradition (Kovach 2010). The ongoing development of knowledge can be found in the sharing and mixing of stories and understandings rooted in people's own lives and histories. Conversation allows ideas to be shared and to evolve out of complex, rather than fragmented understandings (Kovach 2009, 99). Likewise, a researcher must honour participants' knowledge in all forms, and ensure that the interpretation and representation is respectful. This requires ongoing inter-relation throughout the process, during which participants should have the opportunity to verify and confirm the use of their words and to adjust wording to appropriately represent what they shared (Wilson 2008).

### **3.3 Trans-cultural methodology**

The literature cited above is critical to guiding non-Indigenous scholars, like me, who work with and for communities around centering and "privileging Indigenous values, attitudes and practices" (Smith 2013, 128). Well-positioned non-Indigenous researchers are often seen, and may see themselves, as fulfilling an obligation to the people upon whose land they work and/or reside, and can play the role of ally and research partner, so long as the community retains control of the research process and outcomes (ibid, 186-7). However, important methodological questions arise regarding the extent to which non-Indigenous researchers should be "invited to engage the knowledges of Indigenous peoples" (Latulippe 2015, 2) and how information shared by participants can be properly presented and interpreted cross-culturally (Iwama 2009). This is a question that preoccupies me. While I have prepared to the best of my ability to understand Eeyou perspectives, they are, nonetheless, not my own and most of my education has been within a Western academic context, even as I have studied these topics. Therefore, it has been important that I locate myself within relational knowledge-building. To do this I draw on work

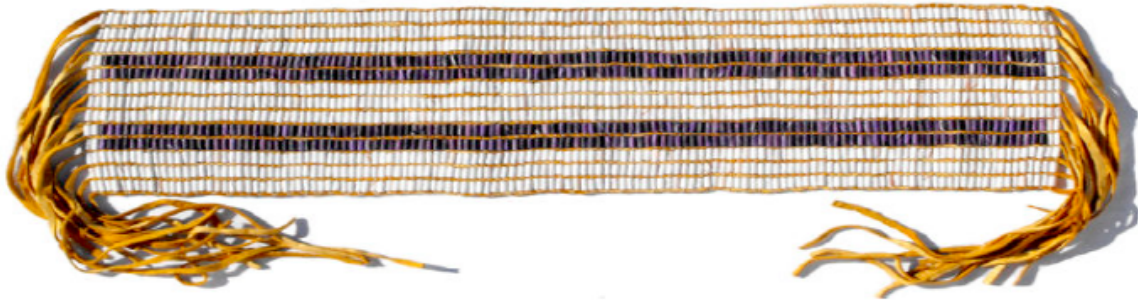
exploring how to respectfully engage two distinct ways-of-knowing the land, borrowing from Richard W. Hill Sr's and Daniel Coleman's (2018) "'Two Row Wampum-Covenant Chain Tradition'" as a conceptual framework for bridging epistemic difference. Here I situate and visualise my own epistemology alongside community members with whom I worked, honouring the complex historical and contemporary interrelationships that connect us.

### **3.3.1 Conceptual framework: A Treaty-Approach**

The historic Teioháte ("Two Paths" in Kanien'kéha, "Two-Row Wampum Treaty" in English) is part of "treaty of coexistence" outlined by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Dutch merchants early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Simpson 2014, 221). The concepts of "reciprocity-between-autonomous-powers" that it conveys were subsequently taken up by the British as they attempted to ally themselves with the powerful Confederacy, and later to inform early treaty-making as the Canadian and American nation-states emerged (Hill Sr and Coleman 2018). It is considered to be the first such treaty between the Peoples of Turtle Island and Europeans. Following the

represented by a belt of purple and white wampum shells. There are rows of purple wampum parallel to each other, with white wampum between and around them. The white represents the sea of life that each row metaphorically shares. One purple row represents an Iroquois [Haudenosaunee] vessel and the other a European vessel. Although they share the same sea, they are separate and parallel; they should not touch or disturb each other or try to steer the other's vessel even though they share the same space. Between the vessels are chains that connect them to each other; these are to be shined and maintained by one or the other vessel. (ibid)

The vessels represent the two nations of the treaty: distinct, yet sharing space; non-interventionist, on a basis of "interdependent autonomy" and "long-lasting friendship" (Hill Sr and Coleman 2018, 1). The white rows of beads represent peace, good-minds, and ongoing friendship, and form the basis for an ethic of reciprocity (ibid; Latulippe 2015). Today, researchers are increasingly turning to the Teioháte treaty to rearticulate approaches to trans-cultural work with Indigenous communities, in "an effort to 'shake the dust' from and 'repolish' a set of understandings that [are] foundational ... so we can see their relevance for building better relationships in a wide variety of contexts, including that of scholarly research" (Hill Sr and Coleman 2018, 2)



**Figure 1.** Teioháte /Two-Row Wampum Treaty belt (Bonaparte in Latulippe 2015, 8)

Rick Hill, Sr (Tuscarora from the Six Nations of the Grand River) and Daniel Coleman (McMaster University) (2018) present five principle derived from the oral history of the “Two-Row Wampum – Covenant Chain tradition.” These principles emerge from reflections on the “two-paths of the local Indigenous community and settler universities” (3) represented in the spirit of the Teioháte – Covenant Chain treaties in monthly seminars held over four years at Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic (SNP), the Haudenosaunee-run postsecondary college on the Grand River Territory of the Six Nations in southern Ontario. Seminars were intended to “bring together the best in Haudenosaunee and Western knowledge traditions” by “Six Nations community-based researchers and settler university-based researchers—including professors, graduate students, Deyohahá:ge: staff researchers, and other community knowledge holders” (2). Hill, Sr and Coleman (2018) outline the research partnership principles derived from Teioháte – Covenant Chain treaties tradition, that emerged from these seminars, as follows:

1. *Relationships are dialogical*: differences between research partners are valued so that Indigenous knowledges and ways of being are engaged from within their own philosophical contexts rather than assimilated into Eurocentric worldviews;
2. *Importance of place-conscious ceremony*: recognition of sacred space between all entities required ceremony to respect and bridge that space;
3. *Equity within distinctiveness*: productive relationships are built on the understanding that there are “elder” and “younger” siblings involved in any relationship, so equity

recalibrates authority and leadership in the context of the parties' grounded, historical experiences;

4. *Internal pluralism and diversity*: it is important to resist the assumption of homogeneity within any of the parties involved and to value diversity within them;
5. *Sharing knowledge, not owning it*: knowledge is understood as a gift of the Creator and not a possession, so our responsibility is to ensure that knowledge circulates within relationships that are appropriate to that knowledge. (3)

While these links have been allowed to oxidise by colonial failure to respect the vision of the treaties, and Indigenous knowledges have been oppressed, appropriated and threatened with epistemicide, it is not too late to repolish this agreement. According to Hill, Sr and Coleman (2018), this can occur by remembering and enacting its teachings and upholding Indigenous knowledges and worldviews in the various venues and processes where various bodies of knowledge interact, including during the transcultural research process.

As a conceptual framework, the Teioháte (see Figure 1), expresses, in the context of this research, two distinctive, yet interdependent, ways-of-knowing traveling side-by-side throughout a reciprocal research process, mindfully traversing a shared creative space imbued by values of relational accountability, respect, and support. While centering Indigenous knowledges and the objectives of the community, a treaty approach also allows me to acknowledge my positioning as a settler person, bridging epistemic difference (Latulippe 2015, 6; Kovach 2009), and to fulfill the obligation that that privilege implies by interrogating dominant social and academic processes (Kovach 2010; Regan 2010). The Teioháte is imbued with Haudenosaunee law, worldview, and land stewardship. Its symbolism represents a form of respect, non-interference, mutual support, and accountability, which informs my knowledge of what Indigenous-settler relationships are meant to be as a EuroCanadian born and raised on the island of Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), unceded Haudenosaunee land. Whereas I have focused my methodologies on Cree epistemologies (Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008), this representation nonetheless encapsulates the relationship that I intend to have with the people whose land I reside upon (in this region or wherever I may go), including the Eeyou, whose territory in Eeyou Istchee, one thousand kilometers to the North of my home, is directly impacted by Quebec and Canadian society and by my life as a southern consumer of northern environments. While this is a perspective that I have nurtured throughout my own life, I have not been taught to think in a way that encompasses Indigenous thought, as many scholars and activists call for educational reform

(decolonisation and Indigenisation) for people of all ages in this country (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). I have found it daunting to have been invited to address a topic as intimate and sensitive as language shift. Language exists at the core of many people's identities and personal histories, and this represents a huge responsibility to those people who shared with me, as well as to their families, communities, and ancestors. Of course, because of the epistemic differences outlined here, my outsider status in the community, and the very intimate nature of this information, the extent to which I have been invited in has varied. Aware of these limitations, the Teioháte has represented an effective conceptual framework by which to understand my role in the research relationship.

### **3.4 Case-Study methodology**

In order to frame this broad epistemological approach, I have employed a case study method in this inquiry into language, land, and relationship in Wemindji. According to Yin (2014), case-study "is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon ('the case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (16). The features of a case study can be described as addressing a complex real-life context in which many factors may need to be distinguished in relation to the phenomenon being explored. Exploring shared experiences and multiple perspectives (stories) is key to understanding which of many interrelated factors can be highlighted toward the community's desired objective (Yin 2014; Smith 2013) and is guided by previous accounts of similar contexts. By focusing on the phenomenon of language loss and revitalization through land-based cultural transmission in Wemindji, I have understood this story to be rooted in Wemindji's unique community and culture, while remaining relevant to other communities with similar experiences.

### **3.5 Research ethics**

The Community Council of Wemindji Cree First Nation has approved the proposal that I submitted in April 2018. I have attained ethical approval from the Concordia University's Office of Research. This research adheres to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans*, and particularly *Chapter 9: Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples*. Participants were asked to give either written or recorded oral consent prior to sharing their testimony.

### **3.6 Participants**

In exploring the relationships of CLWA participants to *iiyiyuuayimuwin* and *ischii*, and the impacts of the program on the latter, I spoke with 27 people about factors affecting the state of the language in Wemindji, and the impacts of the program on participants and the community. Participants included Elders, representatives of the Cree Nation Government, organisers of community programming at CWD, and CLWA organisers, teachers, and participants. The following emerges from what became a close collaboration with local 'language keepers' and community organisers, who also participated in conversations including: Linda Stewart (Manager, Wemindji Culture and Wellness Department, CLWA Advanced participant), Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish (Wemindji Cree Language Coordinator, CLWA teacher), Frances Visitor (CLWA teacher and Cree School Board Language Consultant), and Katherine Scott (Wemindji Heritage Research Coordinator, CLWA Non-Cree Speakers participant). Katherine Scott is a PhD candidate who works in Wemindji's Culture and Wellness Department contributes toward her work on the establishment of a local cultural heritage museum and research, and helps to facilitate graduate student research projects in support of community programming, including this one.

### **3.7 Research methods**

Over the course of this project, I visited Wemindji three times. I first spent one week in the community in early November 2017 to meet and have preliminary discussions with community members, connect with the people I would ultimately work with, start building relationships, participate in and observe *iiyiyuuayimuwin* literacy classes, and conduct my first conversations. I next visited for two weeks in August 2018 to help organisers prepare for the coming year, present with Theresa in the community's Annual General Assembly, continue to build relationships, and have conversations with organisers and teachers. My last field-trip was for three weeks in November 2018 to participate and observe literacy classes, which run from September-May, meet and have conversations program participants, and continue getting to know and supporting program organisers.

Margaret Kovach (2010, 42) describes conversation as a method that aligns with Indigenous worldviews, that honours collective traditions of orality as ways of transmitting knowledge and strengthening relationships. Informal, a conversational method leaves space for participants to share stories with the listener, permitting an organic approach to sharing (*ibid*). It is a dialogic method that allows participant and researcher to build knowledge collectively and reflexively. I understand, the sharing of story is a gift which should be met with respect and reciprocity, and

an acknowledgment of the relational context from which it derives to form collective memory (Kovach 2009, 97). As High (2015) explains, too often the stories of survivors tend to satisfy a broader social appetite for a passive empathy rather than one in which readers accept responsibility for their role in Canadian society (High 2015; Regan 2010). For a non-Indigenous researcher, then, “methodology and self-reflexivity become part of the conversation rather than turning inward or away” (High 2015, 15). In order to learn about community members’ relationships to *iyyuuayimuwin* and *ischii*, I prepared open-ended guiding questions to prompt conversation ahead of meeting with people (High 2015; Kovach 2010). I engaged in conversations and allowed people to share as they wished. I was aware of my responsibility to the wellbeing of participants and focused my questions on the positive growth that language revitalisation has brought to them.

Kovach (2009) also identifies observation and researcher participation as a way of building relationships, through shared experiences (and laughter) critical to Indigenous epistemologies. This methodology acknowledges the experiential nature of knowledge and, therefore, the observation of relationships as knowledge is transmitted in a given setting. Engaging with community members in a flexible, personal way helped me to build trusting, respectful relationships. I have also asked participants to review and approve transcripts and drafts to ensure accurate representation. This methodology acknowledges the experiential nature of knowledge and, therefore, the observation of relationships as knowledge is transmitted in a given setting. Shared moments throughout the process took place in literacy classes and in Community Hall and involved asking people about my interpretations of the things that I heard and observed, in order to “check the emerging interpretations” (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, 58). This process of verifying the validity of my interpretation ensured respectful representation, ongoing relationships of trust building and accountability and bridging epistemologies.

## **CHAPTER 4 – The Wemindji Community: Context**

Eeyou Istchee comprises eleven communities, with about 18,000 Eeyouch, located along the rivers and estuaries around eastern James Bay (northern Quebec) (Grand Council of the Crees n.d.). Eeyou Istchee spans about 400,000 square kilometers from the coast, inland (McAlpine and Herodier 1994). From an Eeyou cultural perspective, land and sea are contiguous and Eeyou Istchee expands beyond the limits of the shore to include coastal and marine spaces and islands (Mulrennan and Scott 2000). Community members speak the Coastal and Inland dialects of the *iyyuuayimuwin*, as well as (most commonly) English, and French, which is more common in inland communities. Wemindji, a mid-sized community, is located on the shores of the Bay, at the mouth of the Maquatua River. The community of over 1,400 people is named for the land surrounding it, *wiimin uchii* meaning "red ochre hills" (Cree Nation of Wemindji, n.d.).

### **4.1 Connection to the land**

Traditionally, Eeyou communities moved between seasonal camps. For the more than three centuries that they were in contact with European missionaries and trading-posts, families mostly lived September to June hunting and trapping on family traplines in the bush (Bussières et al In Press). During the summer months, the community would reunite, gathering at Paakumshumwaashtikw island (Old Factory Bay), the former site of a Hudson Bay Company (HBC) trading-post (ibid). Summers at Paakumshumwaashtikw were times of celebration and reunion between friends and families, and the island remains an important cultural site today. Despite efforts on the parts of the traders and missionaries to settle the community, Wemindji Eeyouch maintained their traditional lifestyle well into the 20th century (Carlson 2009). Like other Eeyou communities, Wemindji Eeyouch eventually settled nearby to the HBC trading post at Paakumshumwashtikw in 1951, and community participation in wage economy began to increase (Visser and Fovet, 2014). In 1958, however, the HBC post, mission and other facilities were moved to the mainland 40 km north of the island (Bussières et al In Press, 16). That location was accessible only by water and air and, as a result of glacial rebound, became difficult to supply by boat. Living conditions on Paakumshumwashtikw deteriorated as a result. That same year, the federal Department of Northern Affairs gave community members the choice of relocating either to Eastmain or to the location 40 km to the North (ibid). Most community members chose the latter option - Wemindji's current site - and the community relocated in 1958 (Cree Cultural Institute n.d.),



“The land was growing,” explained a Wemindji elder, “making it difficult for supply boats to access the site.”

We chose Wemindji because it was located in the centre of our hunting grounds. “Before that, the iiyiyuu who live in Wemindji had their homes in Old Factory,” said the late Wemindji elder Jacob Georgekish. With its wealth of food resources, Old Factory Bay was an ideal summer meeting place: The fishing was excellent, as was the goose hunting, making it a popular spot from spring through to fall.

North of Old Factory Bay is Aaskwaapisuaanuuts. “A lot of people knew about this place because there was lots of game,” said Sam Hughboy, thinking of the fish, geese and other food resources in the area. At different times [throughout history] our ancestors also sought refuge here ... (ibid)

#### **4.1.1 Paakumshumwaau cultural landscape**

The Paakumshumwaau watershed is of particular cultural importance to the community, having historically served as a waterway between the interior and the coast. This heritage is inscribed in ischii, recorded in places names that tell the stories and wisdom of the people who have passed through them (Bussières et al In Press). There is a significant archeological site on the shore of the lake dating back to as much as 6,800 years (Pendea et al In Press). The mouth of Paakumshumwashtikw is said to have been the site of the first encounter between the Eeyou and Europeans, marking the beginning of a long relationship (Bussières et al In Press). The river was key in the transport of furs from the interior during the fur-trade, with an important Hudson Bay Company trading post set up on the island at its mouth. For years the island was the site where the community gathered during the summer months. It was an important place for celebration, where the community would reunite following winter months on family traplines. This island later became the site of Wemindji’s settlement prior to relocating to its current place in 1958. Since then, the community has continued to hold annual gatherings for 1-2 weeks every summer, to celebrate and remember their connections to ischii and to one another. Over the past decades the community has also held annual canoe trips down the length of the river as a way of maintaining and reconnecting youth raised in town to their heritage in ischii (ibid).

