

Constructing the Settler Sovereign & the Mechanics of Power Distribution:
Hydroelectricity and Biopolitics in James Bay and Northern Québec, 1970s-1990s

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis discusses the relationship between hydroelectric development in Northern Québec and the institutionalization of health in Cree and Inuit communities of Eeyou Istchee (James Bay) from the 1970s to the 1990s. It explores the deployment of nutritional science by the Québec Ministry of Health as a response to health issues exacerbated by the flooding of large areas of ancestral hunting and fishing territories and the resulting relocation of Indigenous communities. With particular attention to the roles of distinctly Franco-Québécois notions of sovereignty, gender, race, and anthropocentrism, this research seeks to assess political discourses about energy and health over the course of the second wave of hydroelectric nationalisation in the province. I begin by examining two court cases leading to the adoption of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* in 1975 – namely the Malouf decision and its appeal – to uncover the ideological underpinnings of the territorial negotiations between the Cree and Inuit and the Québec government. I then turn to the ways in which the Québec Ministry of Health targeted Indigenous mothers in the region through mechanisms of biopolitics in responding to health issues exacerbated by the destruction of Cree and Inuit foodways. In sum, this thesis problematizes the idea of hydroelectricity as a “green” energy in the Québec context by examining the impact of environmental destruction resulting from the building of dams in James Bay on the livelihood of directly affected Indigenous communities. It further highlights the persistence and creativity of the Eeyou Cree and Inuit in resisting encroachment on their lands and waters.

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Introduction

The year 1980 in Québec was marked by political tension surrounding the first referendum on the secession of the province, led by René Lévesque's Parti Québécois. As the provincial government sought to attain political independence, the Quebec Native Women association issued a report to the federal government denouncing the Québec healthcare system's mistreatment of Indigenous women. The incriminating report contained evidence of—among other forms of violence—child removal and forced sterilizations.¹ The connection between these seemingly unrelated events can be understood by taking a closer look at the historical context preceding this foundational year.

In 1971, premier Robert Bourassa announced the construction of a six-billion-dollar state-owned complex of hydroelectric dams on the La Grande River in the remote James Bay and Northern Québec region. In doing so, he promised to salvage the province's economy from the hands of Anglophone investors and harness the province's hydraulic resources to ensure prosperity for the French-speaking majority.² The project was part of a larger history of nationalization of hydroelectricity in the province dating back to the creation of Hydro-Québec in 1944 under the liberal government of Adélard Godbout.³ Nearly two decades later, in the early 1960s, Jean Lesage's Liberal government undertook the second phase of nationalization of hydroelectricity in the province, throughout which experts were sent to the non-industrialized north of Québec to assess its hydroelectric potential as part of the newly created Commission Hydroélectrique de Québec. The Premier promoted this endeavour as the “clé du royaume,” and claimed it would allow for the economic liberation of Québec.⁴

¹ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire présenté le 20 août 1980 au Ministère de la Santé et du Bien-Être Canada par l'association des Femmes Autochtones du Québec* (Montreal: Québec Native Women, 1980), 7.

² Stéphane Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois, 1944-2005*, (Québec: Septentrion, 2016), 195.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 (My translation from the French: “key to the kingdom”).

Another decade later, Bourassa's plan to develop a large network of dams on the rivers of James Bay was articulated in a highly gendered language of nation-building based on scientific and technological progress, virile control, and domination of nature.⁵ It was also framed in the language of justice and liberation, both from Anglo-hegemony and from the time-consuming household chores that electronic appliances promised to alleviate.⁶ The dams, however, caused the flooding of 12,000 km² of land on which Cree and Inuit communities had been living for millennia with limited interaction with settler society until then.⁷ These communities relied on hunting and fishing for survival, and their cultures and ways of life were intrinsically tied to the land- and waterscapes of the region.⁸ Yet, the construction of the La Grande complex was undertaken without consulting them.⁹ The resulting destruction of Indigenous foodways and the forced relocation of nomadic communities to a small portion of land delimited by the settler state had a profound impact on their ability to maintain their lifestyle and access their intricate networks of trapping lines and fishing sites for survival. Despite community leaders' pleas to the government to halt the construction, the project carried on, forcing them to change their strategy and learn the language of settler law to defend their land. A lengthy legal struggle ensued, throughout which the project carried on and forests continued to be cut down to build roads and transform the landscape into a massive hydroelectric complex. In November 1973, Québec Superior Court judge Albert Malouf ruled in favor of the Cree and Inuit, ordering the project's interruption until rights to the

⁵ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 86.

⁶ Dominique Perron, *Le nouveau roman de l'énergie nationale: Analyse des discours promotionnels d'Hydro-Québec de 1964 à 1997*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 226.

⁷ Mishuana R. Goeman, "Ongoing Storms and Struggles: Gendered Violence and Resource Exploitation," in *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*, ed. Joanne Barker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 105.

⁸ Stanley Warner, "The Cree People of James Bay: Assessing the Social Impact of Hydroelectric Dams and Reservoirs," in *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project*, ed. James F. Hornig (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 95.

⁹ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 353.

land were determined by a higher court. The government, however, appealed this decision the next day, and the Malouf judgement was suspended, allowing the construction to carry on after a mere seven-day interruption.

In 1974, Justice Jean Turgeon of the Québec Court of Appeals overturned the Superior Court judgement and ruled in favor of the project's continuation, thereby denying Indigenous rights to the land.¹⁰ The court allowed for the project to carry on under certain conditions. The government was compelled to conduct environmental assessments to ensure the minimization of wildlife destruction, as well as surveys to measure the impact of the project on the health of nearby communities. An agreement had to be reached with the Cree and Inuit to limit the dam's negative effects, culminating in the signature of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA)* in November 1975.¹¹ The Québec government was also forced to pay a 225 million dollar compensation to these communities for their loss over the course of twenty years, and provide the financial resources to build the necessary infrastructure for the new settlements. This aid, however, proved slow to come, as the government hastily signed the agreement, made a first payment, and continued working on the dams while postponing the fulfillment of its responsibilities towards the Cree and Inuit. The lack of resources facing relocated communities along with the contamination of land and water caused by the dams resulted in the rise of important health issues among the affected population. Cree and Inuit leaders had to continue navigating the settler state's complex bureaucratic apparatus and harness international support for their cause to finally force the government to honour their part of the agreement. As the Québec state reluctantly proceeded to

¹⁰ Société de développement de la Baie James c. Kanatewat, SOQUIJ AZ-75011045 (Q.C.A., 1974).

¹¹ Province of Québec, *The James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement: Agreement between the Government of Québec, the Société D'énergie De La Baie James, the Société De Développement De La Baie James, the Commission Hydroélectrique De Québec (Hydro-Québec) and the Grand Council of the Crees (of Québec), the Northern Québec Inuit Association and the Government of Canada* (Québec: Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1976).

provide minimal aid to the communities in response to the public outrage their protests garnered, poorly-funded medical institutions based on settler models of healthcare were created across the region.¹²

These establishments, as demonstrated in the report published by Quebec Native Women nearly a decade after the La Grande project was initiated, became sites through which the Québec government deployed western science as a tool of assimilation. The communities' health issues were blamed on their inability to adapt to modernity, and educational devices were designed by settler doctors and healthcare specialists to teach the Indigenous population how to care for their health and nutrition according to modern standards.¹³ These solutions to health issues caused by resource development were rooted in settler ideals of the heteropatriarchal nuclear household and the cult of domesticity. They therefore targeted Indigenous women and mothers more specifically as the primary caretakers of their communities and families. Instead of addressing the water contamination and lack of resources affecting Cree and Inuit communities' ability to adapt to their new conditions, the government blamed nutritional deficiencies and viral epidemics on Indigenous mothers' lack of cooking and cleaning skills.¹⁴ This strategy allowed the government to pursue its development agenda on Indigenous land while maintaining a benevolent public image. In addition, the creation of medical establishments in the region allowed the Québec state to gain greater power over the Indigenous population by attempting to control Indigenous women's reproductive and maternity practices. The language barrier, racial and gender prejudice, and the lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of settler personnel greatly contributed to the mistreatment of Indigenous

¹² Cree Nation Government, "Delivering the Promise," Vimeo, May 3, 2012, video, 1:24:46, <https://vimeo.com/41494497>.