#### **4.1.2 Knowledge of ischii**

The Creator gave us Eeyou Istchee, and with it, he gave us special duties. We are required to keep the Land and all of our environment in a healthy and clean state, for ourselves, our future generations, and all living things that share our Territory with us. It is part of our obligation as Elders, Grandparents, Parents and Community Leaders to provide a good example in this way, and to teach the Youth. (Cree Nation of Wemindji n.d.)

As stewards, Eeyou connections to ischii stem from a worldview of interconnectivity (Mark et al In Press). According to Rodney Mark (ibid), ischii is a source of identity, a community of peoples, animals, and other living things in which the Eeyou are nested, to whom they are responsible. Eeyou traditional worldview understands all living things as interconnected in a close-knit web of relationships of mutual responsiveness and respect (Scott 2006). In Eeyou tradition, these relations are understood, ordered, and maintained by appropriate interactions, and strategies that are communicated and adapted through stories, songs, teachings, and collectively evolved knowledge (ibid).

In our understanding and experience, environment (the land and water) is a living being that we are part of, and it is part of us. Animals and the environment, participating in each other's worlds, in the whole network of relationships of mutual respect and action, are the essence of a traditional way of life. Living well as part of that total community is our ultimate aspiration. (Mark et al In press)

As a coastal people, a traditional tenure system organises land-sea as a patchwork of multi-family hunting territories (traplines), encompassing varied environments and hunting locations (Sayles and Mulrennan 2010). Activities on each trapline are overseen by a Tallyman, or 'territory steward'. These individuals have intimate knowledge of ischii which bestows them the responsibility to ensure sustainability, and the authority to make decisions for the use of their land, the water, plants, animals and resources that comprise it (ibid).

Our Tallymen play a unique and traditional role in guiding and teaching us in the safe keeping and well-being of Eeyou Istchee. It is they who guard Eeyou Istchee, controlling who will have access, and under what conditions. We respect the knowledge and authority of these men, and consult with them in all matters pertaining to the Land. (Cree Nation of Wemindji n.d.)

Reflexive knowledge of ischii and animal behaviour, which is transmitted and developed over many generations is grounded in astute observation of natural and human-induced behaviours, as well as long-term landscape changes caused by on-going coastal uplift (Sayles and Mulrennan 2010). This knowledge informs adaptive responses and governs rotational hunting strategies as well as landscape modifications. According to Mulrennan and Scott (2000), maintaining the authority of Eeyou’s highly-specialised institutions is “critical to the viability of the system” (ibid, 694).

#### 4.2 iiyiyuuayimuwin and literacy



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Figure 2. Eastern James Bay iiyiyuuayimuwin Syllabic Chart (Wemindji Cultural and Wellness Department, personal communication, 2018)

iiyiyuuayimuwin is an Algonquian language of the Eeyou/Innu/Naskapi “dialect continuum of more than 80,000 speakers that stretches from the coast of Labrador on the Atlantic to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains” (Burnaby and Mackenzie 2001, 193). In Eeyou Istchee there are two dialects: North and South. Following the federal Indian Act (1876), it became common to learn English as a second language because federal bureaucracy, traders, and missionaries operated largely in English. The Eeyou syllabary system was introduced by Methodist missionaries in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Manitoba and used to read the Bible and Church

hymnals (Bennet and Berry 1991). In Eeyou Istchee, community members, taught by family members and Church officials, have used syllabics for over a century (Burnaby and MacKenzie 2001). During the 1950s Oblate missionaries recorded that all adults among the Eeyouch were able to read and write in iiyiyuuayimuwin (Berry and Bennett 1989, 432). Nonetheless, literacy in syllabics has been reduced since the time of residential schools in the mid-1900s (ibid), “since most [now receive] their formal schooling in a mainstream language” (McAlpine and Herodier 1994, 130). Cree School Board (CSB) language consultants have been working to standardize spelling between different communities’ dialects since the late-1980s (East Cree language Resources 2019).

#### **4.3 1870s-1990s: Residential Schools**

In order to understand the context of language loss and revitalization in Indigenous communities in Canada, it is crucial to review the experiences and legacies that impact survivors of the residential school system and their communities. For “well over 100 years, and many successive generations of children from the same communities and families endured” (TRC 2015) the assimilative violence of Canadian Indian residential schools (IRS). The residential school system was designed to assimilate Indigenous children to Western culture was introduced by Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. Recognising the importance of children both to communal wellbeing, and cultural transmission, IRS were designed to break cultural, linguistic, family, and community linkages by forcibly isolating Indigenous children from their families and homelands (ibid). This State- and Church-run system has come to be recognised as one of the greatest systematic, genocidal disruptions to Indigenous communities perpetrated by Canada, with the now infamous intention of ‘killing the Indian inside the child.’ In an attempt to break the intergenerational transmission of culture, many levels of Church and State were implicated in the separation of families, erasure of languages and other cultural practices, and the infliction of extreme abuse on young Indigenous people (ibid). Conditions inside IRS led to the deaths of thousands of children from disease, violence, starvation, suicide. The impacts of this on individuals and communities are manifold and monumental (ibid), and have left a legacy of trauma accumulated intergenerationally (Fast and Collin-Vézina 2010). One of the main foci of the IRS was the elimination of mother-tongue languages, as these carry the seeds of Indigenous knowledge, spirituality and cultural identity. Children were violently punished for speaking their languages. The internalisation of cultural inferiority taught within the IRS may result in rejection of cultural identity, language and community (Menzies 2010).

In Eeyou Istchee, federal residential schools were preceded by missionary summer day schools (Visser and Fovet 2014). Then, beginning in the 1940s, through the 1960s, Eeyouch children were taken away from their families and sent to residential schools from Chisasibi to Sault Sainte Marie. Some children were taken from their families for up to nine years (Burnaby and Mackenzie 2001). To this day, this legacy impacts the ways that Eeyou communities perceive institutionalised education (Visser and Fovet 2014). Children returning from these schools became less involved in cultural practices and spent less time in ischii. This time away from their families and communities caused a break in the transmission of language and oral traditions, traditional skills and knowledge (ibid; Berry and Bennett 1989). According to Wemindji's CWD's grant application for the CLWA literacy program that is the focus of this thesis, "Nearly all Wemindji residents between the ages of 50 and 70 spent some time at Indian Residential Schools. Many of our elders who are over 70 years of age also spent years at residential schools. This means that the community's younger adults have been impacted by residential schools [through intergenerational processes]. Our program's priority is to serve former students of residential schools who wish to acquire literacy in our language" (Cree Nation of Wemindji 2017, 1).

#### **4.4 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the New Relationship Agreement**

"In 1971, the Quebec Cree were faced with the creation of large hydroelectricity projects that, according to Diamond, would destroy their culture, society, and way of life" (Ouellet 2011, 155). In the context of an ongoing legal battle for an injunction to stop the construction of the James Bay hydroelectric development project, the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and the Inuit of northern Quebec, with the governments of Quebec and Canada, negotiated the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA), the first modern comprehensive settlement in the country (See Figure 3 of land covered by the JBNQA) (Mulrennan and Scott 2005). According to Rynard (2000), the *Agreement* was negotiated and signed under duress, in a time prior to the constitutionalisation of Aboriginal Rights. Nonetheless, the Eeyou strategically negotiated to (re)claim their rights covering, among others: a land regime; local and regional governments; health and social services; the creation of the Cree School Board; administration of justice and policing; hunting, fishing and trapping rights; and economic and social development, as well as an *Income Security Program* (ISP) which offers guaranteed income and benefits to Eeyou hunters and trappers who wish to engage in traditional lifestyle and economy for one-third or more of the year (Quebec 1975).

#### 4.4.1 JBNQA, the *New Relationship Agreement*, and Land Tenure

The JBNQA superimposed a new land tenure system over traditional Eeyou trapline tenure (See Figure 3). The treaty divides ischii under its jurisdiction into three categories. *Category I* lands, approximately 2,200 square miles of territory, which are allocated for exclusive use by the Eeyou, though Quebec retains the right to ischii for public purposes and must ‘replace’ ischii, should those public activities interfere with Eeyou activities. Eeyou have exclusive hunting, fishing, and trapping rights on *Category II* lands, which are earmarked by the Province for resource development, so long as such activities do not “interfere unreasonably” with Indigenous hunting, fishing, and trapping. The Province is required to “replace” any culturally important ischii that is to be developed. Finally, *Category III* lands are public lands south of the 55th parallel that fall under provincial jurisdiction. Eeyou have exclusive rights to harvesting certain species, whereas others are shared with non-Eeyou hunters. However, the Eeyou receive preferential and guaranteed levels of harvesting for all species on the territory.

Section 22 of the JBNQA delineates a regime of environmental protection categorised by mechanisms for consultation with the Eeyou and Inuit as part of environmental impact procedures. These protect the rights of the Eeyou to hunting, trapping, and fishing and the protection of the land and resources upon which their economies and wildlife resources depend (ibid). The *Agreement* also established the *James Bay Advisory Committee* on the Environment (JBACE), with representatives of the Cree Regional Authority, Quebec and Canada (Quebec 1975). The Committee’s mandate is to “oversee administration and management of the regime through the free exchange of respective views, concerns and information” (Quebec 1975, s. 22.3.24) created through the JBNQA. Despite the shared power laid out in the JBNQA, the resulting relationships were fraught. Where Provincial government chose to approach cooperation via advisory committee with too narrow a focus, rather than acknowledging a broader decision-making capacity, co-management arrangements lacked recognition of Eeyou perspectives, laws, and practices (Mulrennan and Scott 2005). As a result, the Eeyou have struggled to hold influence over harvesting activities in situations where Quebec Government policies prioritise the development of capital-investment over Eeyou livelihoods and territories. Tokenistic treatment of consultation mechanisms have also been used to limit Eeyou authority. Such problems of bad faith were represented in several court cases over the first 25 years of the *Agreement* (ibid).

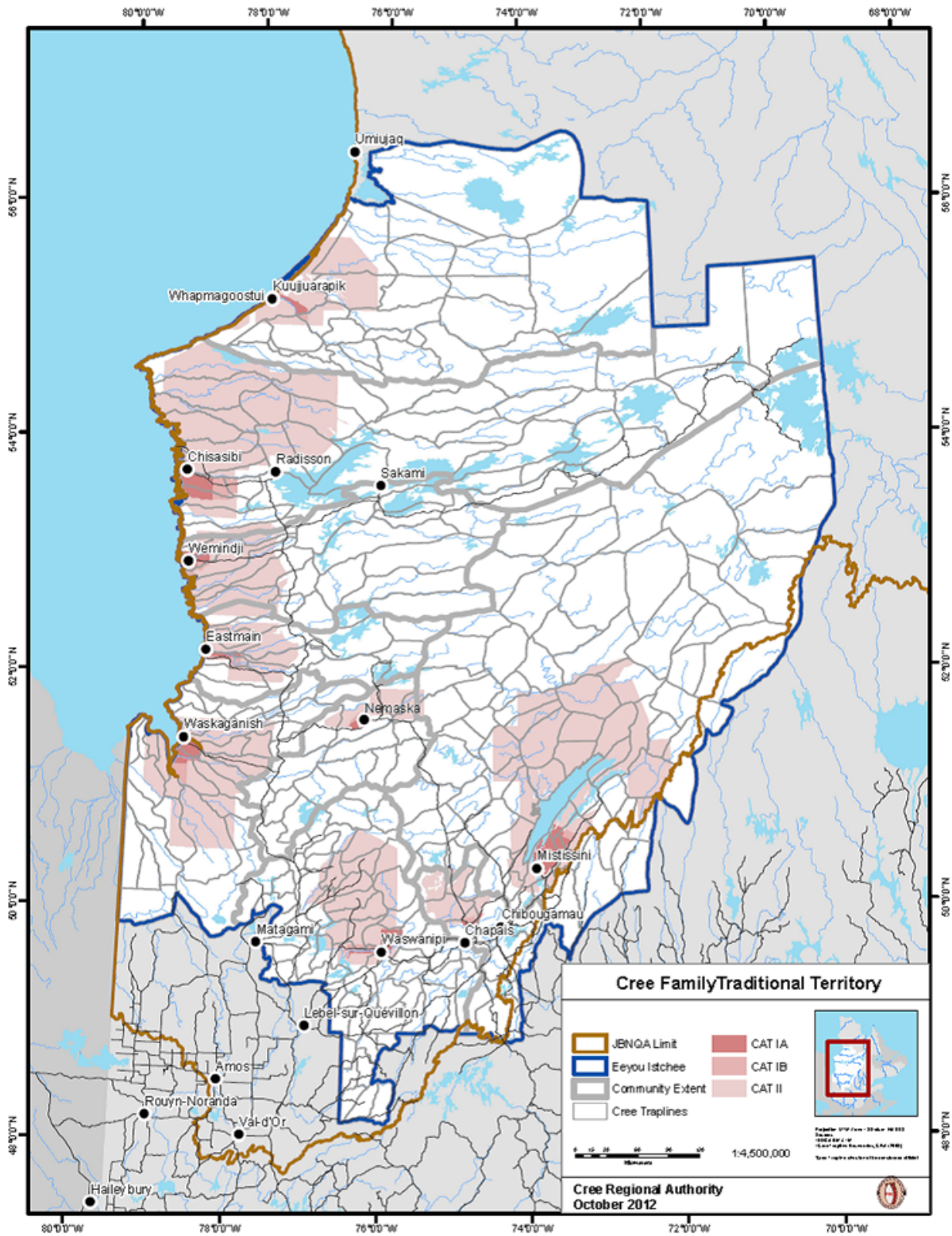


Figure 3. JBNQA classification of land overlaid on Eeyou traplines (Grand Council of the Crees, 2016)

In 2002, the *New Relationship Agreement* came to be as a result of litigation resulting from disputes around the provisions of the JBNQA (Mulrennan and Scott 2005). The Eeyou had demonstrated their ability to impede Quebec's political and resource-based projects and the Government of Quebec had initiated a consent-based approach to their relations with the Eeyou (ibid). The *Agreement* allowed Hydro-Quebec to go ahead with the Eastmain-Rupert divisions of the La Grande Complex, and focuses on forestry, in an attempt to de-escalate problems that had arisen over the course of the JBNQA (Chaplier 2018). This new arrangement encourages more cooperation and revenue sharing between the Eeyou, Quebec, and mining industry, as well as establishing the Cree Mineral Exploration Board (CMEB) (Lapointe and Scott In Press). According to Chaplier (2018), this agreement has caused Nemaska Eeyou tallymen's relationships to their role as stewards of ischii to adapt to include their role as property "owners" and contracted industrial partners in consultation with Hydro-Quebec. However, the agreement does not outline detailed protective measures nor mechanisms for collaboration as it does for forestry (Lapointe and Scott In Press). Lapointe and Scott (In Press) suggest that this may be due to the timing of the *Agreement*, which was signed in 2002, whereas mineral exploration on Eeyou Istchee intensified in 2004.

#### **4.4.1.1 Implications for Eeyou responses to mining in Eeyou Istchee**

Despite the above arrangements, Category I covers quite small parts of Eeyou territory. Quebec's free mining system allows private entities to access, purchase and explore potential mining claims on Categories II and III land without prior consent or consultation with the Eeyou (Lapointe and Scott In Press). This includes "low impact prospecting, to mechanized trenching and drilling, to helicopter and plane surveying" (ibid, 15). The Eeyou are only able to formally raise concerns, through an environmental impact assessment, once a project has reached advanced stages. This usually takes several years. According to Lapointe and Scott (In Press), most of Wemindji's tallymen report that they are often uninformed about exploratory activities taking place in ischii. Tallymen have reported to Lapointe and Scott that they have already become concerned about visible impacts on the environment and wildlife resulting from hydroelectric development and newly created mining infrastructure. While section 22 of the JBNQA ensures Eeyou involvement in environmental impact assessment (EIA), the language around mining is unclear and only applies to the extractive components of mining industry, and few EIAs have been undertaken around mining projects (ibid). In response to these developments, the Grand Council of the Eeyou and the Cree Regional Authority established the Cree Nation Mining Policy in 2010 (Lapointe and Scott In Press). This policy outlines guidelines



for respecting Eeyou livelihoods, rights and traditions, environmental protection, providing benefits to communities and gaining popular support. Nonetheless, these guidelines are not binding. A move to institutionalise Eeyou authority in the mining sector would require immense effort. For these reasons, communities are working to establish protected areas as a solution for protecting ischii - their most culturally valuable lands (Lapointe and Scott In Press).

#### **4.4.2 JBNQA and the creation of the Cree School Board**

The *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA) also included a provision for the establishment of the Cree School Board (CSB). Article 16 of the JBNQA officially established and funded the CSB, marking a move away from childhood education based on a federal assimilative agenda, toward an Eeyou-determined vision of the future (Visser and Fovet 2014) (Section 16). According to Radu and House (2012), the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee was, and is still, the first Indigenous Nation in Canada “to have taken full control of social services on a regional scale” through community-responsive systems characterised by complex bureaucratic and fiscal arrangements between the Eeyou, Quebec, and Canada. According to Ouellet (2011), “There are three notable elements: the Eeyou fully control the curriculum (except for budgetary approval); teachers must instruct according to Eeyou customs; and prior teacher training must be adapted to the conditions of the Eeyou students. Students are also no longer defined as children, but as people” (156). The Cree Nation has largely created their own systems, or adapted existing ones to reflect Eeyou ways and values, such as provincial curricula (Stiles 1997) (see Section 4.6 for more contemporary details).

Signaled by rising concern about language loss within communities, the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Center carried out a study of *iyyiyuuayimuwin* in 1989 and 1990, reviewed in McAlpine (McGill University) and Herodier (Cree School Board) (1994), to identify Eeyouch perceptions of the state of their language. According to McAlpine and Herodier, “Although respondents believed that children were learning *iyyiyuuayimuwin*, they questioned the quality of the children’s vocabulary and their ability to understand elders” (1994, 131). Through a process of persuasion, consensus building and consensus sampling, CSB put in place an elaborate project of curriculum and materials development, and teacher-training (ibid). The program was initiated in 1993 in Waskaganish and Chisasibi, with a focus on kinesthetics and experiential learning, where language is shown to be best internalised, such as physical education, art, and science classes (ibid). Based on the Province of Quebec’s curriculum (for practical purposes), the objective was that compulsory language credits required for graduation from a secondary

institution will be completed in the mother tongue, rather than in a dominant language. As in many communities with a small language-base, materials development was one of the main constraints of this project, as was teacher-training, because most educators are not fluent enough in *iiyiyuuayimuwin*. At the time of writing, McAlpine and Herodier numbered Eeyou teachers as 30% of CSB employees (1994, 136), most of whom were educated in either English or French. Therefore, developing a skilled language-base in CSB employees became a multi-year project. The entire process was overseen and guided by Elders to ensure that the curriculum was culturally relevant and that materials (created by teachers in conjunction with outside consultants) transmit appropriate cultural values and teachings. Strengthening identity was prioritised, given findings that cultural relevance is an important factor for Indigenous students' success at school. This process also involved on-going input from community members informed the conceptualization and design of this program throughout (ibid).

#### **4.5 Protected Areas and Resource Development in Wemindji**

Wemindji is a community with important cultural and economic ties to *ischii* (Mulrennan, Mark and Scott 2012). However, their territory has been heavily impacted by outside development over past decades, this has caused the community to adopt adaptive practices in variety of ways: from evolving knowledge and hunting practices, to creating protected areas, and engaging in resource development to the economic and decision-making benefit of the community (Mulrennan and Scott 2005; Mulrennan et al 2012; Lapoint and Scott In Press). In 2001, community concern for environmental protection on traditional territory caused by extensive environmental impacts of hydroelectric development in the region and increased mineral prospecting, as well as a desire for community-determined development effected a partnership between the Cree Nation of Wemindji and a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from McGill and Concordia Universities, the University of Manitoba, and the University of British Columbia, and has included the contributions of several undergraduate and graduate students (Mulrennan et al 2012). Negotiations subsequently expanded to include the Grand Council of the Crees (GCC), the local Cree Trappers Association (CTA), Quebec's *Ministere du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs (MDDEP)*, Parks Canada, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) (ibid, 247).

This partnership was originally intended to develop a network of formally recognised protected areas throughout community traplines, in order to ensure the integrity of *ischii* - wildlife, land, and water, and thus for community members to continue to practice cultural traditions of

stewarding, and living from ischii. However, the discovery of diamond mines in 2002 and gold in 2004 sparked a “frenzy of geological exploration, with hundreds of mining exploration permits issued by the Government of Quebec” (Mulrennan et al 2012, 247) around the community’s hunting territory, complicating plans for a network of protected areas (Lapointe and Scott In Press). One large claim, near Paakumshumwaau (Old Factory Lake), at the head of Paakumshumwashtikw (Old Factory River), raised particularly strong opposition within the community. This watershed represents a significant cultural landscape, as well as being the last river that remains un-dammed by hydroelectric developments in Wemindji’s territory. With the unanimous support of Tallymen, the community united in protecting the watershed from advanced mineral exploration. In 2008, their resistance resulted in the successful creation of the *Paakumshumwaau-Maatuskaau Biodiversity Reserve*, protecting about 20% of the community’s territory from resource development (ibid; Bussières et al In Press). The reserve has also supported several other initiatives in the community, including the Wemindji Cultural Museum, a photo gallery, and the use of new media to communicate research findings to members of the community (Mulrennan et al 2012, 248). The Wemindji Cree Nation also negotiated with adjacent coastal communities, coastal Tallymen, and the Grand Council of the Crees around the creation of *Tawich Marine Protected Area*. *Tawich* is expected to cover 20,000 square km, “encompass[ing] adjacent waters and offshore islands as well as the rich marine biodiversity they support” (Mulrennan et al 2012, 248) in Eastern James Bay. Negotiations around this project have received positive support from Parks Canada (ibid), who aim to significantly increase the amount of protected marine space off Canada’s coasts.

Whenever we think of developing our Territory, we must also respect our duty to keep the environment – our Land, the waters, and the air – clean and healthy, and to repair any damages we may cause (Cree Nation of Wemindji n.d.).

While the protection of cultural and ecological landscapes is high priority in Wemindji, the community also embraces certain resource development (Lapointe and Scott In Press). Employment opportunities are few in such a small and remote community, and resource development offers important opportunities for Wemindji’s young and growing community (ibid). This process is seen in the partnership between Wemindji Community Council and Goldcorp around the development of the Eleonore gold mine on community territory. While I mostly approach this thesis from a perspective of the revitalisation and protection of cultural tradition and values, it is important to note that Wemindji Eeyouch walk a delicate line between protecting their cultural heritage, and providing for their community needs in the future, adapting

to changing times, while maintaining Eeyou principles of respect and responsibility. According to Lapointe and Scott, “In the hunter’s vision, rules of reciprocity are the order of life, and tallymen take a positive view of kin and community benefiting from what ischii has to share, which may include mineral resources within respectful environmental limits” (in Mulrennan et al In press).

The protection of the watersheds within the community’s protected areas resulted from years of negotiation and partnership and is viewed as an example for communities across the country who aim to determine the future of their community, culture, economy and ischii (Mulrennan et al 2012). The determination to maintain cultural connections to ischii is paralleled by the community’s willingness to engage in cooperative agreements with resource industry. It is in this tenuous context of honouring cultural landscapes, and looking forward to provide continued quality of life, that I begin my exploration of the meaningful intersection of Wemindji Eeyouch’ relationships to ischii and iiyiyuuayimuwin (ibid).

#### **4.6 State of iiyiyuuayimuwin in James Bay**

There are so many words from the life in the bush that we don’t have in the communities because we don’t use this vocabulary in town. When you teach in the bush, in a camp, then the child or the person who is at school can hear what things are really called. The way the elders used to speak and what they called things, the things that we see when we are on the land, like trees and other growing things, the things the animals need to live. These words are not used at all when you are teaching in a classroom. (Florrie Mark-Stewart quoted in Cree School Board 1997)

Prior to the creation of the Cree School Board, the Cree Way program was a grass-roots initiative that originated in Waskaganish in 1973 in response to community concerns about language loss among youth (Stiles 1997). The program was later adopted by several other communities. The Cree Way’s objective was to “validate Cree culture and create a Cree tribal identity, to make reading and writing more important within their previously oral culture, to create a curriculum reflecting Eeyou culture and the Eeyou conceptual framework, and to implement that curriculum in the public schools” (Stiles 1997, 249). The ideology underlying this program served as a model in 1975 when the Cree School Board was created with a focus on language maintenance and education (Stiles 1997). In 1975, the creation of the Cree School Board (CSB) marked a move away from childhood education based on an assimilative agenda, toward a Eeyou -determined vision of the future (Visser and Fovet 2014). CSB was formally constituted

under the Quebec Education Act of 1978, and the 1978-79 was its first school year (ibid). Developed by Eeyou education activists, it was one of the first Indigenous institutions in the country to exert full control over Indigenous children's education policy and administration (Visser and Fovet 2014). In 1988 the Board elected, at communities' urging, to make *iiyuuayimuwin* the language of instruction at the primary and upper-elementary levels (McAlpine and Herodier 1994).

In 1997, CSB's report on that year's Language Conference remarked on the need for further attention and resources to be invested in improving adult Eeyouch' skills in language and literacy (Cree School Board 1997). These concerns grew from several priorities, including: cultivating relationships and communication between adults who are less fluent, children who are students of the language, and Elders with knowledge to share; the need for more fluent adults to take positions as language teachers; and improved cooperation between communities by enhanced knowledge of regional dialects and the standardisation of spelling (Cree School Board 1997). In order to address this need, some of the schools in communities at James Bay offer adult education on premises (Visser and Fovet 2014). This includes Wemindji, which offers a series of formal 39-hour *iiyuuayimuwin* literacy courses jointly with CSB (Cree Nation of Wemindji 2017). These courses are demanding, and are designed to achieve fluency and train Eeyou teachers, though they are open to any *iiyuuayimuwin* speaker (ibid). Unfortunately, little contemporary published information is available on the state of the language in adult Eeyouch, though this will be a continued focus of my research.

#### **4.6.1. "Cree Literacy for Wemindji Adults" Program**

Although the syllabary system was once, perhaps, universally used by adults in Eeyou communities, its use has declined since the time of residential school (Berry and Bennet 1989). The following quotes highlight the importance that some Eeyouch attribute to learning to use the syllabics as adults,

Before I learned Cree syllabics, I was quite pathetic because I couldn't really understand what someone was saying to me when they spoke. Since I learned Cree syllabics, since my mother taught me, it was like someone turning on a light, to understand an elder who spoke in real Cree. (Glen Cooper, Tape #13 quoted in Cree School Board 1997)

It is good to learn. It is important for us to learn this well in order to read and write Cree in the future. If we do not learn, how can we [adults] expect to teach our children or

grandchildren to do so? How can you help our your child or grandchild with his or her homework, if you do not learn how to read and write Cree? It is the same with either English or French, how can we help them if we do not know the language? (Thomas Coon, Tape #4 quoted in Cree School Board 1997)

In September 2017, Wemindji's Community and Wellness Department launched the program, *Maintaining our language: Cree Literacy for Wemindji adults* Cree Nation of Wemindji 2017. Funded by a National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) grant and co-sponsored by the Cree Nation of Wemindji (Chief and Council), the Cree Language Teachers, and the Advisory Committee on Culture. The program is designed with an intergenerational perspective of valorising the traditional teachings of Elders, healing the wounds of residential school survivors and their offspring, and stemming the corrosive effects "mass media, mainstream culture, and the digitalization of our lives as well as to changes in schooling and education" (Cree Nation of Wemindji 2017, 6). A fun, optional evening class, the program is intended as a mechanism by which to renew and instill pride in culture and community, and "support and contribute to the wellbeing of all our residents" (ibid, 9) by creating a safe environment to share knowledge and build relationships.

The stated objectives of the program are to offer the opportunity to gain *iiyiyuayimuwin* competencies to Wemindji community members who were denied those opportunities as children sent to residential schools, as well as to offer opportunity intergenerational survivors. According to the proposal submitted to the NIB, "Inter-generational side-by-side learning can then become a healing process bringing families, friends, and the community closer together and building stronger relationships and strong connections to language and culture" (Cree Nation of Wemindji 2017, 2). With the recognition that "language is the very foundation of [the] culture" (ibid), the program is intended to "promote a resurgence" (ibid, 3) of the language and slow perceive language erosion in the community. This includes incorporating language associated with traditions that are less frequently practiced in today's town life, including "the language of the land" (ibid). CLWA is intended to be a fun, adaptive learning environment, with a premium on laughter and relationship-building based in participant feedback and the building of pride and confidence and to contribute positively to community life through individual and collective wellness. Creating an environment where learning becomes a positive experience is particularly important in this context, "as an essential component of the healing process from the harms of residential school experiences" (ibid). Finally, the program aims to transmit cultural values intergenerationally from Elders who were raised in *ischii* with an understanding of "the

importance of a good life” (ibid). CLWA offers classes, every night of the week. These include Beginner Cree, Advanced Literacy, family classes, Church hymnals (a particularly fun and popular class), Elders’ activities, and Cree for Non-Cree Speakers. Through the dedicated work and creativity of the Cree teachers, the program has taken on significant dynamism over its first year. CLWA is expected to take on special significance in several other community initiatives, including archaeological projects, youth land-based programs, among others (ibid).







In Wemindji Cree community, Eeyou Istchee (Cree Nation of James Bay territory), a complex of historical and contemporary influences have caused the gradual dispossession of cultural relationships between ischii and iiyiyuuayimuwin, and the interrelated “Cree way” of intergenerational knowledge transmission and oral tradition in Wemindji. Children and youth are at the locus of language loss here, many *little ones* do not speak or understand iiyiyuuayimuwin, and youth are increasingly unlikely to spend time in ischii. While Eeyou culture is strong, local programming such as Wemindji’s language reclamation program, *Cree Literacy for Wemindji Adults* (CLWA), and several other land-based initiatives are becoming increasingly important to help young, employed, and elderly Wemindji Eeyouch (Cree people) to retain and restore cultural connections. In this article, I articulate, as shared with me by community members, changes that have occurred to relationships between ischii and iiyiyuuayimuwin, as they have changed in response to dispossession by the State and industry, and the great lengths that the community has gone to protect them.

Here, dispossession is understood to encompass both direct “processes by which Indigenous people’s access to their traditional lands and resources are reduced or severed ... [and] Indirect forms of dispossession [that] occur as a result of policies, regulation or development whose intent is to sever Indigenous peoples’ links to their lands and resources and the Indigenous Knowledge it fosters” (Big-Canoe and Richmond 2014, 127). For example, a direct form of dispossession might be the degradation of a landscape by industrial development to a point of changing wildlife patterns negatively impacting traditional food harvesting. An indirect form of dispossession would be the systemic impacts of the Federal Indian Act, which led to the residential school system, and severed families’ connections to their lands and cultures (ibid). Mulrennan and Bussièrès’ (2018) analysis of *cultural edges* in Wemindji and Eeyou Istchee contributes an additional dimension to this picture. They draw parallels between social-ecological systems and human cultural interactions in places where “two or more cultures converge and interact,” causing groups to adapt their cultures reflexively, and gain knowledge and skills from their interactions (Turner et al. 2003, 439 in Mulrennan and Bussièrès 2018). Each new encounter represents another layered cultural edge characterized by tensions and opportunities. Rather than denying the dispossession caused by colonization, this perspective allows for an understanding in which each group responds agentially, “along increasingly complex and overlapping sets of cultural edges” (ibid). Mulrennan and Bussièrès’ analysis recognizes that while the changes to Wemindji’s culture have mostly been “driven by exogenous factor,” both political and geographical, they are nonetheless “shaped by Cree agency” (ibid).

Through a collaborative research project with the Culture and Wellness Department (CWD) of Wemindji Cree First Nation, this story demonstrates the inextricable links between ishii and iiyiyuuayimuwin. Through an exploration of CLWA, I highlight the immense efforts that generations of Wemindji Eeyouch have made to protect those relationships. CLWA program was initiated by organisers at CWD in 2017, funded by the National Indian Brotherhood and the Wemindji Chief and Council, to mobilise adult community members to respond to the issue of language shift among their children and grandchildren (MS2). First, I begin with an overview of literature, scholarly, and otherwise, exploring the many deep connections embodied in Indigenous language-land relationships, and how those relationships have shifted in response to dispossession and resistance, then I contextualise the research within Wemindji's culture and recent history. I present my results in the form of an interwoven story, sharing what was shared with my by Wemindji Eeyouch participants to this work, who span generations from youth to Elder. This story brings to life those changing relationships, as they have moved, and been moved across ishii. Finally, I discuss how this story interacts with the literature, in the hope that more research will focus on interwoven, interrelated aspects of culture and ontology, rather than continuing to reproduce compartmentalised Western understandings, both on paper and in community members' lived realities.