¹³ Atkinson, Helen B., and Gordon Magonet, ed., *L'expérience de la Baie James: Guide pour les professionnels de la santé qui travaillent parmi les Cris du Nord québécois* (Québec, QC: Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux du Gouvernement du Québec, 1990).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

women within medical institutions. The widespread perception among settlers was that Indigenous women were ill-equipped to properly care for their own children, or even for themselves. This, along with the lack of adequate resources and medical equipment, caused some doctors and nurses to provide inadequate treatment without any explanation or proper diagnosis.¹⁵ In some cases, children were taken away from their mothers, and in others, women were sterilized without consent to prevent them from having any more children.¹⁶ The settler personnel's treatment of these women was, more often than not, informed by popular perceptions of Indigenous mothers exacerbated by the government's rhetoric about Indigenous communities being unable to adapt to the inevitable advent of modernity.

The Québec state's encroachment on Cree and Inuit territory marks the continuation of the well-documented colonial doctrine of *terra nullius* on colonized lands, which rests upon particularly anthropocentric notions of time and space in which nature is perceived as a wild, chaotic female force in need of being tamed by the superior strength of a masculine modern order.¹⁷ Such disruption of Indigenous ways of life as a direct repercussion of the destruction of nonhuman life forms is thus located in a doctrine of settler heteropatriarchy and its anthropocentric articulation of white male supremacy. The distribution of power derived from this epistemological formation as expressed through the case of hydroelectric development in the James Bay region is intimately related to the perpetuation of gendered violence, within and beyond the human realm. Environmental destruction caused by settler colonial resource development projects is dependent upon the perpetuation of violence against Indigenous women and girls and, as the following chapters demonstrate, against mothers in particular.

¹⁵ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ Goeman, "Ongoing Storms and Struggles," 113.

In this thesis, I will examine the deployment and institutionalization of western knowledge through the Québec healthcare and legal systems at the intersection of gender, race, sexuality, and species in James Bay and Northern Québec from the 1970s to the 1990s. In an effort to uncover structural forms of settler colonial assaults on Indigenous and nonhuman life, I will address the following question: How did the deployment and institutionalization of gendered and racialized notions of human and nonhuman life and health underlying the project of Franco-Québécois settler sovereignty manifest itself in the context of hydroelectric development in James Bay and Northern Québec from the 1970s to the 1990s? Tying this specific case study to larger debates within the fields of environmental history and decolonial gender, sexuality, and feminist theory, this thesis engages with current inquiries into history's role in rethinking humanity's place within the world. Thinking through issues of spatiality and temporality, I will draw on a variety of historians' and activists' work to explore the formation and deployment of white heteropatriarchal notions of settler colonial sovereignty.

Hydroelectricity has been central to the Québec government's modern nation-building project, beginning in 1944 with the creation of the state-owned Hydro-Québec, and then in the 1960s with the second wave of nationalization. Although a wide body of research on the topic already exists, a major piece of the puzzle is still missing. Despite their important role in their communities, Indigenous women's experiences are largely absent from the existing literature on the James Bay and Northern Québec hydroelectric project and its aftermath. Most authors writing about it have paid little to no attention to gender in their analyses, and when they have, it has been to discuss white women's experiences. Historian Dominique Perron's 2006 monograph, for instance, discusses the gender dimension of Hydro-Québec's advertising campaigns from 1964 to 1997, but focuses on the ways in which these campaigns portrayed ideals of the modern Québécois

woman, an ideal from which Indigenous women were excluded.¹⁸ Although the author briefly acknowledges the relationship between these campaigns and the state's relationship to Indigenous peoples, her analysis remains centered on Indigenous men, or on Indigenous people as a monolith, thereby obscuring the intricacies of lived experiences and relations among First Peoples in the province.¹⁹ Stéphane Savard's 2013 political history of the discourses of great men in relation to hydroelectric development since 1994 makes no mention of gender theories whatsoever, while at the same time presenting stark evidence of the deeply gendered underpinnings of Franco-Québécois portrayals of nature.²⁰ His study analyzes male discourse, but ignores the long-standing debate on male-dominated historical narratives. Although he presents a well-documented analysis of the political discourse surrounding hydroelectricity and nation-building in Québec, Savard could have made a more substantial contribution to major debates on the unequal nature of the mechanics of power-distribution, not only in this particular historical context, but within academic writing itself. His analysis also remains uncritically steeped in a western, heteropatriarchal, and technocratic episteme that espouses a temporality grounded in linearity and progress.

Bolduc, Hogue, and Larouche, who wrote an "official" history of Hydro-Québec in 1989 while affiliated with the company, portray Indigenous peoples as one of many obstacles to development that needed to be overcome by settler politicians and engineers, focusing their analysis, once again, on the experiences of white men.²¹ Jean-Louis Fleury's 2004 *Les Porteurs de Lumière* about Québec's electrification completely erases Indigenous Peoples from that history. His work discusses the white men at the lower ranks of the workforce who undertook the dangerous

¹⁸ Perron, *Le nouveau roman de l'énergie nationale*, 220.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁰ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 86.

²¹ André Bolduc, Clarence Hogue, and Daniel Larouche, *Hydro-Québec: L'héritage d'un siècle d'électricité* (Montréal: Éditions Libre Expression, 1989), 274-76.

labour that ensured the distribution of electrical power across the province.²² The collection of essays edited by James F. Hornig entitled *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project* uses a Western scientific lens to explore the damages on wildlife and Indigenous cultural and subsistence practices. The authors espouse a technocratic approach, presenting their findings as objective, scientific truth; yet, it is a truth devoid of nuance and ostensibly unadulterated by politics.²³ As with David Massell's monograph on Québec hydropolitics and the exploitation of the Peribonka River during the Second World War,²⁴ Hornig's collection of essays suggests that despite the massive negative repercussions hydroelectric development had on Indigenous land and ways of life, the state's subsequent intervention and monetary compensation were nonetheless beneficial to Indigenous communities.²⁵ This viewpoint is characteristic of a whiggish historical framework promoting the dream of modernity. In light of these shortcomings in the literature on the James Bay and Northern Québec hydroelectric project, I propose using this case study to answer larger questions about the place of historical narratives in reconceptualizing the place of humanity on earth. Such a project requires a deeper engagement with the scholarly debates in both environmental history and decolonial gender, sexuality and feminist theories in an attempt to rethink the role of historical narratives in facing the current environmental and social crises.

The omission of Indigenous women from historical narratives is symptomatic of the reproduction of settler colonial spatiality. Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman suggests that the settler colonial

²² Jean-Louis Fleury, *Les porteurs de lumière: L'Histoire de la distribution de l'électricité au Québec* (Québec: Éditions Multimonde, 2004).

²³ James F. Hornig, editor, *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project*, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), xi.

²⁴ David Massell, *Quebec Hydropolitics: The Peribonka Concessions of the Second World War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

²⁵ Hornig, *Social and Environmental Impacts*.

order is rooted in a form of amnesia, which works to regulate Indigenous women as absent, victimized, or deteriorating, and depends on the displacement of Indigenous bodies. The reproduction of the settler imaginary thus requires a nostalgic remembering of spaces and times of immaculate, virgin land.²⁶ Goeman adds that colonizers engaged in the perpetual disciplining of native bodies, which was justified by the settler imaginary of Native savagery, first through the doctrine of civilization, and more recently through that of reformation of Indigenous peoples in order to help them share in the bounty of progress.²⁷

Circling back to Stéphane Savard's work with these ideas in mind, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois* demonstrates the Québec government's portrayal of the North as a wild and hostile place filled with riches to be conquered and brought back to civilization.²⁸ The study criticizes politicians' promotion of Franco-Québécois men's domination and enslavement of nature, and later their management and protection of it.²⁹ Savard discusses the hydroelectric company's relation to space and nature in terms of control, domestication, colonization, and subjugation.³⁰ Connecting Savard's account to Goeman's discussion of gender and sexuality thus locates Hydro-Québec's ventures in the north of the province in a larger history of settler colonial erasures of Indigenous women's bodies. The current literature's position on the James Bay and Northern Québec hydroelectric development project, therefore, needs to be re-assessed in order to consider this mechanical reproduction of settler colonial imaginaries and its gendered impact on Indigenous communities.