## **5.2 Methods**

This paper is part of a two-year community-engaged master's project undertaken in support of Wemindji's CLWA program (MS2), in collaboration with community organisers, including: Linda Stewart (Manager, Wemindji Culture and Wellness Department, CLWA Advanced participant), Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish (Wemindji Cree Language Coordinator and CLWA teacher), Frances Visitor (CLWA teacher and Cree School Board Language Consultant), and Katherine Scott (Wemindji Heritage Research Coordinator and CLWA Non-Cree Speakers class participant). The following emerges from 22 conversations (individual and group) with 27 people, including 12 Elders, 2 Cree Nation Government (CNG) representatives, 4 community organisers, 3 Cree Language Teachers (1 also CLWA organiser), and 14 CLWA participants (including 9 Elders, and 3 organisers). Most conversations took place in English; however, Elders spoke to Theresa and me in iiyiyuuayimuwin. Out of respect for Elders and literacy program organisers who prioritise iiyiyuuayimuwin syllabic orthography, I asked Language Consultant, Ernest Hester to transcribe conversations with Elder's into syllabics, and translate them into English. I interchange between English and iiyiyuuayimuwin syllabics and iiyiyuuayimuwin written in roman orthography throughout, depending on the source, as most

academic writing that cites iiyiyuuayimuwin words uses the roman orthographic spelling. What herein appears in iiyiyuuayimuwin syllabics emerges from conversations had with Elders in contribution to this project. I use long quotations from participants, honouring the words and stories of those who shared with me, to construct a story framed by the insights of Wemindji Eeyouch spanning generations from youths to Elders. According to McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, and White (2018), “storywork” as method, “provides data in the form of firsthand accounts through which to gain insight into the *meaning* of language reclamation in diverse Indigenous communities” (161). I have interwoven these snippets of conversations, stories, and insights, with my own interpretation to present what I envisage to be a “métissage focused on rereading and reframing Aboriginal and Canadian relations and informed by Indigenous notions of place” (Donald 2012, 533). While much of the literature that has emerged from Eeyou Istchee focuses on hunters who still practice Eeyou land-based livelihoods and, therefore, retain much of the language, many Wemindji Eeyouch expressed having little time to spend in the bush practicing cultural activities. This part of the population is rarely represented in academic literature. Therefore, in presenting the stories that community members shared with me, I aim to present this reality, illuminating complex land-language relationships as expressed by Eeyouch who work and live in town.

### **5.3 Indigenous land-language relationships**

Take [language] away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers ... That is, you are losing all those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality that you are talking about. (Fishman 1996, 72)

Originating from ancient cultures lived on the land, Indigenous languages are rooted in traditional territories, and transmit extensive knowledge of, and personal relationships to local environments (Simpson, 2014). Deeply embedded inter-relationships between Indigenous languages and lands are pillars of cultural identity and wellbeing for Indigenous people and communities. Jeff Corntassel (Tsalagi, Cherokee Nation) describes the complex interdependence of four elements that form Indigenous cultural identities, or peoplehood, including language, homeland, ceremonial cycles, and sacred living histories: “a disruption to any one of these practices threatens all aspects of everyday life” (2012, 89). Belinda Daniels-Fiss (Plains Cree) (2008) describes land and language as sacred, working “in unison ... to

discover where I fit in this world and to explore my connections to Cree values, traditions, and customs” (238).

As Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) (2010) articulates, land should be understood as more than a material object of attachment, but “as a field of ‘relationships of things to each other. Place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world” (79). Indigenous Knowledge of the land, animals, meteorology, to name a few is profoundly place-based, and tied to ancestral lands. It is crucial to maintaining local environments, and is encoded in ancient stories, songs, ceremonies and other forms of patterned cultural expression (White 2015). Vocabulary is frequently descriptive and compound, encoded with scientific information. Names of phenomena, such as a specific life-stage of a plant or animal, may refer to several phenomena that occur simultaneously, any changes to which might signal, for example, ecological or climate change (ibid). The “knowledge-practice-belief complex” is recognised as vital to conserving ecosystems and biodiversity (Gadgil, Berkes, and Folke 1993, 151), and the correlation between Indigenous language loss and biodiversity loss have long been recorded around the world (Grenoble 2018; Oviedo, Maffi, and Larsen 2000; Romaine and Gorenflo 2017).

Whereas language and identity historically flow in continuum across traditional territories through constellations of relationships, State-like boundaries have had a reductionist effect on languages, relational networks, and cultural identities (Feit 2004; McLeod 2000). Colonial projects of relocation and sedentarisation moved many people from land-based lifestyles, economies, law and governance, and from the language and knowledge associated with these cultural cornerstones. Subsequent to settlement, increased dependence on wage-economy and Western-style social systems, such as health and education, may further reduce access to and time spent in the bush (Corntassel 2012; Niezen 1993). “Being displaced from traditional territories dismisses the importance, throughout history, of engaging with the land as a ‘living classroom’, as the ancestors would have ... being assigned land in the reserve system undermines the very connections to land that are meaningful...” (Brown et al 2012, 56). In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) officially acknowledged Canada’s cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples through its 150 year-long residential school system, during which 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families’ homelands to State- and Church-run boarding schools where they were submitted to terrible abuses. The main objective of the residential schools was to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children to Western culture by

the massive displacement of children from families and territories, destruction of Indigenous languages and social systems, violence, and cultural shame (TRC 2015).

Likewise, industrial development continues to destroy Indigenous territories, with serious implications for culture, language, and wellbeing. Here we can identify where communities strategically avail of opportunities brought through the new knowledge, skills, technologies of their encounter in order to “rebuild and sustain their resilience ... [including] included the maintenance of certain cultural attributes,” such as language, land-based practices, governance systems (Mulrennan and Bussi eres 2018). Faced with dispossession, communities often mobilise their oral traditions strategically within Canada’s legal frameworks to demonstrate historical occupancy of the land and Indigenous legal traditions in response to encroachment, in order to protect lands, cultures, rights, and livelihoods. In 1984 the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en went to Court to demand recognition of unextinguished title and Aboriginal rights over unceded traditional territory in British Columbia (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* 1997). An unprecedented case, the communities were able to use their oral histories as principal evidence to demonstrate “their deep and enduring social, cultural and historical connections to their territory” (Temper 2018, 11). They argued for equal recognition of the legitimacy of their cultural practices and worldviews, they created “a space within the courtroom where Indigenous narratives were able to gain equal legitimacy to settler narratives” (ibid). Similarly, Loon River Cree (Alberta) developed concurrent language- and land-use planning, in order to protect their land-based culture from the destruction of oil-field development on their territory (Schreyer 2008). By tying language-planning to land-rights and land-use planning, they were able to mobilise Aboriginal Rights and land-claim consultation stipulations to maintaining land-based livelihoods, protecting their language and territory. On a smaller-scale, communities may initiate land-based educational programs and healing camps which focus on relational learning to revitalize and heal participants’ cultural relationships to language-land (Cornassel and Hardbarger 2019; McIvor and Anisman 2018; Radu, House, Pashagumskum 2014; White 2015). Other programs focus more specifically on language, but most incorporate cultural learning (Hinton ed. 2018; Hinton, Huss and Roche eds. 2018).

Today, global languages, particularly English, threaten precariously placed Indigenous languages and cultures through processes of de- and reterritorialization (Jacquemet 2005). The dissolution of direct historical links between languages and specific geographic areas by increasingly mobile people and electronic communication (deterritorialisation) is causing the re-creation of language and cultural identity based in creolisation and a fusion between English

and Indigenous languages and globalised culture (reterritorialization) (ibid; Battiste, Kovach and Geraldine 2010). “Transidiomatic practices are no longer solely contained in areas of colonial and post-colonial contact, but flow ... from contact zones, borderlands, and diasporic nets of relationships to the most remote and self-contained areas of the globe” (ibid, 266). However, mobile technology also provides communities a practical tool for language acquisition, in which learning itself has become unbound to place and time (Rocca and Smith 2017). According to Louellyn White (2015), “One sign of vitality in a language is adaptability to social and technological changes” (106).

#### **5.4 Shifting relationships in Wemindji**

Cree is a dialect continuum of Algonquin languages that “stretches from the coast of Labrador on the Atlantic to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains” (Burnaby and Mackenzie 2001, 193). Spoken by approximately 96,500 people (Statistics Canada 2017). It is the Indigenous language with the most speakers in this country, and one of three (of about 70) anticipated to survive and flourish (Cree, Ojibwe, Inuktitut) (McIvor and Anisman 2018). Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Cree has been expressed orthographically through a syllabary system created by Anglican missionaries in Manitoba (Bennet and Berry 1991). It is also written using roman orthography. Eeyouch speak *iiyuuayimuwin* (Eastern Cree dialect), which is further broken down geographically to include, Northern and Southern, and Coastal and Inland dialects, and further distinguished by the local dialects of each community. Over the past three decades Eeyou language consultants have worked to standardise dialectical variations in spellings between Eeyou communities (East Cree Language Resources 2019).

Wemindji is one of eleven communities and among 300 traplines (traditional family hunting territories) of Eeyou Istchee. Wemindji Eeyouch speak the local variety of Northern-Coastal *iiyuuayimuwin* (Cree Nation Government 2019). Located along the rocky shores of *wiinipaakw* (James Bay), at the mouth of the Maquatua River, Wemindji is named for its surroundings: *wiimin uchii* means "red ochre hills." Wemindji Eeyouch' ancestors have lived on their ancestral territory for many thousands of years and are deeply connected to it (Pendea et al In Press). *ischii* is inscribed with the stories of innumerable generations of families, it tells the living history of a People. Placenames and their stories describe landscapes, activities, events and visitors past. Part of oral tradition, they are descriptive tools for travellers and hunters to navigate the landscape, and are tangible markers of the land-culture embeddedness that permeates Eeyou

Istchee, imbues Eeyou values, and finds life in expressions of iiyiyuuayimuwin (Bussières et al In Press; Mulrennan Under Review).

As Morantz (2002) explains, colonisation of Eeyou Istchee and way of life differed from those of other Indigenous communities in the South: “Without significant Euro-Canadian settlement or business interests in eastern James Bay, the undermining of the old Cree ways was more gradual and more imperceptible than elsewhere in Canada” (132). For over three centuries, Eeyouch engaged in the fur-trade with missionaries and trading-posts (Mulrennan and Bussières 2018). Families hunted and trapped inland from September-June, and during the summer months would reunite at Paakumshumwaashtikw Island, then the site of an Hudson Bay Company (HBC) trading-post, Catholic mission house, an Anglican church, and a school (ibid). Summers were times of celebration and reunion, and the island remains an important cultural site today. According to Mulrennan and Bussières (2018) “differences in edge exposure within Cree society [along gender and generational lines] produced often marked differences in opportunities to access enhanced levels of social interaction as well as new knowledge, skills, and goods ... with implications for the maintenance of language and tradition” (4-5).

Missionary summer day-schools preceded residential schools here (ibid; Berry and Bennett 1989). Beginning in the 1940s, the Government of Canada began taking Eeyouch children from their families’ to be sent to residential schools from neighbouring Fort George, to Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario. About eighty percent of Wemindji’s children were sent away, some for up to nine years, causing a break in the transmission of relationships, language, culture, and tradition, continuing into the 1960s (Katherine Scott, unpublished data). During that time, in 1951, Wemindji Eeyouch settled near the HBC trading-post at Paakumshumwashtikw, community participation in wage-economy increased, and the population began to grow. In 1958, the trading-post and mission moved to Wemindji’s current site on the mainland 40 km north of Paakumshumwashtikw. Given two possible sites for relocation by the Government of Canada, and faced with a burgeoning population, a hygiene crisis on the small island, and increasingly difficult access to supplies caused by receding water levels around the island, the community elected in 1959 to relocate to the town’s current location alongside the mission and trade-post (Bussières et al in Press). According to Mulrennan and Bussières (2018), the establishment of Wemindji as a town represented a “dramatic expansion” of the cultural edge between EuroCanadians and the Eeyou. The community became increasingly involved in the modern economy, and less involved in traditional land-based livelihoods, though some chose to continue their customary lifestyle and the community made efforts to maintain their culture (ibid).



During the early 1970s, the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and Inuit, under duress, negotiated and signed the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) with the Governments of Quebec and Canada. The communities were under the threat of “large hydroelectricity projects that ... would destroy their culture, society, and way of life” (Ouellet 2011, 155). In the context of 1970s legal understandings of Aboriginal rights, powerful government and corporate interests, and judicial complicity, the Eeyou gave up massive concessions of title, rights, and interests, with the aim of protecting ischii and lifestyle (Rynard 2000). The agreement superimposed a new resource-oriented system of land governance over Eeyou traditional tenure systems; created the Cree Trappers Association (CTA); established the Cree School Board (CSB); and led to the creation of the Grand Council of the Crees. Social impact analysis suggests that JBNQA resulted in dispossession from land-based culture in the region through the destruction of ischii and livelihoods, and the relocation of one Eeyou community (Niezen 1993, 517). This facilitated a transition from hunting to higher levels of participation in the wage-economy, dependence on institutional services, and disconnecting subsequent generations from cultural practice (ibid). However, CTA’s Income Security Program (ISP), was initiated to offset this trend and maintain land-based practices, and therefore *iiyiyuuayimuwin*, by ensuring an annual income and benefits to those who maintain a hunting, trapping, and fishing lifestyle at least 120 days yearly. However, today enrollment is declining: in 1977, 52% of Wemindji’s population was enrolled in ISP, versus 10% in 2014 (Réseau DIALOG n.d.).

The CSB was formally constituted under the Quebec Education Act of 1978 and was among the first Indigenous institutions in the country to exert control over children’s education (King 2016). CSB’s organisation and curriculum observe the Quebec model of education and imparts final decision-making power to the province (ex, standardized tests), however the Eeyou negotiated adapting curriculum to Eeyou culture and language instruction, a significant “win” under Quebec’s rigorous French-language policy (Burnaby and Mackenzie 2001; Rynard 2000). In 1988 CSB initiated the Cree as the Language of Instruction Program (CLIP) at the primary and upper-elementary levels (McAlpine and Herodier 1994). However, questions about the effectiveness of CLIP’s curriculum to meet the requirements of Quebec’s provincial standardised testing, and community members’ misgivings about the appropriateness of the Indigenous language in education plagued CLIP (Visser and Fovet 2014; Field notes, Nov. 2018). After years of modifications and reductions to the immersion program, CLIP was replaced with the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC) in 2011, making Cree Language a subject of study, rather than the language of instruction (Cree School Board 2010).

In 2002, the Eeyou signed the *New Relationship Agreement* which resolved some outstanding obligations for Quebec to the Eeyou while also allowing for further hydro-electric development on Eeyou ischii. The latter further integrated Eeyou into the northern resource economy at the same time as representing an unprecedented deal in terms of the sharing of resource revenue and joint management (Chaplier 2018). The agreement allowed Hydro-Quebec to go ahead with the Eastmain-Rupert development of the La Grande Complex on Eeyou Istchee, while also enforcing provisions of JBNQA that had not previously been enforced, including: increased control of forestry activity in southern Eeyou Istchee, and improved economic opportunity for the Eeyou. This has required a partial redefinition of Eeyou land tenure to meet the interests of industrial actors in the region. As Chaplier (2018) explains of Nemaska Eeyouch' outlook in negotiating this agreement,

For the Nemaska tallymen, the land is primarily a place of teaching and sharing, as well as a place of connection to their hunting traditions. It is where the Cree culture finds its values and its balance. But they also recognise that ever since the JBNQA, the land has become something else. It is a place of economic opportunities and, for the younger generation, a place to learn new skills to find their way in a world dominated by the Canadian entrepreneurial and resource-based economy. (68)

While, much of Eeyou Istchee (Category III lands under JBNQA) remains vulnerable to private resource development, the community is strategic in its endeavors to maintain land and culture. For example, following the discovery of large diamond and gold deposits across their land in the early millennium, Wemindji was overwhelmed with hundreds of private mining claims issued by the provincial government across their territory, including around the culturally and ecologically significant Paakumshumwaau river-basin (Mulrennan et al. 2012). The community responded according to their dual imperatives of maintaining cultural responsibility to steward their land and protect their culture for future generations, with contemporary imperatives of economic and employment opportunity to meet the needs of their young and growing population. They did this by engaging with researchers from McGill and Concordia Universities, and Universities of Manitoba and British Columbia to create *the Paakumshumwaau-Maatuskaau Biodiversity Reserve* and proposed *Tawich (Marine) Conservation Area*, and by negotiated with Goldcorp to develop the Eléonore gold mine on their territory (Mulrennan, Scott, and Scott, In Press; Lapointe and Scott In Press).

## **5.5 Stories of the language and the land**

Eeyou' relationships to ischii and the community's history remain culturally important and the Cree Nation and local community organisers strive to provide mechanisms through which Eeyouch can maintain their cultural identities and associated wellbeing. For example, the Cree Nation-wide Spring Goose- and Fall Moose-breaks respectively allow Eeyouch to take two weeks off work and school to spend time at their family hunting camps (Bussi eres et al In Press). Community organisers also offer programming aimed at strengthening and maintaining community members' cultural identities. The Culture and Wellness Department (CWD) organises several annual events on the land, including an annual two-week youth canoe expedition down Paakumshumwaashtikw River, a week-long snowshoe walk in February, and an annual summer gathering in July (ibid). For community members who wish to practice and learn traditional skills but may not spend much time in the bush due to family, work, and school obligations, and for Elders with health or mobility constraints, CWD also offers land-based programming at the in-town Culture Camp. Bi-weekly activities include traditional meals, traditional skills, sing-alongs, among others. This programming was originally intended to take place in the bush, however organisers encountered difficulty motivating community members to participate, and moved activities to the in-town culture camp (Fieldnotes, Nov. 2018). CLWA is a more recent addition to this larger project, which aims to address a phenomenon of language shift in children and youth. With a focus on syllabic literacy, CLWA aims to raise adult Wemindji Eeyouch' awareness of this problem, to help adults to improve the precision and scope of their skills in iiyiyuuayimuwin, with the hope of motivating adults to speak iiyiyuuayimuwin at home with their children (MS2).

In this section, I will interweave participants' stories from multiple generations to trace the path that Wemindji iiyiyuuayimuwin has travelled across ischii. The following delineates the inextricable relationship between the two important and intrinsically interwoven Eeyou cultural threads, how those relationships have changed reflexively in response to direct and indirect forces of dispossession, and how Wemindji Eeyouch have made and continue to make immense efforts to respond to the impacts that the colonial legacy and globalisation are having on their language and culture.

**5.5.1 iiyiyuuayimuwin is born of ischii**

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Eeyou culture is important. The Tâp iyiyiwac [Eeyouch that live mainly the traditional Eeyou culture and speak the pure and older form of the language] always knew what to do when out in ischii, they would always know how to read the weather and accurately predict future weather conditions by observing the clouds. They knew all about these things. They were very knowledgeable in how they lived in the past. (Elder Elizabeth Shashaweskum, conversation with Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish and author, Wemindji, Dec. 4, 2018)

Tâp iyiyiwac, those people who live according to Eeyou tradition, speak *Old iiyiyuuayimuwin*, the language of Eeyou land-based culture that evolved over thousands of years of living in ischii, much of which has now been lost, according to several participants. The language is inherently formed to express the daily lives and routines, skills and technologies, beliefs and philosophies, and extended social networks associated with that reality. Before resettlement and residential school, parents and family members taught language and skills in ischii while practicing daily tasks, through observation and orality. This “Cree way” of learning is something cherished by many and acknowledged as a living heritage going back thousands of years. It is a crucial form of language and knowledge transmission that is part of the knowledge-practice-belief complex and peoplehood models explored above (Corntassel 2012; Gadgil, Berkes, and Folke 1993), threatened by Western forms of institutionalised education and therefore intimately tied to language loss. Elder Irene Mishtaachiishikw describes this process as it informed her childhood,

Things that I experienced with my parents, my mom, was like observing, even though this is your first time doing it, skinning a rabbit, cleaning rabbit, or beaver, skinning the, cleaning the beaver, she just observes. I learn that from her because I do more observations with her, just watching her, how it's done. But when it's your turn to do it, she just explains, "This is how you do it." She doesn't do it, she let me do it by myself. What I observe from her, that's how I learned, observation. And when we talk Cree, 'cause we don't know, somebody else might learn from you, the words that you use, the Old Cree. (Elder Irene Mishtaachiishikw, conversation with author, Wemindji, Nov. 29, 2018)

The people with whom I spoke who spend a significant amount of time in the bush, engaged in cultural activities, easily describe the dynamic connections between *iiyiyuuayimuwin* and ischii. *iiyiyuuayimuwin* is cherished as the root of identity and connection to a past lived in ischii, Alexandra Coon, 25, Cultural Animator at Mistissini elementary school, and CLWA Facebook user, explained,

That's where the language was born, from the land, because that's where ancestors lived. They lived from the animals, and the trees kept them warm, giving them fire and shelter. So, the language and the land have that interconnection in that way. That's what helped my people survive out on the land. (Alexandrea Coon, telephone conversation with author, Wemindji, Dec. 3, 2018)

iiyyuuayimuwin emerged from millennia lived in ischii; it is vast and descriptive. Much of the vocabulary comes from this rich heritage of “surviving on the land” in community with other creatures. The language describes landscapes, land-based activities, proper techniques for setting up camp, hunting, cleaning game, preparing food. Knowledge of the language and vocabulary is important for the continuation of cultural practices. Eeyou placenames and the words used to identify land-formations, practices, and objects are important for navigating, practicing cultural activities, and for cultivating a sense of Eeyou identity and connection to hunting territory and culture. David Kakabat, a retired police chief and hunter explained how the language helps hunters travel on the land,

If another hunter tells you, 'You have to go this place,' you have to explain - it's like a map. If you have a map, you know where to go but when you go in the land, you don't have a map. He has to tell you a certain tree, the kind of trees that you're going to see to get to that point where you're supposed to go. He can explain the landscape and he's gonna use Cree words to describe the treeline, the landscape, the streams and the lakes. So, there's the names of things that you say in Cree. (David Kakabat, conversation with author, Wemindji, Dec. 2, 2018)

### **5.5.2 Coming back to ischii**

For survivors of residential school, their families' traplines were the sites and source of healing that allowed them to reclaim their language and culture, though that the reconnection was often difficult and in some cases may not have been possible. Participants shared with me that when they returned from residential school, many were shocked by life on the land, had become alienated from land-based practices, and had grown accustomed to the conveniences of Western society including running water and electricity. According to Edward Georgekish, manager of Wemindji's radio station, who was sent to residential school in Moose Factory,

Those are the privileges you had when you went to residential school. You had showers. But when you came home to the community, you didn't have that, you had to go back to

where you left off. There was no running water. You had to fetch water. If you want to shower you have to jump in the river. So, there's pros and cons to everything. (Edward Georgekish, conversation with author, Wemindji, Aug. 15, 2018)

According to participants, having been separated from their cultural context, they had become accustomed to speaking English and had missed years of cultural learning, thus often struggled to communicate with family members upon their return. However, returning to Eeyou Istchee, the bush, and family, meant reclaiming these aspects of their identity. Inspired by that time, many today are working to maintain the Eeyou culture and language. Linda Stewart, CLWA Advanced participant, and manager of Wemindji Community Hall, remembered the time in her youth when she started relearning her culture after her time in residential school,

My mother was telling me what kind of boughs to collect, making a hole in the snow, and getting poles and trees. It was A LOT of work. It really hit me hard. Like, 'How can they live?! I shoulda stayed in school!' [Laughing]. Then I was really happy that I got to experience that and learn life-skills and how to hunt, how to wear snowshoes, how to collect firewood, get water, everything ... When I came back, I didn't know what to say ... So that's when I started learning, speaking the right - using the right words. You have to listen closely to what they call the things they use around camp. (Linda Stewart, conversation with author, Wemindji, Nov. 7, 2017)

### **5.5.3 Town-life and 'surviving between two worlds'**

So much has changed. When people used to go on their traplines a long time ago and my dad was telling me stories, even if a family didn't have a trapline, they had a chance to go. They would get invited by another family to come. That doesn't happen that much anymore. Like, my children, the first chance they had to go in the bush as - my youngest was 3 years old, my daughter was 9 and my other son was 13. Because we got invited by friends to go to their spring camp ... When we were really, really young, like maybe 5-6 years old we saw that, but then after that we didn't because we were in residential school. (Frances Visitor, conversation with author, Wemindji, Nov. 9, 2017)

Settlement of the community has, in many cases, taken *iyyuuayimuwin* from off the land into town, indoors into classrooms, and squeezed it into busy schedules. It is widely acknowledged that much of the language is not practiced in town, as most words and concepts come from

ischii. Today, community members attempt to *survive between two worlds*, working and/or studying in town while maintaining connections to land-based culture. For many who live in town, increased participation in the wage economy leaves little time to be immersed in Eeyou culture, even CLWA or other land-based programs. Many community members only get to spend a few weeks in the bush every spring and autumn, when offices and schools are closed for vacation for the annual Goose- and Moose-breaks. Several other factors have taken hold over generations since residential schools, representing an increasingly institutionalised and globalised “path away from ischii” that traces the direction of language loss, particularly for young people. English and iiyiyuuayimuwin are no longer contained to isolated points of encounter, and the effects of globalised culture and media are incipient. Symptoms of the colonial legacy have further accelerated language shift through decades of intergenerational language loss, inconsistent institutional Eeyou education, and internalised colonial shame and bullying. As a result of these influences, many children who are raised primarily in town often insist on being spoken to in English. While some understand iiyiyuuayimuwin, they lack verbal skills.

Many survivors of residential school feel less urgency about language shift than other community members. Based on memories of returning to families’ traplines and relearning what they had lost, they believe that children will eventually “come into it”. They perceive CLWA activities as an extension of traditional cultural transmission and are “glad” for Culture and Wellness Department’s efforts. However, others argue that reality has changed and that Wemindji is no longer a place where children are immersed in iiyiyuuayimuwin. CLWA and other Culture and Wellness programming is a direct response to these realities and needs of town-based community members. The majority of participants spoke to the impediment town-life represents to relationships between ischii and iiyiyuuayimuwin, for example, several mentioned that families are more likely on weekends to drive to other towns and cities to visit family, go to events or shopping. Flossie Georgekish told me that her responsibilities to take care of her elderly mother preclude her from spending time in the bush. Patricia Georgekish, who works fulltime at Wemindji’s *Tawich Development Corporation*, told me that her trapline is a six-hour drive away on a dirt road, and therefore it’s impossible for her to get there except once per year, “The only quicker way to get there is by plane, just a fly-in, and who has that kind of money?”(Patricia Georgekish, conversation with author, Wemindji, Dec. 5, 2018). Sammy Blackned, Director of Sports and Leisure for Wemindji’s Band Council, explained that many people cannot go on weekends because of the distance to family traplines. He said it takes the

better part of a day of travel, leaving one day or so to spend time on the trapline, and if weather is inclement, the entire weekend is wasted. Likewise, young people who are being raised in this context are more likely to stay in the familiar, convenient town setting with their usual hobbies, technology, and friends, and therefore less likely to participate in land-based activities (Field notes, Nov. 2018). David Kakabat, who goes goose hunting in May, told me that his adult daughters sometimes join him and his wife with their young grandchildren, but that the teenagers often choose not to participate. They only stay for the hunt when they do, and “after the hunting is finished they want to come back to hang around in town I guess, play the videogames.” Jeremiah Mishtaachiishikw, 33, CLWA teacher, and Cree Language and Culture teacher at Wemindji’s high school described how youths’ lifestyle has changed in the 20 years since he was his students’ age, and how the increase in waged-work effects this cultural shift,

I remember me and my family used to be in the bush, at the camp during the school year. Weekends, fall, winter, spring, we used to stay up there. And the knowledge that I know mostly comes from my childhood. Whatever I did during school, I did outside, that’s how I learned the Cree Language ... We don’t hardly see that now, because families are working now. During my childhood there was hardly any families or parents working so they had a lot of time. Now it's only during the spring [Goose-hunt] when most of the students will go out in the bush. Some will stay in the community, some will go ... I think that’s where it affects the students from being able to practice the culture. (Jeremiah Mishtaachiishikw, conversation with author, Wemindji, Dec. 4, 2018)

For most concerned community members with whom I spoke, the solution to language loss in Wemindji is quite evident: to adapt, and re-establish young people’s relationships with ischii, and allow them to engage in intergenerational Eeyou knowledge transmission described above. Jeremiah explained his perspective on how this might impact youths’ schooling, “If every student went in the bush regularly, if they were practicing here in the community ... my students would probably be more excited [to learn the language and culture]... because here at school is very limited” (conversation 2018). Elder Elizabeth Shashaweskum articulates her vision of what should be done to maintain culture and language,

σnc̄p̄c̄<sup>a</sup> σ̄p̄, <̄ē p̄r̄ ̄ē<sup>u</sup> .<̄j̄r̄ <̄j̄d̄r̄ <̄.<̄σ̄r̄ <̄ē<sup>u</sup>, ̄.̄Δ̄ d̄r̄c̄<sup>u</sup> <̄n̄n̄<sup>o</sup> ̄.̄Δ̄ Δ̄<sup>u</sup>c̄<sup>u</sup> <̄r̄<sup>u</sup> <̄p̄<sup>a</sup>̄ē<sup>u</sup>  
σ̄<sup>u</sup> n̄.̄Δ̄<sup>u</sup>c̄<sup>o</sup> ̄.̄Δ̄.̄<̄j̄ p̄n̄.<̄j̄r̄<sup>u</sup> p̄j̄ p̄r̄r̄<sup>u</sup>x <̄.̄Δ̄<sup>a</sup> r̄<sup>u</sup> Δ̄<sup>u</sup>n̄.̄Δ̄ ̄r̄ r̄<sup>u</sup>d̄n̄l̄r̄<sup>u</sup> Δ̄p̄<sup>o</sup> Δ̄p̄<sup>u</sup>n̄.̄Δ̄σ̄<sup>o</sup>,  
<̄ d̄c̄p̄σ̄.̄Δ̄<sup>u</sup> σ̄.̄b̄<sup>a</sup> ̄ē<sup>u</sup> σ̄l̄<sup>u</sup> <̄ d̄j̄r̄<̄j̄p̄σ̄.̄Δ̄<sup>u</sup> <̄ λ><sup>u</sup>x <̄d̄<sup>c</sup> ̄r̄ p̄r̄ .<̄.̄Δ̄<sup>u</sup>n̄.̄<̄j̄<sup>c</sup> d̄n̄<sup>u</sup> <̄.<̄p̄<sup>o</sup>  
c̄<sup>a</sup> b̄ Δ̄j̄ r̄<sup>u</sup>d̄n̄l̄r̄<sup>c</sup> <̄σ̄c̄ <̄r̄<sup>u</sup> <̄ Δ̄<sup>u</sup>c̄<sup>x</sup> l̄.̄b̄<sup>u</sup> p̄j̄ <̄b̄ <̄<sup>u</sup> <̄ Δ̄<sup>u</sup>n̄d̄σ̄<sup>u</sup> ∇<sup>b̄j̄<sup>u</sup></sup> r̄<sup>u</sup> Δ̄<sup>u</sup>n̄.̄Δ̄<sup>u</sup>



Δσβλπ°x σΓ Ρλ<·Δλπ°·Δ ΔΔΓΝ"ΔΠσ·Δλπ"xx C·< Γ"Ν"Δ ΡΡ ΡλδΝΛμ Δ·Δλππλ Ρλ Λ<sup>6</sup> λμ ΡΡ  
Ρλρλ·Δλ Ρλ λμ ΡΡ Ρσ·Δλπ"Νλ Δσβλπ° Ρλρ·Δλπ"Δλπ·Δλπ"x

What I think about what is happening here, regarding ailments, is that the people should try more to be out in ischii either for a week or during the weekends with their children and/or grandchildren. This they should do to learn of the traditional practices and the Eeyou culture, such as how to set rabbit snares and clean fish such as during the winter season. Then the students can tell about their experiences while staying out in ischii with their elders and to share of what they had learned about traditional practices while being out in ischii ... These children will surely learn much and will always remember and hold on to these teachings. (Elder Elizabeth Shashaweskum, conversation with Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish and author, Wemindji, Dec. 5, 2018)

For their part, CWD's programming, including the canoe expedition, snowshoe journey, and cultural programming in town, makes it possible for those who do not have regular access to a trapline to experience the land-based culture and lifestyle and discover the strength that their ancestors embodied. Programs aim to offer opportunities for community members to reinforce cultural connections to ischii, practice tradition, learn cultural skills and knowledge, help people maintain their relationships to Eeyou culture through changing times, heal from colonial dispossession, and learn aspects of culture that they may not have been taught. These programs offer opportunities to experience and learn Eeyou culture, while adapting to community members' capacities by facilitating material transport, planned routes, food, etc. Edward Georgekish compares his experiences growing up on the land before being sent to residential school and his ancestors' lifestyles to the experience offered by the winter snowshoe journey, and the resilience that it might impart to today's youth,

It was all physical and mental. You had to endure the hardship, hunting and living off the land. I was very fortunate that I experienced it. The winter journey ... Our ancestor's it was their way of life ... Our ancestors, our grandparents had to survive, they had no choice. I think that the programs that we're doing is so that our younger generations will experience that, but not as intense. It's not as hard. At least they can get a message of how it was in the old days. Seeing is believing.

The youth summer canoe expedition also aims to introduce young people, in particular, to the ways of their ancestors and give them a taste of what life was like for generations past. As Elder

Irene Mishtaachiishikw observed, “They were really amazed, they were excited. Especially the young people ... they have guides. So they learn from their guides that are there working with them, and learning at the same time.”