²⁶ Goeman, "Ongoing Storms and Struggles," 114.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁸ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

The particular case of Québec becomes all the more relevant when inquiring into the effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples and land, as the region was the scene of two waves of colonial invasion. The rivalry between English and French speakers and the French-Canadian struggle for political and economic independence from Canada's Anglophone majority greatly influenced the creation of a distinctly Francophone modern identity. This modern Franco-Québécois identity relies, to this day, on the silencing of Indigenous peoples' existence and claims to the land, most particularly in relation to the movement for Québec's sovereignty, burgeoning in the later decades of the twentieth century. The movement itself was dependent upon francophone settlers' ability to exploit the hydroelectric resources of remote areas inhabited by Indigenous communities in order to attain the economic autonomy necessary for recognition as a distinct political entity on the world stage.

By presenting hydroelectric power as a clean and renewable resource, Québec politicians sought to conceal the environmental destruction involved in the creation of such large-scale industrial development projects. This approach allowed them to continue producing cheap energy for the inhabitants of the south with minimal resistance from the population at large.³¹ Meanwhile, Indigenous villages in the affected region did not gain access to the electricity produced on their land until as late as 1987.³² The environmental damage caused by the project was eventually exposed, not only by groups of activists—affected Indigenous communities joined by scientists and environmentalists—but also by a series of environmental disasters that made the headlines and alarmed the population about the dangers and shortcomings of hydroelectric development.³³

³¹ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 220.

³² *Ibid.*, 162.

³³ *Ibid.*, 62.

Sociologist Jason W. Moore, who introduced the concept of capitalocene in order to think about the relationship between the climate crisis and humanity, discusses the idea of cheap nature, produced by a capitalist culture that thrives on the objectification of resources, exploiting and transforming them into capital to feed human over-consumption.³⁴ This perception of a nature to be conquered and dominated by the forces of human ingenuity, according to the author, represents a crucial shift in history that laid the groundwork for the current climate crisis, which affects Indigenous peoples and lands disproportionately. Hydro-Québec's attempt to ignore damages caused to Indigenous and nonhuman lives and its imposition of settler forms of governance and institutions in the north in order to provide cheap electricity to the settler population can, as the coming chapters demonstrate, be understood as the perpetuation of a larger structure of environmental racism and settler supremacy.

Although most authors discussed above consider the impacts of hydroelectric development on Indigenous communities and their reactions to it, their analyses present the Cree and Inuit as the unfortunate casualties of a powerful state that was not careful or considerate enough to ensure the protection of pristine cultures and landscapes. They suggest that these communities nonetheless received significant compensation in response, such as monetary reparations, special rights to the land, healthcare, and education. This common view disregards the violent institutionalization of Indigenous peoples by settler states, notably through healthcare and education, justified by a doctrine of paternalistic benevolence.³⁵ The existing literature thus ignores the contradictions underlying settler perceptions of welfare based on access to modern lifestyle and institutions.

³⁴ Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene Part II: Accumulation by Appropriation and the Centrality of Unpaid Work/Energy," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45, no. 2 (2016): 253.

³⁵ See Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), Kindle.; John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the*

According to several Indigenous scholars and activists, the modernity paradigm is informed by a destructive idea of progress, and, I argue, is grounded in a linear and hierarchical conception of time. Although, as argued by prominent scholar William Cronon, historians have to grapple with the problem of historicism in order to present a coherent story, it is also possible—and necessary—to harness theory and evidence in a way that does not present universal access to the modern as a desirable outcome. Modernity, as argued by Bruno Latour, is an illusory paradigm, and it is upon this very idea that the perceived human versus nature framework rests.³⁶ In that spirit, Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that the colonial experience traps Indigenous peoples into the project of modernity. According to her, it is necessary to settle “some business of the modern” in order to be able to speak of the post-colonial.³⁷ She states:

Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes.³⁸

As a non-Indigenous person, I propose to respond to these theories by assessing the materialization of the state and its representatives’ modes of thought in regards to health and the environment through resource exploitation and the institutionalization of its Indigenous population.

Another factor that has prevented the historiography from moving away from the modernity paradigm based on the commodification of land and resources is its anthropocentric

Indian Residential School System, 1879-1986 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017); Maureen K. Lux, *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada, 1920s-1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Karen Stote, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Indigenous Women* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015).

³⁶ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

³⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999): 34.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 34.

character. Global warming now forces us to acknowledge the inevitably destructive nature of the modern ideal and its cult of infinite growth on a planet with finite resources. This colonial worldview rests upon the ideological separation of humanity from nature. Exploring the modern articulation of this anthropocentric mode of thought offers a way to decentralize humanity from historical narratives informing our sense of self in relation to the rest of the world. The construction of massive hydroelectric dams in northern Québec emerged out of this ideological formation. The Québec government's discourse at the time promoted hydroelectricity as a clean, renewable source of energy despite stark evidence of the pollution and environmental destruction engendered by it. Turning a blind eye to the negative impacts of the project on local wildlife and communities, the government sought to stimulate the economy and gain power and recognition on the world stage. This story is thus part of a broader scheme of exploitation of the land for the benefit of the few. The nonhuman, however, also participated in the negotiation of power in the region. The state and its engineers found themselves challenged with unpredicted natural events that halted their march to progress. Looking at nature's pushback in response to settler destruction allows for a better understanding of the fragility of settler colonialism and its dream of modernity.

Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that in order to shift our understanding of humanity's place in the world, we need to engage in a form of species thinking. This involves thinking of humanity as occupying a very small part of the Earth's history, and as part of a larger web of species, to which humans are not superior.³⁹ Chakrabarty argues that one needs to consider processes on a much larger time-scale in order to make sense of where humanity now stands. He suggests that considering deep history is therefore necessary to the process of reimagining our frame of reference to reposition ourselves in relation to the world. Doing so, according to

³⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 1 (2014): 3-4.

Chakrabarty, requires a methodology that involves zooming in and out, or examining small-scale and large-scale processes simultaneously. This exercise allows one to connect the study of species to that of capitalism in order to rethink the place of humans on the planet. I suggest that deconstructing the intersections at which hierarchies are produced (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, species, etc.) is also crucial in allowing us to move out of anthropocentric modes of thought and thereby access alternate modes of being in relation to time and space.

In failing to acknowledge the intersectional power relations that inform processes of identity formation, we lock ourselves into a specific “time-zone” hierarchy that is out of sync with the nonhuman world. In order to overcome this distortion, I propose an approach that bridges the imaginary gap between historical materialism and so-called postmodernist thought. Scholar Gyan Prakash argues that both theoretical currents can be merged in order to engage in decolonization efforts through academic writing.⁴⁰ Following this view, this thesis is informed by more recent decolonial theory and seeks to contribute to efforts towards deconstructing white heteropatriarchal hierarchies at the intersection of race, gender, and species. It explores the material expressions of these doctrines in the context of Québec through the deployment of legal and healthcare systems in the James Bay region as a means to establish settler dominance over land and peoples.

William Cronon has argued that historical narratives hold the potential of making readers care about a specific subject. Environmental history thus faces the important task of re-inscribing meaning into environmental issues in the current context of climate change. A failure on our part to find a sense of care for nature that goes beyond the paternalistic paradigm of environmental conservation risks preventing us from feeling compelled to cease our abuse of it and, by extension,

⁴⁰ Gyan Prakash, “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride? A Reply to O’Hanlon and Washbrook,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (1992): 168.

from saving ourselves. Cronon states: “Our histories of the Great Plains environment remain fixed on people because what we most care about in nature is its meaning for human beings.”⁴¹ In engaging in this process of crafting narratives that have the power to trigger emotional responses, however, it is important to care for the kind of emotions that are transmitted. Uncovering injustices of the past that live through the present requires careful attention to the ways in which power is consistently negotiated among and between a variety of agents and forces.

In the case of resource development in James Bay, focusing solely on the state’s perpetration of violence against Indigenous women without discussing the latter’s agency in responding and adapting to this oppression would risk victimizing them and portraying the state as an all-powerful force that cannot be challenged. It is thus essential to craft narratives that avoid victimizing historical agents—human and nonhuman—in order to convey the possibility of creating alternative futures and modes of governance. This is especially the case when writing about marginalized—or subaltern—groups, human or otherwise. The long history of fetishization of Indigenous peoples, of the “other,” and of the oriental, as theorized by Edward W. Said,⁴² must be taken into consideration in order to remain sensitive to dynamics of appropriation and victimization informed by histories of racism, anthropocentrism—or speciesism—, eurocentrism, and heteropatriarchy.

Several Indigenous scholars have argued in favour of reclaiming kinship relations with other-than-humans as a way of restoring the balance between human and nonhuman beings. Melissa K. Nelson, for instance, proposes the retrieval of eco-erotic kinship relations in which nature is perceived as a lover. By creating loving relationships with more-than-humans, we can

⁴¹ William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, Histories, and Narrative,” *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992): 1369.

⁴² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1978).

potentially move away from the framework in which humans are perceived as exceptional, more intelligent than, and different from nature.⁴³ This process would allow us to create what she calls a “trans-human” form of nationhood, in which we engage in reciprocal agreements with both humans and nonhumans on an equal level.⁴⁴ Discussing Indigenous stories involving human-nonhuman erotic relations, the Chippewa author states that:

Tragically, these beautiful stories of embodied connection have been demonized and silenced by patriarchal, colonial, and Judeo-Christian ideologies, and these rich eco-erotic experiences have been suppressed and, in many cases, extinguished. The history of colonial and sexual violence against Native peoples and the imperial imperative of severing First Peoples’ relations with land have had severe intergenerational consequences for the health of Native peoples and for the ‘well-being of the world.’ It could also be said that this profound historical disruption of human-environment relations has led to the ecological and social crises we face today.⁴⁵

In considering Nelson’s approach, how can non-Indigenous scholars rethink the place of humans within the world while remaining sensitive to dynamics of appropriating, essentializing, and romanticizing Indigenous stories, customs, and cultures of trans-human connection? The author argues that efforts towards decolonization are dependent upon our ability to examine the ways in which patriarchy, heteronormativity, shame, and guilt are reproduced.⁴⁶

In the same vein, Lenape scholar Joanne Barker argues that in order to avoid fetishizing Indigenous gender and sexualities, scholars need to “defamiliarize gender, sexuality, and feminist studies to unpack the constructedness of gender and sexuality and problematize feminist theory and method within Indigenous contexts.”⁴⁷ Prominent Athabasca scholar Dian Million also states

⁴³ Melissa K. Nelson, “Getting Dirty: The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral Literatures,” in *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*, ed. Joanne Barker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 255.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 232-33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁴⁷ Joanne Barker, introduction to *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*, ed. Joanne Barker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 14.

that “To ‘decolonize’ is to understand as fully as possible the forms colonialism takes in our own times.”⁴⁸ Settler colonialism, as theorized by historian Patrick Wolfe, is a structure rather than an event. Institutionalized assaults on the lives of Indigenous women are part of what the author calls a logic of elimination, upon which settler colonial societies are built and through which they reproduce themselves.⁴⁹ In order to participate more substantially in decolonization efforts, Mishuana R. Goeman thus calls for settler colonial scholars to examine settler states’ embodied practices, moving beyond the criticism of the state’s representation of Indigenous peoples as absent.⁵⁰

In this thesis, I seek to contribute to such efforts by drawing important links between the destruction of Indigenous foodways engendered by the state’s hydroelectric project and institutionalized assaults on Indigenous motherhood by the Québec healthcare system. Connecting this local history to the global phenomena of institutionalization of motherhood, state-imposed heteropatriarchal legislation, and land dispossession for the purpose of resource extraction, I will offer an analysis of the ways in which environmental destruction and violence against Indigenous women are intrinsically connected through structures of elimination upon which the Franco-Québécois identity was formed and reproduced.

In order to unpack the ways in which the settler biopolitics of gender and sexuality operate to sever kinship ties between Indigenous women and their communities—human and other-than-human—Ann Laura Stoler’s critique of Michel Foucault provides useful insight. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault introduces the idea of bio-power as the modern phenomenon through

⁴⁸ Dian Million, “Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 72.

⁴⁹ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, (London: Cassel, 1999), 163.

⁵⁰ Goeman, “Ongoing Storms and Struggles,” 102.

which the regulation of population became instrumentalized through schools, hospitals, prisons, and other state-controlled institutions as a way to generate capital.⁵¹ Stoler argues that articulating a critique of imperial systems of control requires the recognition of their fragility.⁵² My aim here is thus to uncover the contradictions and the porous nature of the settler state's discourse on hydroelectricity and its attempts at silencing, controlling, and erasing Indigenous communities through the institutionalization of healthcare in the region. By examining the relationship between Indigenous women's experiences of the Québec state's attempts at severing their kinship ties to land and water through institutionalized mechanisms of biopolitics, this thesis moves away from linear narratives that portray increased access to modern institutions and commodities through rights advocacy as a viable solution to the world's imbalance. Such narratives shun the correlation between ideals of the modern, environmental demise, and social inequality.

The Québec government's perception of space and time as expressed through the Hydro-Québec intrusion into James Bay and Northern Québec and its impact on Indigenous women's health helps to uncover the relationship between a white heteropatriarchal doctrine of progress and infinite growth, environmental destruction, and structural violence against gendered, sexualized, and racialized Indigenous bodies. I suggest that a reconceptualization of sexuality and gender-dynamics is necessary in order to come to a new understanding of humans' place within nature. The case of hydro- and bio-power in James Bay and Northern Québec exemplifies the correlation between the politics of gender and our relationship to the natural world. The following chapters explore the deployment of racialized heteropatriarchy in relation to the peculiarity of Québec as a

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 140-41.

⁵² Ann Laura Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves," in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995), 97.

site of contestation between two settler identities, which, I argue, contributes to the exacerbation of the control, silencing, and perpetration of violence against Indigenous women.

Hydro-Québec emerged out of Québec's nation-building project and the rivalry between French- and English-speaking settlers. This conflict manifested itself as a contest for control of the land and its resources as a way to gain economic power. It is therefore located in a politics of property and ownership, which lay at the root of the settler colonial imposition of heteropatriarchy. By exploring the deployment of a gendered and racialized conception of Franco-Québécois sovereignty through the James Bay and Northern Québec project at the height of the debate around the secession of Québec, this thesis uncovers important ways in which the conflict between Anglophone and Francophone settlers worked to perpetrate violence against Indigenous kinship networks and to target Indigenous women in particular ways. Among these, notably, was the healthcare system's deployment of nutritional science aiming to reform Indigenous mothers' domestic and childcare practices in accordance with settler cultural standards. By seeking to control and enforce surveillance upon Indigenous women, the state attempted to strip them of their rights to the land, of their livelihood, of their influence within their communities, of their children, and of their ability to reproduce. This phenomenon can be understood as an extension of the state's desire to impose a settler colonial form of order across the province, one that envisioned progress in terms of domestication, both of women and of nature.

Using the original court case initiated by the Cree and Inuit against the Québec Government in 1971 as well as the subsequent appeal by the latter, the first chapter examines the initial legal struggle through which these communities sought to have their rights to the land recognized in the wake of the project's inception. It traces the outlines of these negotiations while examining the ways in which the settler legal system worked to undermine Indigenous rights to the land and

traditional governance. This chapter further problematizes the settler state's perception of nature and the environment in relation to health, and sheds light on the ways in which the Cree and Inuit of James Bay learned to harness the language of settler law to defend their land. By doing so, it offers a new perspective on the violence inherent to the workings of the colonial legal apparatus in Québec in relation to the formation of a distinct Franco-Québécois modern identity.

The second chapter examines the gendered character of educational campaigns conducted in the region by the Québec Ministry of Health and by the Cree Board of Health in the subsequent decades, and contrasts documents from both of these organizations with Indigenous women's testimonies about their experiences of the Québec healthcare system, particularly in regard to motherhood and reproduction. Looking at the issues of forced sterilization and child removal, it sheds light on the particular ways in which the institutionalization of health in the region targeted Indigenous women through biopolitics. The final chapter offers an analysis of surveys conducted by the Québec Ministry of Health in the region in response to health issues in the communities due to settler encroachment on their land, the resulting environmental damage, and their forced resettlement. It investigates the settler state's vision of Indigenous health and its deployment of settler health and nutritional standards as assimilation devices promoting a capitalist agenda.