While cultural activities are popular among CLWA participants and other community members, particularly the Gookums (literally grandmothers, here refers to a group of Elders who participate in these activities), several participants mentioned that they often cannot participate in because they are tired and want to spend their evenings, weekends, and holidays with their family, rather than ‘strangers’. Likewise, regular land-based programming was intended to be out in ischii but it proved too difficult to mobilise people to participate in activities held in the bush rather than in town, therefore activities take place at Culture Camp. Due to limited resources and organisers’ own busy schedules, activities are frequently held during business/school hours, making it difficult for both working adults and young people to participate. Nonetheless, community members make important efforts to get involved in CLWA cultural activities. Richard Visitor, a participant in the Beginners Cree Literacy class, recently moved the Wemindji, his father’s birthplace, from Moose Factory where he was born after his parents’ time in residential school. He and his wife have dived enthusiastically into CLWA. Richard spoke of maintaining participation while working and fathering the couple’s 9 year old daughter, “We were so busy in the beginning we were non-stop participating in whatever things they had happening. We were actually sick for two months [Laughing] ... My wife and I do go to separate classes because of our daughter.” (Richard Visitor, conversation with author, Wemindji, Nov. 23, 2018)

#### **5.5.4 Technology: Call and response**

People don't really limit the time that the kids have with technology ... 15 years ago, people spent time outdoors with their family, kids played outside, now you don't see that much ... You always see people on their devices, not really interacting with each other. (Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish, conversation with author, Wemindji, Aug. 20, 2018)

Technology and social media have flooded the community with globalised culture, particularly the lives of young people. Participants frequently cited the constant influence of childhood entertainment, social media, and videogames for the struggle they face when speaking to their children and grandchildren. Wanda Miniquaken, 18, former CLWA teacher, described the implications to the culture and land,

Technology does repel us from our culture and language ... Let's just say if I was watching my dad clean a fish or something, right? Then I take my phone out, I'm not watching him, I'm not being present, I'm not learning, right? But without the device, I'm there and I'm like completely aware. (Wanda Miniquaken, conversation with author, Wemindji, Nov. 23, 2018)

Nonetheless, CLWA is seeking ways to use technology to reassert iiyiyuuayimuwin across the territory and "to adapt a new way to teach the younger generations." (Anthony Stewart, conversation with author, Wemindji, Nov. 23, 2018) This is helping to a build stronger relational network between Nations and individuals. Organisers use Facebook to bring iiyiyuuayimuwin to over 4,000 users, and CLWA recently launched an iiyiyuuayimuwin syllabics application for handheld devices. Grace Delaney, participant of CLWA's Moose Factory weekly online class shared that,

It's thanks to technology like this that we are able to see this ... We would need to have you here to be able to do this, which would require a lot of travelling ... and would be very expensive because there's no one who can do it here in [Moose Factory]. (Grace Delaney, Skype group conversation with author, Wemindji, Dec. 6, 2018)

Radio programming is also effective in transmitting cultural knowledge and Old iiyiyuuayimuwin. Recordings of Elders from 1960-80s recounting traditional legends, stories, and knowledge of ischii are popular. CLWA organizers are currently planning another series of programming including bedtime stories, songs, and a word-of-the-day.

### **5.5.5 Wemindji as a site of healing and reclamation**

We're just an extension of our people on the Quebec side [of James Bay] but the English is overpowering us on this side. (ibid)

While growing up in Wemindji no longer has the effect of immersing children in the language, many adults are still relatively strong in iiyiyuuayimuwin. For some families, Wemindji functions as a site of healing and reclamation for adults and families from other communities, particularly Moose Factory (Dorothy Stewart, conversation with author, Montreal, Dec. 20, 2018). Multiple Wemindji Eeyouch shared with me their stories of returning to Wemindji to reconnect with language and culture. Richard Visitor recently moved from Moose Factory to Wemindji with his family, "To show our children they have a connection to this community, to this region." As an intergenerational survivor of residential school, Richard enjoys CLWA, connecting with distant

cousins, and has found healing and joy immersing himself in the community. “I do love [CLWA] simply because it will give me an opportunity to learn the language on my own, which is something I really want to do ... I had this thinking that I do need to reconnect my heritage because of my personal history, to be connected to who I really am.” According to several participants, CLWA weekly online classes further help to transmit this healing effect to Moose Factory.

## **5.6 Discussion**

In this case study, I attempted to illustrate the relationships between *iiyiyuuayimuwin* and *ischii*, and how they have shifted in response to dispossession and Eeyou responses. Indigenous scholars have articulated the cultural links between lands and languages, embedded within complex worldviews. Belinda Daniels-Fiss (2009) describes land and language as culturally and spiritually entwined. White (2015) elaborates that Indigenous languages allow people to communicate with the Creator, plants, animals, and all of Creation. Jeff Corntassel's (2012) peoplehood model demonstrates that when any element of language, homeland, ceremonial cycles, and sacred living history is disrupted, they all are. Leanne Simpson (2014) describes the reclamation of language and land as a simultaneous process of healing. Wemindji Eeyouch participants who actively maintain their relationships to the land described in vivid detail how their language has been interwoven with their land by generations of ancestors. They described how, as children, they learned on the land from their parents and grandparents, the language an integral part of that cultural continuation.

Nonetheless, little literature exists elaborating the impacts of dispossession from land on Indigenous languages, nor on the current urgency of Indigenous language loss (Brown et al. 2012; Grenoble 2018; Hinton 2001; Sheridan and Longboat 2014; Turner and Clifton 2009). Big-Canoe and Richmond's (2014) conceptualisation of environmental dispossession through both direct (physical and environmental), and indirect (policy impacting cultural, intellectual, and spiritual connection) forces brought by colonial interactions (originally applied in the context of wellbeing). This provides a lens through which to interpret both the tangible and less perceptible processes that function to disconnect people from language-land relationships. Here, Wemindji community members have shared how the effects of settlement in town, resulting busyness and increased involvement in the wage-economy, Western-style education and infrastructure, have significantly reduced time in the bush, weakened many Wemindji Eeyouch' relationships with *ischii*, and therefore effected the disuse of “Old *iiyiyuuayimuwin*,” as also expressed by

Ohmagari and Berkes (1997). Stiles (1997) and Adelson (2000) observe that Indigenous language taught uniquely in a classroom setting is often devoid of its cultural meaning and helps to instill an artificial, or tokenistic sense of identity. Leanne Hinton (2001) describes “language contraction” as when speakers tend “not to know certain domains of vocabulary or certain aspects of grammar” (5). In many cases, and particularly for the young, the language has contracted to include that which is used in town, to the loss of a vast amount of *iiyiyuuayimuwin*, a land-based language.

While scholars have elsewhere recorded the social effects of industrial dispossession on Eeyou communities (Fettes 2019; Morantz 2002; Mulrennan et al 2012; Niezen 1993; Ouellet 2011). However, they were not mentioned by participants. This may have been the case had participants been members of the community with stronger relationships to *ischii*, such as hunters, however, this work demonstrates that the direct implications of those impacts are more strongly felt beyond the limits of town. Very significant to this group was the “indirect” dispossession effected by that many Wemindji Eeyouch experienced as children who were sent by the Government of Canada to Church-run residential schools. Many children spent years away from their families and missed out on important cultural- and language transmission, missing precious opportunities for land-based knowledge, culture, and language. However, I would inquire into how Big-Canoe and Richmond place the dispossessive forces of internalised notions of cultural shame, and intergenerational reverberations of colonial dispossession, and would argue that these are an extension of indirect dispossessive forces.

A good deal of literature highlights the relationships between connection to land and cultural continuity, wellbeing and identity with dramatic implications for human wellbeing when that relationship is weakened (Adelson 2000; Daniels-Fiss 2009; Radu et al 2014; Sheridan and Longboat 2014; Simpson 2014). A substantial parallel body of research exists which demonstrates the impacts of language loss and reclamation on Indigenous people’s and communities’ health and wellbeing (Brokenleg 2012; Chandler and Lalonde’s 2008; Hallet et al. 2007; Jenni, Anisman, McIvor, and Jacobs 2017; Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan, and Toth 2014; Stiles 1997; Walsh 2018; Whalen, Moss, and Baldwin’s 2016). According to participants, the process of reclaiming their relationships to *ischii* and *iiyiyuuayimuwin* began during the residential school era, upon returning to the bush during the summers or at the end of their time away, some (though not all) began the process of relearning and reclaiming their relationships to family, culture, *ischii*, and *iiyiyuuayimuwin*. This process of Eeyou cultural continuation (which began *long before* Canada) and healing continues today, expressed by participants as the

natural expression of a “living culture” that renews itself as it is transmitted between generations. As Ohmagari and Berkes (1997), and more recently Bommelyn and Tuttle (2018) suggest, because of dispossession from ischii and traditional land-based learning, community programs like CLWA and the youth canoe expedition, among others, have become an important branch for passing along that traditional knowledge transfer, or “the Cree Way.” The efforts and success that the community and the Eeyou at large have made have helped them maintain their culture and *iiyiyuuayimuwin*, and heal from dispossession. Because of these continued connections, Wemindji has become a place where descendants of Wemindji Eeyouch who grew up elsewhere, may return to the community in order to heal and reclaim connections to *iiyiyuuayimuwin*, ischii, family, and culture (both physically and also remotely, through CLWA’s online class).

The literature addresses this topic of communities’ adapting Western-style institutions in various ways. Mulrennan and Bussi eres (2018) take the position that Eeyou’s adaptations of State institutions are strategic and necessary to successfully negotiate around unrelenting colonial and neo-colonial (industrial) encroachment on Eeyou Istchee. According to their cultural edge model, the Eeyou have been able to maintain substantial and important parts of ischii, culture, and *iiyiyuuayimuwin* because of their resilience at these cultural edges. On the other hand, Naomi Adelson (2000) refers to the resistance that Whapmgoostui community members have to the influence of “whiteman” on their lifestyles and institutions. She highlights that, “By and large, the community views the changes arising from village life as damaging, or at the very least as not conducive to ‘being alive well’” (109). Adelson also underscores the community perception that the “enactments of tradition” in structured education reinforce in children a “particularly artificial” sense of Eeyou identity (107). Louellyn White (2015) carries this line of thought further, she writes,

When Indigenous communities decide to resist dominant power structures and choose to adopt an Indigenous form of schooling, including the teaching and learning of their own languages, they are engaging in a form of critical pedagogy. (105)

Both of these perspectives are presented in this case-study, and exist in tension with one another, perhaps and inherent part of strategic nation-building and resistance to dispossession. Participants shared their pride for the successes that the Cree Nation has had in reclaiming the right to educate their children in *iiyiyuuayimuwin*, which is mandatory to graduate high school, for the development of *iiyiyuuayimuwin* curriculum, and for their community’s resilience.

However, the weakening of traditional form of knowledge transmission, the state of young peoples' language in Wemindji, and the loss of relationships to ischii are also constantly attributed to the adopting of Western-style education. Likewise, a tension exists around the comforts and affluence conveyed by town-life. Participants shared that one of the main impediments to their relationships between ischii and iiyiyuuayimuwin are the busyness conferred by wage-work, and children's schooling. The latter has been affected by Western influences in several ways, from the strategic adoption of Quebec's academic structure in 1978, to internalised notions of inferiority which caused the elimination of CLIP, 2011, to the influence of non-Eeyou teachers who choose to teach cultures other than Eeyou during Cree Culture and Language class, and who prohibit children from speaking their language at school, today. This tension may also demonstrate the difference in perspectives based on the lived realities of community members in contrast to the visions and opinions of Eeyou leadership, and highlights a need to attend to the more intangible processes of dispossession that community members experience on a personal level.

Finally, the influence of globalised language and culture, transmitted by pervasive social-media and digital entertainment is understood in the literature to have a deterritorialising impact on Indigenous languages. According to Jacquemet (2005), the incursion of world languages into remote areas is causing identities and language ideologies to creolise, creating a reality in which languages are no longer directly tied to their historical geographies. Likewise, Battiste, Kovach, and Balzer (2010) view the adaptation of English to the local environment, as a tool of empowerment, and even resistance by generating "Aboriginal Englishes" rather than "broken" ones (11). However, participants of this project repeatedly expressed fear of youths' and children's language choices, perceiving the hegemony of the English language eroding their community's identity and risking the loss of their heritage. Even the one youth with whom I spoke, Wanda Miniquaken (18) told me that she saw the death of the iiyiyuuayimuwin as a "natural progression." However, technology is creating yet another cultural edge (Mulrennan and Bussièrès 2018) as program organisers mobilise its potential for language learning and to extend Wemindji's and CLWA's influence and build and strengthen relationships and social networks via the language, across Eeyou Istchee.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This study drew on concepts of environmental dispossession to explore the ways in which Wemindji Eeyouch' relationships between ischii and iiyiyuuayimuwin have changed in response

to encroachment by industry and State, as well as the deterritorialising impacts of modern media and technology. The concept of the cultural edge highlighted Eeyou responses to dispossessive forces and the immense efforts and adaptations that the Cree Nation and Wemindji community organisers make in order to maintain their cultural connections. While their achievements are substantial, the pressure on their social systems are immense and diverse. Mulrennan and Bussièrès' (2018) analysis of Wemindji's resilience at the colonial cultural edge repeatedly underscores the efforts that the community has, and continues to make to maintain iiyiyuuayimuwin and ischii. Mulrennan and Bussièrès (2018) posit that, whether the Eeyou can "continue to defend and sustain" ischii and culture, remains to be seen. I have attempted to demonstrate the intimate ties between language (loss) and land (dispossession), the current state of the language in Wemindji's children and youth, and the tensions that exist between town-life and its implications for land-language relationships. Given the current situation, I would respond to Mulrennan and Bussièrès that, the sheer number and weight of accumulated pressures faced by the community is currently overwhelming Wemindji's ability to transmit their language to younger generations. At the time of writing the Government of Canada has recently tabled the Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages, in which it proposes to support "the efforts of Indigenous peoples to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen Indigenous languages." However, while community and Cree Nation efforts are critical to maintaining language and culture, no amount of work, programming, or adaptation will reverse the impacts of Canada's colonial dispossession on Indigenous communities' relationships to language and land without first ensuring their access to their land and its environmental integrity.





*less time spent in ischii, and the pervasive influence of globalised media, are seriously impacting the community's youngest generations. In 2017, Wemindji's Culture and Wellness Department initiated the new program, 'Cree Literacy for Wemindji Adults' (CLWA), with the intention of motivating adults to improve their skills and speak more iiyiyuuayimuwin (Eastern Cree language) in the home. This article explores the program organisers' efforts to sensitise and mobilise adult Wemindji Eeyouch (Cree people), providing a road-map for other communities entering into this most challenging, and under-documented endeavor. Through a lens of miyupimaatisiun (wellbeing) we highlight the important impacts that a language reclamation movement can have even in its beginning stages for individuals and communities alike.*

## **6.1 Introduction**

It's all connected. Everything, the culture and the language is ... it's like wellbeing. When you know yourself more, who you are, everything comes together. When you know your surroundings and your language - your wellbeing flourishes. It will flourish. I think that's a good way to learn your language, you know, to actually be out there on the land and not just learning in a classroom setting. (Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish, conversation with first author, Wemindji, Aug. 20, 2018)

In response to a worldwide crisis of Indigenous language loss, language activists are emerging from communities around the world, mobilising to reclaim, revitalise, and maintain their ancestral languages and traditional knowledge for future generations (Hinton 2001). LR projects oriented around community-defined goals can bring significant benefits to well-being (Fitzgerald 2017; McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White 2018; Romero-Little 2006). Drawing on the work of Indigenous scholars in Canada and the US, Fitzgerald's (2017) holistic framework recognizes the successes of Indigenous language reclamation/revitalization initiatives through a holistic lens of wellbeing, as a protective measure for cultural continuity and adaptability, rather than through strictly linguistic measures. By centering the impacts of *the process and the personal goals of a language reclamation movement*, one may observe how LR can contribute to *reversing* the negative outcomes of language shift, the process in which Indigenous or minority groups "shift from their ancestral tongue to a world language," with important impacts on wellbeing (Hinton 2001, 4). This framework is a departure from conventional Western linguistic-oriented concepts of language and vitality, which focus

specifically on quantifiable measures drawn from numbers of speakers, level of fluency, and “decontextualized grammatical structures” (ibid, 287), ignoring complex cultural meanings of language, and the colonial contexts in which Indigenous language shift takes place. In this context, McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White (2018) articulate that, “Studying a language [as a Western linguist] differs greatly and dangerously from feeling a language” (163). For this reason, we choose to use the term *language reclamation* to refer to this process, rather than revitalisation. Reclamation suggests community-defined meaning, aspirations, and agency in reclaiming their rights to speak and pass on their language, whereas revitalisation might imply quantifiable measures of success beyond the nuanced personal goals community members may have for their relationships to the language (Fitzgerald 2017; McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White 2018).

In the Eeyou community of Wemindji, an Eeyou<sup>1</sup> (Eastern James Bay Cree) community profoundly touched by the legacy of residential schools, *iiyuuayimuwin* is perceived by many community members to be significantly declining among children and youth. In this article, we examine Wemindji’s LR program, *Maintaining our Language: Cree Literacy for Wemindji Adults* (CLWA), funded by the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) and the Wemindji Band Council. CLWA is a response to community concerns about intergenerational language shift and aspirations to nurture Eeyou cultural identity for generations to come. Organisers’ ultimate goal is to mobilise adult community members to increase *iiyuuayimuwin* use at home, and prevent further language loss among their *little ones*. We look at program organisers’ efforts to mobilise and sensitise the community in developing a local language reclamation project, with impacts resonating at the level of the Cree Nation Government of Eeyou Istchee (CNG). Through an exploration of various activities, successes and challenges, we can see how the process of LR, even in its beginning stages, has already begun to confer positive impacts on community members’ wellbeing. We hope to identify possible directions for enhancing communal wellbeing through the program, which we also understand as being critical to the sustaining of this initiative over the long term. We hope that in providing a map of Wemindji’s journey, we can offer ideas and inspiration for other communities hoping to undertake such a “superhuman task” (Hinton 2001, 4). We highlight positive indicators identified by participants of this nascent movement, in order to gain an understanding of the benefits that the program is conveying to Wemindji Eeyouch (James Bay Cree people), as well as identifying areas with room for improvement to extend benefits to more community members. Finally, by approaching this

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<sup>1</sup> Also spelled *iiyuu*.

assessment of Wemindji's LR project through the lens of wellbeing, we have been able to capture more nuanced personal impacts that the process of iiyiyuuayimuwin learning and engagement is having on active participants.