In the more recent past, Stephen Harper's federal government presented legislation that sought to give the state the ability to remove protections of Indigenous land, and especially waterways.⁵³ This attitude has been perpetuated by the Trudeau government, which continues to trespass on Indigenous land and water to impose its development agenda in the name of economic stimulation, while simultaneously failing to address the lack of drinking water on sixty Indigenous reservations despite public promises to that effect. Environmental destruction perpetrated by

⁵³ Goeman, "Ongoing Storms and Struggles," 106.

colonial governments in and around racialized communities is intrinsically linked to dynamics of domination predicated on historically constructed hierarchies, both among humans and between human and nonhuman beings. These hierarchies inform dominant understandings of time and space in ways that benefit those who stand at the higher echelons of the pyramid. Deconstructing them is thus a necessary step in shifting the current balance of power and establishing new relationships upon which a future for humanity might exist.

Theories of class, gender, racial, and ethnic conflict are essential to this exercise in redefining humans within the world, and historical narratives offer an important platform to deprogram dynamics of self-representation that obstruct our ability to think beyond anthropocentrism, capitalism, speciesism, and other-isms. The relationship between environmental destruction and gendered, racialized, and sexual violence deserves special attention in thinking through issues of global warming. Human relationships to nonhuman beings are dependent upon structures of knowing, and the manifestations and reproduction mechanisms of the hierarchical underpinning of the modernity paradigm must therefore be uncovered, challenged, and abandoned in order to make way for new earthscapes to emerge.

Chapter 1

Technocratic (In)justice

When planning the construction of the La Grande hydroelectric complex, announced in 1971, the Québec government failed to consult the Indigenous population living in the area. Following several unsuccessful attempts to convince the settler state not to go through with the project, the affected communities came together and learned the language of settler law in an effort to defend their land and water against encroachment. The court battles that ensued became the site through which Indigenous and settler worldviews met and were faced with the need to find a resolution. In the initial trial, Justice Albert Malouf ruled in favor of the Cree and Inuit, recognizing that the project constituted a breach of their rights and granting an injunction against further construction related to the project. At the time, this decision was groundbreaking, as it marked the first instance of a legal recognition of Indigenous rights to the land in a Québec court.¹ This victory, however, was short-lived. The provincial government decided to appeal this decision, and Justices Jean Turgeon, François Lajoie, Robert Whitley Owen, Marcel Crête, and Fred Kaufman of the Québec Court of Appeals then unanimously ruled in favor of the provincial government, claiming the Indigenous population in the area would benefit from the project more than they would suffer from the damage it would cause. The Cree and Inuit then attempted to appeal the decision, but the Supreme Court refused to hear their case in a three-two ruling.²

This chapter explores some of the ways in which worldviews collided and interacted on a legal stage as actors negotiated rights to the land and water. It locates the context of hydroelectric

¹ Jacques Viens, “Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Québec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress, Final Report” (public inquiry report, Québec, 2019), 87.

² Mélanie Dugré, “Mtre James O’Reilly: The Trailblazer,” *Bar of Montreal*, September 2, 2015, <https://www.barreaudemontreal.qc.ca/en/avocats/mtre-james-oreilly>.

development in James Bay in a larger history of settler encroachment on Indigenous land and structures of governance and inquires into the role of the legal apparatus in upholding the conditions in which this dispossession was made possible. How did Hydro-Québec and state representatives use legal rhetoric and tactics to undermine Indigenous social organization and establish settler supremacy on Indigenous land? What can this process reveal about Franco-Québécois thought in relation to nature?

With reference to the initial lawsuit brought by the Cree and Inuit against the Société de Développement de la Baie James (SDBJ) heard by the Québec Superior Court and the subsequent appeal by Hydro-Québec and the SDBJ, this chapter addresses the following questions: How did the provincial government and its representatives use the justice system to articulate their view of the relationship between humans and nature and promote a specifically Franco-Québécois notion of sovereignty? How did the Cree and Inuit challenge this vision? In today's context of increasing public scrutiny over issues of race- and gender-based inequality, this chapter aims to bring some clarity to yet another aspect of the colonial state's attempts at silencing Indigenous peoples and ignoring their ancestral rights to the land, but also to the creative ways in which Indigenous communities have resisted and contested colonial powers in Québec. I argue that Hydro-Québec and the SDBJ used the settler legal apparatus to silence and discredit the Cree and Inuit and to legitimize the destruction of the nonhuman world in the name of a gendered and anthropocentric vision of progress and sovereignty. I also argue that the Cree and Inuit mobilized both settler and Indigenous modes of thought to resist Québec's attempts at defining and subjugating Indigeneity through legal processes.

Organising Resistance

Despite the settler government's attempt at ignoring them, the Eeyou Cree and Inuit made use of creative strategies to resist this injustice. Using settler rhetoric and apparatus to their own advantage, they asserted their agency by defining their own identities and indigeneity in the face of a settler power that sought to define it for them. Upon discovering that their land was being destroyed by settlers, Indigenous inhabitants organized a meeting in July 1971. Between 400 and 500 people attended the meeting, during which the Cree and Inuit voiced their opposition to the project to both provincial and federal authorities.³ They had been given no documentation concerning the construction plans, and when they asked for information, they were told that the project was under study. When they heard that the *Loi sur le développement et l'organisation municipale de la région de la Baie James* had been adopted, they immediately held a meeting, once again voicing their opposition to the project.

Between their first meeting and the beginning of 1972, approximately ten meetings were held between Indigenous and settler leaders to discuss the project and the Cree and Inuit's rights in the region. In the spring of 1972, the latter were informed that the government intended to move forward with the construction. They thus held another meeting in Fort George in April, where they decided to take legal action against the government and form a committee of settler experts and Indigenous people to study the project. The committee presented their report to the Bourassa government in September 1972, and gave them a month to respond. They did not hear back from state representatives. Before receiving the report prepared by the Cree and Inuit, Hydro-Québec and the government had no established knowledge of the potential impact of the project on the

³ Chef Max « One-Onti » Gros-Louis c. Société de développement de la Baie James, SOQUIJ AZ-50900653, [1974] R.P. 38 at 178 (C.S.Q., 1973).

environment.⁴ Using both settler expert and Indigenous ways of knowing in relation to nature, and learning the language and strategy of settler law, the Cree and Inuit demonstrated determination, creativity, and innovation in resisting settler encroachment on their land. They thus defied settler attempts to silence their voices as well as to define Indigeneity as antithetical to modernity.

The Bourassa government's unwillingness to negotiate with Indigenous communities and its dismissal of the latter's opposition to their project was representative of its general attitude towards Indigenous peoples at the time. The provincial government and the SDBJ used bureaucratic procedures as excuses for their failure to provide Indigenous leaders with information about the project. Dr. John Spence, who directed the environmental assessment committee, described their communication with the state in the various meetings that were held to discuss the project: "we really didn't get very far, we didn't get anywhere. We talked for a long time but there was no satisfactory conclusion to those meetings."⁵ Bourassa's negotiators deliberately kept the Cree and Inuit out of the decision process, withholding information from them and engaging in symbolic gestures without sincere negotiation as a way to perform a superficial spectacle of allyship that would uphold the state's benevolent image and conceal its true intentions.

The procedures undertaken by the Cree and Inuit, on the other hand, demonstrate their rapid adaptation to settler legal language and their considerable efforts to engage in negotiations with the Québec government. As the various Indigenous communities affected by the project had never collaborated on this scale before, their ability to come together in their opposition to the project so quickly and the different avenues they adopted in order to make the state listen to their

⁴ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 176-77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

plea represents an important measure of resistance, resilience and ingenuity that settlers attempted to silence through bureaucratic mechanisms and arbitrary legal and scientific rhetoric.

Negotiating Exploitation

In July 1971, the National Assembly adopted the *Loi sur le développement et l'organisation municipale de la région de la Baie James*, creating the SDBJ and granting it authority to develop the natural resources of the region. The area in question totaled over 344,000 square kilometres, more than one fifth of the province, and almost double the size of England. Article 43 of the act stated that the legislation did not affect the rights of Indigenous communities living in the territory.⁶ Despite this clause, the provincial government decided to exploit the hydroelectric resources of the region. For Bourassa, in power from 1970 to 1976 and again from 1985 to 1994, the project was crucial to the economic emancipation of the province from Anglophone investors' interests and would allow it to compete with other jurisdictions in the race towards modernization.

On 15 November 1972, the Eeyou Cree and Inuit of James Bay and Northern Québec brought the SDBJ and Hydro-Québec to the Québec Superior Court, asking for an interlocutory injunction to stop the construction of dams on their land. They argued that the *Loi sur le développement et l'organisation municipale de la région de la Baie James* was unconstitutional and compromised their rights to the land.⁷ In total, 164 witnesses were heard – among whom only 35 were members of the affected Eeyou Cree and Inuit communities – and 312 pieces of evidence were presented in court. The proceedings lasted until June 1974. The court did not pass a final judgement on the status of the project but was only required to decide if there were reasonable grounds for halting it until a final decision was reached about property rights in the region.

⁶ Gros-Louis c. SDBJ, 171.

⁷ Ibid., 41.

Granting the injunction would have meant that the land was to be kept in or returned to its original condition until its legal title was established in a court of law. Since court proceedings of this complexity are often lengthy, the Cree and Inuit wanted to make sure that the construction on their land was halted until the conflict was settled to avoid further irreversible damage to the environment.⁸

Several expert witnesses testifying on behalf of the Indigenous population in the initial trial described the potential repercussions of the project on the land and ecosystems in extensive detail. They predicted that over 166,000 square kilometres would be affected by the construction, and four important rivers would see their flow reduced between 20 and 100 percent.⁹ Some areas would be flooded and others dried periodically.¹⁰ The La Grande River's flow would be completely halted for a full year and would be diverted through tunnels.¹¹ Roads would be built, workers' camps erected, dikes dug, transmission lines built, and immense quantities of materials transported to the worksite.¹² Two of the experts testifying about the potential effects of the project on the ecosystem declared that it would be comparable to a large-scale natural disaster. One of them compared it to the magnitude of five landslides blocking portions of the La Grande River and affecting the fish significantly.¹³ Several experts explained that the fish on which Indigenous communities relied for personal consumption and commercial use would no longer be found in the same areas. They described the importance of different varieties of fish to the Cree and Inuit populations, and suggested that these changes would be disastrous for their livelihood.¹⁴

⁸ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 42.

⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹¹ Ibid., 99.

¹² Ibid., 100.

¹³ Ibid., 101, 116.

¹⁴ Ibid., 115-117.

The wetland area, a very fragile ecosystem that hosted vegetation and animal populations crucial to the region's biodiversity, would be dried out, destroying the habitat and food sources of several species.¹⁵ Water would be contaminated by the discharge of oil from construction machines and the soil would acidify.¹⁶ Changes in the chemical composition of the water would be difficult to predict, and the level of salt in different areas would vary. Erosion would also cause considerable damage to the ecosystem.¹⁷ In his testimony as expert witness, geography PhD candidate Alan Penn warned that drinking water would become inaccessible to Fort George, a remote island Cree community.¹⁸ These impacts had been observed in other areas where similar modern development projects were implemented, and the state was aware of the destructive potential of its technological advances, but nonetheless chose to ignore it for the sake of stimulating the settler economy.¹⁹ Settler priorities thus required that the land be conceptualized as something to be used and managed by the modern human, and this required an imagined separation between humans and nature to be drawn to justify the latter's exploitation by the former.

A Logic of Accumulation

The settler state's epistemology as revealed throughout both trials centered on a capitalist logic of accumulation. Stéphane Savard argues that the period of the La Grande project was marked by a conceptualization of the territory as merely utilitarian rather than one that was inhabited. The land was portrayed as empty, ready to be conquered by the forces of the modern technocratic state for the benefit of the settler population.²⁰ In his public speeches, premier Robert Bourassa used

¹⁵ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 124.

¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷ Ibid., 126.

¹⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹⁹ Ibid., 137-38.

²⁰ Stéphane Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois, 1944-2005* (Québec: Les Éditions du Septentrion, 2013), 162.

language reminiscent of early colonial campaigns to describe the territory. He referred to it as a “monde nouveau à bâtir,”²¹ suggesting the perceived emptiness of the region in the settler imaginary. Bourassa’s words were also quoted in the National Assembly upon the adoption of the *Loi sur le développement et l’organisation municipale de la région de la Baie James*: “Il ne sera pas dit que nous vivrons pauvrement sur une terre aussi riche.”²² These words portray the settler government’s conceptualization of land in terms of wealth to be appropriated and exploited for the sake of modernization.

These priorities were clearly expressed by André Langlois, an engineer testifying on behalf of the SDBJ, who described the thought process behind the decision to destroy forests: “il s’agit de comparer deux choses: est-ce que l’avantage économique au point de vue développement de la ressource hydraulique est plus grand que le dommage ou que le gain qu’on peut faire en exploitant une forêt?”²³ The first option presented by the engineer was to exploit the hydraulic resources and flood the land, and the second was to cut down the forest to exploit it for wood. Neither of these options considered the value of nature when kept in its original state. Later in the trial, anthropologist Adrian Tanner testifying on behalf of the Cree and Inuit about their lifestyles briefly discussed hunters’ treatment of animals, claiming that they only kill the number of caribou they need and leave the rest of the pack alone, even though they could easily kill them all.²⁴ The fact that this expert considered the option of killing the whole pack is revealing of settler values of accumulation over sufficiency. In his cross-examination, Guy Lefebvre, another engineer testifying for the SDBJ, admitted that during the preliminary studies for the planning of the project,

²¹ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l’état québécois*, 159 (my translation from the French: “new world to build”).

²² *Ibid.*, 160 (my translation from the French: “It will not be said that we will live poorly on such rich soil”).

²³ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 103 (my translation from the French: “it’s a matter of comparing two things: is the economic advantage in relation to hydraulic resource development greater than the damage or the possible gain we could make from exploiting the forest?”).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

they had not considered fish or other animals at all.²⁵ These expert testimonies demonstrate the SDBJ and Hydro-Québec's desire to prioritize the economy and its conceptualization of the nonhuman world as potential wealth to be exploited and consumed rather than complex ecosystems upon which lives – human and nonhuman – depend.

Anthropocentrism & the Tradition-Modernity Dialectic

Throughout both trials, settler views of modernity as being opposed to tradition were used to create a divide between human and nonhuman worlds, as well as to discredit Indigenous claims to the land and legitimize settler dominance over nature. Before the Quiet Revolution in Québec, nature was seen as something to adapt to, to domesticate. Stéphane Savard argues that this perception shifted in the 1960s, when the new *Québécois* identity became tied to a vision of total control and domination over nature.²⁶ Announcing the court of appeal's final judgement, Justice Turgeon stated that the Indigenous population had quickly evolved towards the lifestyle of all other Québécois.²⁷ This statement implied that Indigeneity was incompatible with modernity. Opposing modernity and tradition, Justice Turgeon, along with his fellow justices, adopted a linear vision of time according to which settler culture was not in fact a culture, but a universal goal supported by scientific theories of evolution. This perspective implied that tradition was something less evolved, and that modernity was the ultimate and universal goal of human evolution.

Writing to a settler audience, prominent Cree scholar Harold Johnson has criticized this notion in his work on Indigenous-settler relations in Canada in the following passage: “You prefer to describe your way of doing things as scientific or logical rather than merely cultural. To many

²⁵ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 158.

²⁶ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 153-54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

of your family, it seems that culture is what lesser peoples have.”²⁸ The premise of the SDBJ’s line of argument was that science and logic should prevail over tradition and culture. Pointing to the supposed erosion of the latter over time, the SDBJ’s seventeen lawyers further attempted to discredit Cree and Inuit perspectives. They argued that these communities no longer depended on animals and fish as much as they claimed they did. The lawyers argued that the Indigenous population in the region bought certain food products from the market, and that they benefited from government-funded programs and institutions such as schools, health establishments, housing, water and sewage systems, welfare, roads, electricity, and more.