## **6.2 Methodology**

The primary author, Chloe Boone, conducted this project as part of a Master's thesis, which resulted in this piece, co-authored with Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish (second author, Wemindji Cree Language Coordinator, former CSB Cree Language and Culture teacher, and CLWA teacher). Chloe came into this project at the invitation of local community organisers and Cree Language teachers through her supervisor, Dr. Monica Mulrennan's, who has a 20 year research partnership with the Wemindji community. The following results emerge from what became a close collaboration with local 'language keepers' and community organisers, including: Linda Stewart (Manager, Wemindji Culture and Wellness Department, CLWA Advanced participant), Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish, Frances Visitor (CLWA teacher and Cree School Board Language Consultant), and Katherine Scott (Wemindji Cultural Heritage Coordinator and CLWA Non-Cree Speakers class participant). The approach taken involves qualitative analysis of 22 hour-long semi-guided conversations (individual and group) with 27 community members about factors affecting the state of iiyiyuuayimuwin in Wemindji, and the impacts of the program on participants and the community. Participants include, 12 Elders, 2 Cree Nation Government (CNG) representatives, 4 community organisers, 3 Cree Language teachers (1 also a CLWA organiser), and 14 CLWA participants (including 8 Elders, and 3 organisers). These conversations provide a snapshot of Eeyouch' experiences of and perspectives on changes to iiyiyuuayimuwin, ischii, and culture. Chloe (first author) spoke with most participants in English; however, Theresa (second author), assisted by Chloe, engaged with Elder participants in iiyiyuuayimuwin. iiyiyuuayimuwin Language consultant, Ernest Hester then transcribed these conversations into syllabics and translated them into English. We chose to report iiyiyuuayimuwin conversations in syllabic form out of respect for the Elders who shared their iiyiyuuayimuwin words with us and who are participants of CLWA, and out of respect for the work of literacy program organisers. We felt it important not to erase iiyiyuuayimuwin from this research, and because of the syllabic focus of the program, it seemed like the logical choice of orthography.

## **6.3 Language reclamation in Indigenous contexts**

Indigenous languages are vast and complex cultural codes that express culturally distinct ways of relating to and conceptualising the world, imbued with nuances which define and describe human behaviour, values, concepts, and beliefs in ways that can never be fully translated to another social-linguistic context (McIvor, Napoleon, and Dickie 2009; White 2015). Language can define a people's collective identity, and yet is inextricable from the other aspects of peoplehood: homeland, ceremonial cycles, and sacred living histories (Corntassel 2012). Indigenous cultures are fundamentally rooted in complex relationships to the land. As acclaimed Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson (2002) describes,

Our spiritualities, identities, languages, and systems of governance come from the land. The sustenance of our wisdom, worldviews, philosophies, and values comes from the land. The source of our knowledge and our teachers themselves come from the land and the spirit-world it encompasses (15).

The importance of peoplehood and cultural identity can be observed in personal accounts and concrete understandings of wellbeing. Naomi Adelson's (2000) work with Whapmagoostui Eeyouch describes, *miyupimaatisiun* (*being alive well*), the Eeyou cultural conception closest to 'wellbeing', as maintaining relationship to Eeyou identity rooted in cultural values, practices, and beliefs. *Miyupimaatisiun* "constitutes ... the practices of daily living and by the balance of human relations intrinsic to Cree lifestyles" (15), and has "everything to do with life on the land" (60). It also takes on an element of identity that distinguishes Eeyouch 'daily living' from non-Eeyouch and in contrast to Western influences on Eeyou communities (ibid).

Indigenous language shift is intimately tied to the colonial project of accumulation of power and capital through State and corporate usurpation of Indigenous land and resources via assimilatory, genocidal, and exploitative policies (Hinton 2001; TRC 2015). Of about 450 Indigenous languages that were spoken across this land called Canada when European colonisers first arrived, about 70 are still spoken (McIvor and Anisman 2018). McCarty, Romero, Zepeda (2006) rightfully recognise this as "testimony to the resistance and resilience of their speakers" (29). Nevertheless, only three (Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibwe) are being transmitted enough to persist and flourish (McIvor and Anisman 2018). In order to understand the context of this crisis of global proportions, and subsequent language revitalization movement, as it pertains to communities in Canada, it is crucial to consider the experiences and legacies that impact survivors of Canada's residential school system, and their communities. Introduced by Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, residential schools were designed to assimilate

Indigenous children to Western culture by breaking cultural, linguistic, family, and community linkages and forcibly alienating Indigenous children from their families and homelands. From the mid-1800s until 1996, “many successive generations of children from the same communities and families endured” the dispossession, genocidal violence, and terrible abuse of residential schools (TRC 2015, v). One of the main foci of the schools was the forcible elimination of mother-tongue languages, causing the disruption of intergenerational transmission of culture, knowledge, and identity. This has created what is sometimes known as a ‘missing’ or ‘lost’ generation of adults who experienced a break from their language and culture and, therefore, may struggle to connect with fluent-speaking Elders and younger generations who learn the language in school (Hinton, Florey, Gessner, and Manatowa-Bailey 2018; Hoover 1992; Sarkar and Metallic 2009). They may struggle to support their children’s language socialisation, and may experience internalised cultural shame, effecting an intergenerational degradation of language and relationships. Likewise, today’s wage economy and formal education may inhibit families from spending time together in the bush, impairing cultural transmission and “the traditional mode of education based on participant observation and apprenticeship in the bush” (Ohmagari and Berkes 1997, 197). Globalised culture and media, which glorify the dominant culture, further aggravate these impacts on children’s connection to culture and identity (McCarty, Romero, and Zepeda 2006). Inappropriate schooling, in which Indigenous language education is offered only a few hours per week, follows Western pedagogy, and fails to prioritise cultural learning, is resulting in further generations being educated outside of their cultural and linguistic context (McIvor, 2009).

Reconnecting to language and land-based culture can be profoundly healing to individuals and communities who have survived colonial violence (Jenni, Anisman, McIvor, and Jacobs 2017; McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White 2018; Whalen, Moss, and Baldwin 2016). This is particularly true for those adults whose experiences in residential school limited their relationships with ancestral culture, and/or its transmission to the next generation. Learning, practicing, and reclaiming culture can enhance acceptance of, and pride in one’s cultural identity, an increased sense of social inclusion and acceptance, sense of interconnectedness with and knowledge of the natural world, traditional foods and medicines, and enhanced spiritual connection (Archibald and Dewar 2010; Brokenleg 2012; Grenoble 2018; McIvor, Napoleon, and Dickie 2009; Walsh 2018). The benefits of learning/speaking an ancestral language are also closely tied to enhanced wellbeing in more measurable terms, including reduced rates of depression, diabetes, substance abuse, cigarette smoking, violence, and suicide, and is further

shown to enhance academic attainment, represented in higher rates of high school graduation and college attendance (Chandler and Lalonde, 2004; Hallett, Chandler, and Lalonde 2007; King, Smith, and Gracey 2009; Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan, and Toth 2014).

Generally part of a larger movement of cultural and territorial reclamation and healing, language reclamation and revitalisation are by necessity community-driven (Fishman 1991; Hinton 2018). By centering community needs, goals, and wishes, organisers can work toward developing culturally relevant frameworks imbued with a community's intellectual traditions (Romero-Little 2006). While the ultimate goal may be to educate a new generation of child learners, for young people to achieve fluency, the language must be spoken at home and permeate interpersonal relationships daily, thus imparting cultural “values, precepts, and belief systems” through language socialisation (Romero 2003, 3). However, in a movements' early stages, it may be difficult for language activists to “convince others that sociocultural change is needed” (Fishman 1991), particularly where people have internalised a sense of cultural and linguistic unworthiness. LR may remain the work of one or a few interested individuals until enough community support can hopefully be gained, once organisers can accomplish “something the community can trust” (Hinton 2001, 6). Therefore, it may be necessary to raise community awareness of the risks of language loss with regular meetings and language gatherings, creating a “deep and encompassing discourse” in which “community voice and intellectual traditions are the starting point ... if these efforts are to become viable and sustainable over the long term” (ibid, 401). It may be helpful to contextualise LR efforts to meet practical community goals, from identity- and community-building, leadership- and capacity-development, child-rearing, prayer, song, land-based practices, to social media use, etc. (McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White 2018; Romero-Little 2006). Doing so allows the process of language reclamation to confer wellbeing in addressing community-identified needs and perspectives, beyond the intents of Western linguistics (Fitzgerald 2017).

#### **6.4 Language reclamation in Wemindji: a question of autonomy**

Wemindji Cree First Nation is one of eleven communities in Eeyou Istchee (East James Bay Cree Nation), with a population of approximately 1,500 people located along the shores of James Bay. Eeyouch' ancestors have lived in Eeyou Istchee for many thousands of years (Pendea et al In Press). They were involved as trappers in the fur trade for well over 300 years. However, from the 1940s, through the 1960s (Katherine Scott, unpublished data), the Government of Canada sent nearly all of Wemindji's children away to residential schools, many

returning disconnected from their language and culture, and struggling to communicate with family members (See MS1).

Today, the leadership of Eeyou Istchee today are very active in Nation-building, and often have to make difficult decisions to balance the dual imperatives of maintaining tradition and responsibility to ischii, with economic opportunity and development. In 1975, the Cree Nation and Inuit negotiated under duress the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA) with the Governments of Quebec and Canada. The *Agreement* allowed the province to go ahead with massive hydroelectric development of traditional Eeyou ischii, and superimposed a new system of land-tenure focused on resource development, on a system of multi-family hunting territories. However, the Eeyou also managed to negotiate significant successes protecting culture and toward self-determination. JBNQA provided for the creation of the Cree Trappers Association (CTA) and Income Security Program (ISP), which ensures an annual income and benefits to those who maintain a hunting, trapping, and fishing lifestyle at least 120 days yearly. It also provided for the creation of the Cree School Board, 1978, with which the Eeyou reclaimed control of their children's education. In 1988, CSB initiated the full-time Cree as the Language of Instruction Program (CLIP) at primary and upper-elementary levels (McAlpine and Herodier 1994). However, questions about its effectiveness and beliefs that the Indigenous languages might have negative impacts on student success plagued CLIP (ibid; MS1). In 2011, CLIP was replaced with the *Guaranteed Viable Curriculum* (GVC), making 'Cree Language and Culture' a subject of study twice per 6-day cycle, rather than a language of instruction (MS1). Many community members identify this change as the cause of language loss in today's younger generations (Cree School Board 2010; MS1). In 2002, The Eeyou signed a renewed land claim agreement with Quebec, called the *New Relationship Agreement*. This agreement, allowed the damming of the Eastmain and Rupert Rivers, and enforced sections of JBNQA that had previously been unenforced, including restrictions on forestry in southern Eeyou Istchee and increased Eeyou economic benefits to come from industrial development in ischii. The agreement also positioned Eeyou tallymen as consultants and partners in the development of new Hydro-developments. Faced with encroachment, this once more demonstrates the Eeyous' ability to strategise and balance cultural values and economic development (Chaplier 2018).

Wemindji works actively to protect traditional territory and culture from resource development, for example through the creation of two protected areas that safeguard culturally important territory from an overwhelming number of mining claims in the early 2000s. However, the



community also seeks economic opportunities and has negotiated the development of a gold mine on its territory in collaboration with Goldcorp Inc. (Mulrennan et al. 2012; Lapointe and Scott In Press). Though settlement in town has drawn many people away from traditional lifestyles, into the wage-economy, relationships to ischii and the community's history remain culturally important (MS1). In 2014, 154 Wemindji Eeyouch were registered as ISP beneficiaries. The Eeyou Istchee-wide Goose- and Moose-breaks respectively allow Eeyouch to take two weeks off work and school to spend time at their family hunting camps every Spring and Fall respectively. Likewise, every July a two-week-long gathering at Paakumshumwaashtikw Island (the site of Wemindji's previous settlement) brings community members together to celebrate their history. Community organisers also offer programming aimed at strengthening and maintaining community members' cultural identities. The Culture and Wellness Department organises several annual events in ischii, including an annual youth canoe expedition down Paakumshumwaashtikw River, and a week-long snowshoe walk in February. However, not all community members participate in these excursions, which are time-consuming and may distract precious vacation time away from time spent with close family (MS1). The conversations supported by this research project revealed that many people only spend a few weeks per year on their family traplines, often during May Goose-break. Those with children may not participate at these times either, choosing to travel to other communities to visit family, shop, or participate in sporting events, or to stay in the familiar comfort of town. For community members who wish to practice and learn traditional skills but may not spend in the bush due to family, work, and school obligations, and for Elders with health or mobility constraints, Culture and Wellness Department also offers land-based programming at the in-town Culture Camp. Bi-weekly activities include traditional meals, skills-learning (ex, carving, cleaning pelts), sing-alongs, among others. CLWA is a more recent addition to this much larger project, which aims to address the phenomenon of language shift in children and youth. With a focus on syllabic literacy, CLWA aims to raise adult Wemindji Eeyouch' awareness of this problem, to help adults to improve the precision and scope of their iiyiyuuayimuwin skills, with the hope of motivating adults to actively start speaking iiyiyuuayimuwin at home with their children.

## **6.5 iiyiyuuayimuwin: Cree Language in Eeyou Istchee**

A dialect continuum of Algonquin languages, Cree stretches across much of this country and its dialects are spoken by approximately 96,500 people (Statistics Canada 2017). Taken as one, Cree is the Indigenous language with the most speakers in Canada, and one of only three





the language and culture changed during her years at residential school, and how she was able to reclaim it when she returned to her family's trapline,

It was a lot of work, it really hit me hard. Like, 'How can they live?!! I shoulda stayed in school!' [Laughing] And then I was really happy that I got to experience that and learn life skills and how to hunt, how to wear snowshoes, how to collect firewood, get water, everything. And the terminology they would use, at night they would say, 'the starry-night'. My dad asked me in Cree, he asked me waasaaskumitipiskaau, it means 'starry-night'. And when I came back [from outside], I didn't know what to say, I said 'It's dark' [Laughing]. So my uncle went out and he told me, 'Do you know what your father asked you?' and I said 'No' [Laughing]. I know he asked me about if it's dark or about the night. So he was asking if there was lots of stars, 'starry-night' it's called. 'This is how you say it' he said. So that's when I started learning like, speaking the right, using the right words, and you have to listen closely and when they call, stuff they use around camp, so, that's why ... Now-a-days people don't speak how the ancestors [spoke] ... (Linda Stewart, conversation with first author, Wemindji, Nov. 7, 2017)

Linda has since become a mother and grandmother and has watched her family's relationships to the language change over time, and following changes to CSB's CLIP program. Her story echoes across Wemindji (ibid).

CLWA began as a series of weekly evening classes focused on teaching iiyiyuuayimuwin syllabic literacy to adult community members. Classes include: Beginners Cree Literacy, Advanced Cree Literacy, Cree Literacy for Non-Cree Speakers, Gookums and Friends (for Elders) (Gookums literally means grandmothers, whereas here it refers to a group of Elders, mostly women, who participate in these activities). Classes focus on syllabic literacy, including: recognising and pronouncing the sounds of the syllabics through repetition, grammar, and reading and writing. Gookums and Friends classes focus on activities such as singing church hymns and playing syllabic BINGO. CLWA enrollment was enthusiastic at first, with over 80 inscriptions, however, after the first weeks of the program's initiation, attendance fell and has remained irregular, with small classes of between 2-5 participants. Based on participation rates and according to conversations, the most popular elements are Gookums and Friends and bi-weekly cultural activities, which bring together people of all ages to practice iiyiyuuayimuwin in a social and cultural context. Activities follow traditional seasonal cycles, including pelt stretching, carving, preparing goose, iiyiyuuayimuwin Christmas carols, traditional feasts, etc. CLWA also offers weekly online-classes to Moose Cree First Nation, western James Bay (Ontario). CLWA

has provided a starting point to building a larger grassroots movement with influence at the level of the community, Band Council, and CNG. Activities include a language symposium, seasonal Cultural Awareness Weeks, the development of technological tools, and other important efforts to mobilise and raise awareness. The following section provides an overview of mobilisation efforts. In the following sections we detail both the collective and individual impacts that the CLWA has had on the community and the participants. As we have briefly mentioned, in the case of Wemindji, language reclamation was possible only by mobilizing awareness more broadly in the community through collective cultural events and activities that ultimately supported continued engagement of participants in their own individual learning process.