The lawyers further pointed to the fact that they wore store-bought clothes, used motorboats and firearms, and consumed gas. The participation of Indigenous people in wage labour was also used to discredit their relationship to the land and waters.²⁹ One of the state’s expert witnesses, anthropologist Bertrand, claimed that he could not understand how a people would possibly want to remain attached to its roots since we live in a technological world. However, he admitted under cross-examination that the Cree and Inuit did successfully combine their own traditions with modern technology.³⁰ The adverse effects of colonialism and its doctrine of modernization on the lives of Indigenous peoples, however, had long been recognized in Canada at the time. A commission of inquiry led by Major General Henry Darling reported in 1828 that colonization efforts in Canada were impacting Indigenous communities negatively.³¹ The fact that these state representatives, over a century later, continued to perceive assimilation as the desired goal of

²⁸ Harold Johnson, *Two Families: Treaties and Government* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 2007), 73.

²⁹ *Gros Louis c. SDBJ*, 90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

³¹ Viens, “Public Inquiry Commission,” 37.

Indigenous-settler relations pointed to the persistence of settler denial of colonial violence despite its evident manifestations across the country.

In his final decision, Justice Malouf ruled that the fact that Indigenous peoples made use of modern technology and services did not signify that they did not depend on the land. He claimed that the testimonies, as well as other forms of evidence presented by the Cree and Inuit, clearly proved their dependency on hunting, trapping, and fishing.³² He concluded that these occupations represented a way of life for them and were thus highly important. He added that their diet was at least partially dependent on the area's wildlife. Affirming Cree and Inuit epistemological differences from settler conceptions of the land, he stated: "They have a unique conception of the land, use all of its bounty including its animal life, and any interference in the territory would compromise their existence as a people."³³ The SDBJ's line of argument, by contrast, was designed to challenge the authenticity of the affected communities' claims to indigeneity.

By the same token, it undermined their rights to the land on the premise that they were no longer Indigenous, but modern people just like the rest of the province's population. Since they had supposedly begun their transition away from their traditional lifestyle and towards a modern one, their relationship to the land was deemed less significant. Modernity was thus seen by the state's representatives as the antithesis of tradition, a view that served to legitimize humanity's inevitable separation from the land, and its management and exploitation of it in the name of progress.

³² Viens, "Public Inquiry Commission," 92.

³³ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 93 (My translation from the original French: "Ils ont un concept unique de la terre, font usage de tous ses fruits et produits incluant toute vie animale y étant et toute interférence s'y produisant compromet leur existence propre comme peuple").

Paternalism & Denial of Colonial Violence

During the two trials, the SDBJ and Hydro-Québec, represented by lawyers of the Montréal-based Martineau Walker law firm, adopted a strategy that mainly consisted in avoiding the facts and maintaining an ambiguous narrative about the scale of the project's impact on the land and its inhabitants to minimize their magnitude. This further demonstrated the Québec government's use of the legal system as a tool to persistently deny the realities of Indigenous peoples and assert the dominance of its patriarchal ideals. The state's lawyers chose to present facts that served their narrative and ignore those that did not.

For instance, biologist Étienne Magnin testifying on behalf of the state gave no conclusive information about the potential effects of the project on the environment, and instead simply claimed that “Dans l'état actuel de nos connaissances, vraiment pour ne parler que du domaine aquatique, je ne pense pas qu'on puisse donner des affirmations totales et définitives sur tous les impacts écologiques bons ou mauvais qui pourront découler des aménagements de cette région.”³⁴ He did not present scientific evidence, and instead avoided bringing up any experiments or measurements that could have revealed the potential risks involved in the project.³⁵ Appealing to newly articulated ideals of the modern man as a rational risk manager, the SDBJ's lawyers argued that a proper planning of the project would minimize its impact on the environment. In his monograph *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada*, Christopher Dummitt argues that:

After the war, the masculinity of risk still featured prominently in ideas about the modernist project. In response to the collapse [of Vancouver's Second Narrows Bridge], we see how these ideas persisted, centering on men's ability to control the

³⁴Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 120 (my translation from the French: “To our current knowledge, to speak only of the aquatic domain, I do not believe we can make total and definite affirmations about the ecological impacts, good or bad, that could result from the development of the region”).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

environment through engineering and everyday personal feats of daring in order to build the infrastructure of the economic boom.³⁶

In reference to the high number of workplace deaths in industrializing postwar Canada, Dummitt further argues that “The persistence of a modernist appreciation for development - in both its utilitarian and aesthetic senses - demanded that this violence be neutralized.”³⁷ I suggest that this statement can be applied to the violence against Indigenous communities and to the environment industrial projects like the La Grande dams entailed.

As outlined by Savard, Hydro-Québec served as a conduit through which a new, modern Franco-Québécois identity was articulated, one that contrasted with earlier depictions of French-Canadian identity as being tied to a rural lifestyle. Transitioning away from the infamous conservative Duplessis era of *Grande Noirceur*, the Lesage liberal government of the 1960s was characterized by a seemingly limitless potential for social reform and modernization. Where Duplessis spoke of provincial autonomy, Lesage rather promoted provincial liberation, opposing federal interference in provincial affairs while fostering cooperation between the different levels of government.³⁸ This cooperation, needless to say, excluded Indigenous governing bodies.

The new modern image of the Québécois was highly gendered and defined in terms of rational, secular, and calculated manhood. Savard argues that the Quiet Revolution represented a period of effervescence throughout which the Québec state was transformed by a nationalism centered on the territory of the province and by new markers of identity. Among these shifting references was the idea of a Québécois that was a “*maître chez lui*” (master in his own house) who triumphed over natural elements and transformed and exploited them to satisfy his needs. This

³⁶ Christopher Dummitt, *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 54.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸ Viens, “Public Inquiry Commission,” 68-69.

representation of the new Québécois occupied an important place in the political landscape, as well as in Hydro-Québec's promotional documents.³⁹ John Ciaccia, Bourassa's personal representative in the negotiations with Indigenous communities for the project starting in November 1973, depicted the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* as a rational planning of the territory, focused on the ordered development of the land.⁴⁰ Experts testifying on behalf of the Cree and Inuit during the Superior Court trial, however, maintained that it would be impossible to plan the project in a way that would spare ecosystems.⁴¹ This type of evidence was disregarded, and even denied, by the SDBJ's lawyers and its expert witnesses. Their strategy of withholding information that might have compromised their chances of winning operated to silence Indigenous voices to allow the state to freely exploit the nonhuman world for the sake of capital accumulation.

Judicial Ambiguity

The diverging opinions of Justice Malouf and Justices Turgeon, Lajoie, Owen, Crête and Kaufman in response to this strategy are informative of the subjectivity involved in interpreting the facts of a case and the evidence in a court of law. In their work on gender and violence, Emily Snyder, Val Napoleon, and John Borrows argue that "Power dynamics play out in legal practices and processes. They also play out in interpretations of the present and the past."⁴² They further claim that in assessing Indigenous-settler relations, it is necessary to refuse the idea of a social evolutionary framework which depicts once pristine Indigenous cultures degenerating into contamination upon contact with modernity.⁴³ Such perceptions suggest that the degradation of Indigenous livelihoods

³⁹ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état Québécois*, 84-85.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴¹ *Gros Louis c. SDBJ*, 159.

⁴² Emily Snyder, and Val Napoleon, and John Borrows, "Gender and Violence: Drawing on Indigenous Legal Resources" *UBC Law Review* 48, no. 2 (2015): 606.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 610.

is a naturally-occurring and inevitable process, thereby obscuring settler responsibility in perpetrating colonial violence. In the Court of Appeal, Justice Turgeon argued that the benefits Indigenous communities would derive from the situation outweighed the negative effects of the construction on the territory they occupied. He went as far as to suggest that the project would have a positive impact on the region's biodiversity. His claims were not supported by any evidence other than a few questionable testimonies presented by the appellants to the effect that fish populations were thriving in other areas where dams had been built around the province.⁴⁴ These testimonies were no more than observations made by a few settler witnesses who went fishing in these areas years – sometimes decades – after the construction had been completed.