### **6.5.2 Community mobilisation**

In August, 2018, CLWA was invited by Wemindji's Band Council to present at the community's Annual General Assembly. Theresa presented CLWA's work, and Chloe presented on the importance of ancestral language to community and individual wellbeing. Our presentation prompted lively discussion among the approximately 300 community members in attendance. The discussion culminated with a Band Council motion making *iiyiyuuayimuwin* the language of business for all entities of the Nation (ex, Wemindji Health Centre, Daycares, Youth Centre, Community Hall, among others), and requiring *iiyiyuuayimuwin* instruction in all organisations working with young people. This has not yet resulted in a tangible increase in language use, however, Theresa (second author) has felt empowered by this support to engage more directly with community members and to ask representatives of entities to get involved in building a movement. Following this success, we developed a survey to gather information about community members' language use (adult, youth, and children), in order to help raise awareness about language shift. Organisers hope to repeat the process in five years.

In September 2018, CLWA hosted a local language symposium. The event brought together representatives of local entities with community members to learn about language loss and to identify ways to work together as a community to maintain and revive what has already been lost. Activities included presentations on LR and survey results; a panel discussion with local language teachers and consultants; video conferences with Moose Factory Chief Allan Jolly on that community's experiences of language shift, and Dorothy Stewart, Language Coordinator (CNG); and a brainstorming session. Following the symposium, Theresa (second author) utilised the support of the Band Council resolution and involvement of entities to create a Steering Committee on Language and Culture, involving 15 representatives from different

entities. This committee plans to organise activities in each of their organisations for four seasonal Awareness Weeks. We have identified this as another way to preserve the language and culture, because everything in Eeyou culture signifies ischii and seasons. Everything is different in each season, including how Eeyouch hunt, and activities carried out in the bush. The goal of Awareness Weeks is to engage community members in Eeyou cultural practices and bring the community together for fun social activities in a Eeyou cultural context. During the 2018 fall Awareness Week, Theresa (second author) asked each entity to plan one activity. For example: one of the daycares held coffee breaks to demonstrate how they teach children language and culture; the Youth Council organised a scavenger hunt for cultural objects, where participants won bonus points for dressing in traditional Eeyou-style; the Health Centre taught mothers how to make traditional bunting bags; and the Community Hall held workshops on tool making, skinning moose, a traditional feast, a iiyiyuuayimuwin comedy night, and a walk under the banner <ᑦ ᐃᐱᐱᐅᑦᐅᐅᐱᐱᑦᐃᑦ (Speak to Us in Cree).

### **6.5.3 Technological applications**

Among the most striking successes of the program are the links that have materialised between Wemindji and others across Eeyou Istchee (Field notes, Aug. 2018). In January 2018, Theresa (second author) began a Facebook page to facilitate communication with CLWA participants, which gained over 3,000 followers ‘overnight’ and helped CLWA gain visibility across Eeyou Istchee, as well as Moose Factory. People from across the territory post questions about literacy and vocabulary, videos of language activities, quizzes, news about language reclamation and loss, class schedules, and videos of Elders singing/talking in iiyiyuuayimuwin (ibid). CLWA organisers are also using technology to make learning iiyiyuuayimuwin accessible, including: releasing an app for handheld devices to help users learn and practice syllabics with a game, and iiyiyuuayimuwin programming on Wemindji’s local radio station, including a word-a-day games, and traditional Eeyou bedtimes stories (Field notes, Nov. 2018). Since October 2018, CLWA has also used technology to assert LR across James Bay, in Moose Factory, with weekly online classes focusing on syllabics literacy and pronunciation.

### **6.5.4 Impacts of the program on participants**

In its second year, CLWA has created waves within Wemindji and across Eeyou Istchee. The program is raising awareness, instilling pride in Wemindji, mobilising adult learners, and building relationships. Katherine Scott, Wemindji Cultural Heritage Coordinator and CLWA Non-Cree Speakers class participant, explained that, thus far, the program’s most important impact within









CLWA is also having positive impacts on participants' relationships and helping to build bonds: family, community, and ancestors. Flossie Georgekish is using what she has learned to help her grandchildren with their homework. Likewise, Linda Stewart speaks more Eeyou at home and on the land and has observed her family members doing the same in response to her efforts. Richard Visitor has used CLWA cultural activities as opportunities to connect and learn from Elders,

One of the things I like doing ... say we were at the Christmas caroling night, one of the things I find helpful to, is helping the Elders that were there. Just getting them tea and me trying to communicate with them. Asking them in Cree if they want tea and trying to understand them. The Elders are a key for me.

Cultural Heritage Coordinator and Non-Cree Speakers Class participant Katherine Scott claimed to have experienced enhanced relationships within the community since she started taking classes and learning the proper pronunciations and participating in program activities. For others, CLWA is a way of honouring their parents, now passed.

Participants also highlighted mutually reinforcing relationship between CLWA and personal religious practice. Participants are able to read the Bible in iiyiyuuayimuwin more easily and Christmas carol and hymnal sing-alongs are the most popular CLWA activities. This is particularly so for the Elders who participate in Gookums and Friends classes (above). One Moose factory participant explained how learning syllabics and practicing the language (a rare occurrence in that community), connects her to her Christian spirituality,

P2< <A2^m P2< s2t A"rA22^x s^m^l^ .q^m b <2z^e Dc-A^f .<^t s^r r^ydnL^b, C^< .<^i^<^e f^"r s^r^"J^a^e <^e r^y^x X <^i^ Δn^m^C^x <^m^ll^ L^b <^n^o^ Γ^m^Δ^m^ s^nc^r^"C^e <^i^ <^r^Γ^"C^e p^z^ b^x b^r <^r^Γ^"C^z^e s^p^J^r^s^"Δ^p^e C^< f^"r s^r^"J^c^r^e, <^i^d <^m^ll^ z^m^ s^r^"J^c^r^e^x C^< s^"C^ f^"r Δ^"J^C^e i^r <^r^Γ^"C^z^e <^e Δ^r^t^o^ s^p^J^r^s^"Δ^p^e, <^i^d <^s^z^r^o^ b .<^i^r^s^l^ s^p^J^Δ^e^ll^ <^i^Δ^d^t^o^ll^ b r^"r^"P^L^e^ll^ Δ^m^d^o^b b r^"r^ <^r^Γ^"C^z^e^ll^x

My iiyiyuuayimuwin literacy is also improving ... In the beginning, I could not even read the name Jesus Christ [represented as X in iiyiyuuayimuwin syllabics]. But today, I think that I have really improved and learned how to properly read in iiyiyuuayimuwin syllabics. When I used to read the iiyiyuuayimuwin hymn book, I could not understand at all what I was reading, but today I can say that I am able to read and understand it. (Elder Rita Shashaweskum, conversation with authors, Wemindji, Dec. 6, 2018)

### 6.5.5 Challenges encountered

Despite CLWA's accomplishments, the literacy program faces challenges commonly associated with grassroots LR, as well as challenges posed by educational institutions. Programming challenges include irregular participation in class-based programming; a lack of trained language teachers, and insufficient funding to hire staff to plan activities outside of the classroom.

Many community members stated that they would like to participate in activities but are often too fatigued after work, and their evenings are occupied by family. Others mentioned that cultural activities that are planned during organisers' workdays Monday-Friday, and are inaccessible to those who work or attend school. Organisers responded that scheduling is challenging because programming is in competition with popular activities such as weekly BINGO, weekend sporting events, and ongoing travel to other communities. Participants suggested having cultural activities on evenings and weekends, and a summer language and survival camp for young people. One participant suggested that a collaboration with the local church could supplement learning for community members who cannot attend classes.

Organisers' ultimate goal is to offer land-based LR programming, however financial and human resources are unavailable for such an elaborate undertaking and therefore programming has been limited to class-based learning and bi-weekly cultural activities at the in-town cultural camp. Several suggested that more people might attend conversational and land-based courses. Sammy Blackned suggested storytelling nights at culture camp to impart and retain traditional teachings through cultural practice. Several participants suggested the Band Council create camp settings in the bush and on the coast for use by community members without access to traplines, and for those who wish to learn traditional ways. While one such camp exists outside the community, it is the property of CSB and previous negotiations around its use fell through. According to participants, camps would ideally be open to individuals, families, and school classes, and would focus on training people in traditional skills and the language. Sammy Blackned, Director of Sports and Leisure for Wemindji's Band Council, suggests incorporating technology, such as apps to identify features of the landscape and their meaning, and even offering grants to youth to work as research assistants in collecting that information and developing the technology.

In addition, many adult community members feel discouraged to participate in CLWA because of its focus on the syllabary system. The complexity of the syllabics, which to master require a



That is what the older people need to do, they should teach others about what they learned and observed in the past. I personally didn't really see the old ways of the distant past. And the Elder ones that are still alive, those should be the ones to teach that knowledge. (Elder Molly Natawapineskum, conversation with authors, Wemindji, Dec. 6, 2018)

On a more systemic level, Jeremiah Mishtaachiishikw suggested inverting the influence of adult decision-making around younger generations' language shift by integrating community programming with school curriculum, which could be undertaken at the community level. He envisions harmonizing activities at Cultural Camp and Community Hall with the themes being covered in Cree Language and Culture classes at various grades in the schools. Sammy Blackned also suggested reducing the work week to four days, in order to accommodate community members need for cultural practice and the distances travelled to spend time on family traplines. Non-Eeyouch living and working in the region should be required to learn the language in order to maintain employment.

## **6.6 Discussion**

CLWA is creating waves across Wemindji and Eeyou Istchee. In this article we have explored the benefits that a project of LR can have on a community's and individual wellbeing. Through a lens of language reclamation we are able to valorise the personal benefits of cultural connection without imposing quantitative linguistic measures of success or failure, rather, valorising the wellbeing that LR in Wemindji is conveying on organisers and participants alike. This study and LR program are also unique because they focus on adults who are either survivors or direct descendants of survivors of the residential school system, whereas LR initiatives and associated literature frequently focuses on children.

Much of the literature on LR illustrates the great lengths that a few dedicated people must often make to start and maintain a movement to maintain their community's language (Hinton 2001, 2018). These small language communities frequently have few resources at their disposal beyond creativity and personal motivation. While literature exists offering suggestions for "Steps toward Language Revitalisation" (Fishman 1991), these require that a critical mass be put in motion, directions for which are rare, as the necessary steps depend on community dynamics, nevertheless, we have attempted to contribute to this is gap in the literature that. It is coming to be recognised that centering LR programming on community-defined goals can help enhance

benefits to community (Hinton ed.2018; Hinton, Huss, and Roche eds. 2018; McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White 2018; Romero 2006). In Wemindji, a few organisers have undertaken immense practical and emotional endeavors to save their language and compensate for the shortcomings of institutional education. Their ongoing work to pique interest and mobilise the community into collective action toward language reclamation has been an incredible process almost entirely on organisers' first-hand experiences of language reclamation and healing, and their intimate knowledge of their community's dynamics. Organisers planned meetings and activities, like the language symposium and Awareness Weeks to sensitise the community to the risks of language shift and sought community members input for LR strategies, as well as, with the ultimate goal of increasing the use of iiyiyuuayimuwin at home.

A significant body of literature exists outlining the potential benefits of language reclamation for Indigenous communities' identity and wellbeing (Brokenleg 2012; Brown et al 2012; Fitzgerald 2017; McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White 2018; Mclvor, Napoleon, and Dickie 2009; Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan, and Toth 2014; Stiles 1997; Walsh 2018). Whalen, Moss, and Baldwin's (2016) and Jenni, Anisman, Mclvor, and Jacobs' (2017) reviews highlight the critical place that Indigenous languages hold for healing, as an indicator of cultural identity, and sense of belonging to community. Archibald and Dewar (2010) suggest that cultural reclamation can help participants heal by gently allowing them to reconnect with culture, build relationships, and explore experiences in an environment of trust. Elder participants and organisers observed that some Elders who consult on programming initiatives appear to have a renewed sense of purpose since the language began to be taught in CLWA. Participants articulated that CLWA is enhancing their sense of Eeyou identity, and the personal value of their experiences that occur in Eeyou contexts, such as interpersonal dialogues, family and community activities, reading (Bible, books), and writing (letters, private journals), and honour ancestors. Participants and organisers expressed a sense of joy, pride, and empowerment in practicing and transmitting iiyiyuuayimuwin through their relationships with families and peers. Likewise many articulated hopefulness for their culture's and communities' future, which they cultivate through participation in the CLWA, a perspective also shared by participants that do not participate in the CLWA. Some participants are transmitting their growing confidence and language skills to family members and encouraging more language use at home and in interactions with Elders. Some of those who practice Christianity have experienced enhanced religious practice, thanks to increased syllabic literacy, which is traditionally used for religious purposes.

Naomi Adelson's (2000) work on Eeyou understandings of miyupimaatisiun (being alive well) articulates wellbeing in the Eeyou sense as maintaining land-based interconnections between identity, community, culture values and practices. According to Hinton (2001), and McIvor, Napoleon, and Dickie (2009), contextualised language learning through cultural activities in particular have the impact of building connections. Participants in Wemindji reported to us that cultural activities and Elders' classes which are tied to the cultural (religious) element of song respond to a more holistic metric and had the greatest impacts on elements of wellbeing. Activities at culture camp and during Awareness Week are favourites of participants and were identified as the most effective learning strategies for language. These help community members connect with other elements of the culture as well through the "Cree way" of learning, as described by Bommelyn and Tuttle (2018) and Ohmagari and Berkes (1997). They draw more participants than formal classes do, and gatherings have been successful in igniting passionate discussion about language shift between community members. Intergenerational settings provide opportunities for community members to learn from Elders, and may enhance Elders' sense of value to their community. Cultural activities bring families and friends together, and can integrate the younger age groups, which are at the locus of language loss. Both through the survey that we conducted, the Language Symposium, and conversations that we had with participants, many community members have expressed a desire for land-based programming, however, resources and time are limited and participants' connections to the natural world and land-based tradition have not been impacted much by CLWA. This is an area with room for improvement with potential for conveying resilience and healing.

According to the literature, a departure from Western linguistic pedagogy to a contextualised practice that is informed by culture and relationships, and oriented to community members' contextualised goals may deepen the beneficial impacts of language reclamation initiatives (Fitzgerald 2017; McCarty et al 2006). While the program is indeed helping to improve the literacy skills of its participants, at this early time, this impact is only notably felt by a few. Those who dedicate substantial personal time and effort to studying the syllabic system and practicing phonetics, writing, and reading at home are having the most success at improving their literacy and the precision of their speech. Several factors explain lower levels of participation in classes, which focus specifically on syllabic literacy, such as skill requirements, and associations with missionaries and Western-style learning. The program, its participants, and in particular, *potential participants* might benefit by refocusing somewhat toward a more holistic approach, informed by Indigenous pedagogies and Eeyou understandings of miyupimaatisiun. It may be

worthwhile to refocus the program toward this more holistic approach, informed by Indigenous pedagogies and *miyupimaatisiun*. If CLWA is to meet its objective of offering benefits to as many community members as possible, then the program may benefit by reorienting its focus to activities that best fulfill these objectives by taking into account the daily realities of- and goals articulated by community members (MS1).

## **6.7 Conclusion**

The immense efforts of CLWA organisers to mobilise and inform Wemindji community members about the risks that language shift may hold for their community are having impressive impacts early in the development of the program. While substantial work remains to bring momentum to Eeyou language reclamation, signs are promising. The program has initiated an important discussion and raised awareness and pride across Wemindji and Eeyou Istchee. Some very dedicated participants have improved their syllabic literacy skills, however, as Fitzgerald (2017) points out, the impacts of language reclamation are much vaster than quantitative metrics. CLWA classes and activities are having many positive impacts on the wellbeing of community members and their relations to their families, language, and culture, and are bringing participants a sense of pride, hope, and connection to one another and to cultural identity. In order to build on these benefits and address organisational challenges, increased focus of learning language through a framework of *miyupimaatisiun* focused on connecting *iyyiyuuayimuwin*, knowledge, values, and cultural practices, may bring more benefits to a larger number community members. This would also valorise the input that community members have given in the contexts of the local Language Symposium and survey, on their aspirations to learn the language of land and culture (McCarty, Nicholas, Chew, Diaz, Leonard, White 2018; Romero 2006). Language learning that is contextualised to impart these attributes may help the program to orient toward its greatest benefit and potential – the ability to convey wellbeing and cultural learning (McCarty et al 2006; Hinton 2001; Fishman 1990). Organisers may best respond to community members' goals of learning about land-based culture in a fun social setting, while addressing some of the challenges that they have encountered thus far, and building on their program's existing contribution to Wemindji Eeyouch language reclamation and wellbeing.







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## **ANNEXE I: Guiding Questions**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Can you tell me about your participation in CLWA?
  - a. What activities have you participated in?
  - b. What are the impacts of those classes/activities on you? On the community?
3. What does CLWA mean to you?
4. What do you think the CLWA program means to the community?

### **Language**

5. It seems like you have an interesting relationship with iiyiyuuayimuwin. Can you tell me about that?
  - a. How would you say your relationship to the language has changed over time?
6. What would you say is the state of iiyiyuuayimuwin in Wemindji?
7. What are the factors affecting the language?
  - a. What can be done about it?
  - b. How is the literacy program affecting those factors?

### **Land**

8. What do you think is the connection between language and land?
9. Wemindji has been quite active in creating land-based cultural programming, what is the overall meaning of these initiatives for the community?
  - a. What was their impact?
10. What is the role of CLWA in this larger project?