Malouf had suggested that this information could only be considered speculation, especially due to the difference in ecosystems, as well as the long periods of recovery they had undergone before the witnesses visited them.⁴⁵ The fact that Turgeon contradicted this line of thought and instead considered these testimonies more reliable than those of the dozens of scientists testifying on behalf of the Cree and Inuit demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the deployment of expert knowledge in these court proceedings, as well as the possibility for justices to sway judgements according to their own worldviews and to prioritize strategy over truth in attributing power through the judicial apparatus. In the end, Turgeon and his fellow justices' capitalist worldview prevailed, not due to its superior logic, but rather due to its upholding of the state's supremacy in allocating resources, allowing it to continue to compete against other modern nation states in the capitalist economy.

⁴⁴ *Société de développement de la Baie James c. Kanatewat*, SOQUIJ AZ-75011045 at 180 (Q.C.A., 1974).

⁴⁵ *Gros Louis c. SDBJ*, 143.

The justices of each trial interpreted and applied the law to the facts of the case differently, leading to opposing judgements. This points to the ambiguity of legal language and the way in which it was utilized to promote different agendas. The federal government had ceded the Ungava region to the province in the 1912 *Québec Boundaries Extension Act (QBEA)*. Article 2(c) of this act stipulates that the province of Québec was to recognize the rights of Indigenous inhabitants of the transferred territory and would have to use the same process as the federal government had with other Indigenous communities should it seek to extinguish those rights. It also stated that the province would be in charge of any compensation and obligation towards the Indigenous population ensuing from this procedure.⁴⁶

One of the main issues of the case was therefore to determine the nature and scope of the Indian rights mentioned in the *QBEA*.⁴⁷ Malouf interpreted this article as a clear and precise obligation of the province to recognize Indigenous rights to the land in the territory, and to proceed in the same manner as the federal government would to extinguish such rights through treaty-making.⁴⁸ Justice Malouf then used a quote from Governor Murray's instructions from December 1763 in *Constitutional Documents of the Canadian Archives* to support his decision: "And you are upon no account to molest or disturb them in the possession of such parts of the said province as they at present occupy or possess..."⁴⁹ He then argued that since the province had never passed any treaty with Indigenous peoples in the territory, their rights had never been extinguished and their land was never ceded.⁵⁰ Contradicting this interpretation, the Court of Appeal judges argued instead that the way the law governing the region under the British upon colonization was

⁴⁶ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 51.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 65.

operationalized denied Indigenous peoples the right to sovereignty. They claimed that Indigenous peoples' rights depended on the good will of the sovereign, and could be abolished at any time without compensation.⁵¹ The Justices' interpretations of the law and applications of it to the facts of the case differed at a fundamental level, reflecting their difference in opinion and perceptions of the conflict in terms of rights of ownership, following a logic of accumulation characteristic of a capitalist state.

Colonial Epistemological Supremacy

The very fact that settler laws were used to determine whether or not Indigenous peoples had rights suggests that settler forms of justice held supreme authority in attributing power and determining privilege. The justice system was the only conduit through which Indigenous claims to the land were seriously considered. In the initial trial, the SDBJ's lawyers argued that the Cree and Inuit should have undertaken legal action as soon as their rights were compromised.⁵² Indigenous leaders initially tried to negotiate with the government outside of the legal framework, and when they realized they were not being heard, they chose to take legal action. The state therefore refused to recognize any negotiation unless it was done through their own framework of institutionalized justice.

Designed by settlers, the judicial system worked to the latter's advantage, and Indigenous representatives had no choice but to recognize its legitimacy in arbitrating negotiations as their land was actively being destroyed. Justice Malouf ruled that their attempts to negotiate with the government were well-intentioned, and that they should therefore not be penalized for not engaging legal procedures right away.⁵³ The fact that Indigenous actors in this negotiation process

⁵¹ SDBJ c. Kanatewat, 172.

⁵² Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 176.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 180.

had to be represented through settler legal experts – notably by their leading lawyer, James O’Reilly, along with nine other lawyers – and that their testimony was interpreted through a legal lens further demonstrates the importance of the power imbalance and the dominance of settler epistemologies in this conflict. It also points to the lack of credibility given to Indigenous knowledges and modes of governance in settler forms of justice.

In his judgement, Justice Malouf pointed to the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763 as evidence of the existence of Indian rights to the land, which had been confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Calder* case only a few months earlier. In January 1973, the Supreme Court delivered a judgement according to which Indigenous rights to the land existed wherever those rights had never been ceded through treaty.⁵⁴ The judge concluded that before Confederation, it had always been the case that Indigenous rights to hunt and fish on unoccupied land were recognized.⁵⁵ In his monograph *Two Families: Treaties and Government*, Harold Johnson criticizes this paradox. Discussing settler conceptualization of Indigenous rights in legal doctrine, he states: “Your family can recognize that my family has rights. This recognition in no way infers that those rights are derived from the Royal Proclamation. The Royal Proclamation was not a grant of right; it was simply a recognition by your family’s monarch that my family has rights.”⁵⁶ Examining the legal grounds for determining Indigenous rights, he continues: “The assumption that your family can determine the rights of my family is never clearly articulated in your constitutional documents. Neither have your courts ever articulated a legitimate theory. Authority is merely assumed.”⁵⁷ Johnson claims that the idea of sovereignty, according to which settlers claim ownership over the

⁵⁴ Loïc Blancquaert, “L’impact du jugement Malouf au Québec (1973-1974),” *Assemblée Nationale du Québec* (June 2011): 11.

⁵⁵ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 61.

⁵⁶ Johnson, *Two Families*, 99.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

land, was an old excuse to deny Indigenous peoples equality. Sovereignty was something only settlers were entitled to, and the author argues that all that sovereignty really means is that settler modes of governance originated in Europe.⁵⁸ The legal jargon of rights as expressed in settler documents such as the *Royal Proclamation* and the *QBEA* in both of these court cases is thus used to either affirm or deny equality to Indigenous peoples and legitimize or overwrite settler supremacy. In the Court of Appeal, the five justices in charge of the case used the law to secure wealth for the settler inhabitants at the expense of Indigenous and nonhuman lives.

Throughout both rounds of litigation, colonial modes of thought prevailed in the court room despite evident contradictions in the government's lawyers' arguments, who used the justice system to discredit Indigenous knowledges, rights, and modes of governance. In the beginning of the initial trial, the Superior Court deemed Chiefs Delisle, McKenzie and Gros-Louis, executive members of the Indians of Quebec Association, unfit to bring about the claim, as they did not reside in the territory under scrutiny. Similarly, the Inuit Community Council of Fort Chimo and the Northern Quebec Inuit Association were also dismissed as claimants by the court. The law did not provide these associations with the right to represent their members in court.⁵⁹ The only ones who were recognized by the courts were chiefs and trappers living in the territory covered by the *Loi sur le développement et l'organisation municipale de la région de la Baie James*.

The process of discrediting Indigenous governing bodies had begun long before with the 1869 federal *Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians, the Better Management of Indian Affairs, and to Extend the Provisions of the Act 31st Victoria, Chapter 42*. This act imposed the structure of band councils upon Indigenous communities, replacing the traditional chief system

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Two Families*, 89.

⁵⁹ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 48.

First Nations had been operating with for millennia. It further allowed government agents to remove chiefs from their positions, and it prohibited women from voting for council members.⁶⁰ Such legislation aimed to dismiss Indigenous governance structures by delegitimizing their chosen representatives' power to speak on behalf of their people in a court of law and imposing a patriarchal governance structure instead, one that was subordinated to the settler state.

In order for their claims to be recognized in court, the Cree and Inuit had to use settler expert language and authority, given the settler modes of thought underpinning judicial proceedings. In the Superior Court trial, several Indigenous witnesses testified to the effect that the project had already started disturbing animal populations, citing unfavorable effects on beaver and fish spawning areas, and projecting that caribou and fish populations would be eliminated, and vegetation would be disturbed by the floods.⁶¹ In order to verify their claims, the authority of several expert witnesses was summoned. Biologists, geographers, and anthropologists shared their knowledge about the land and its animal and plant populations. They supported Indigenous witnesses' testimonies, confirming that the project would eliminate beaver populations in some areas, and that both animals and plants would have a harder time propagating.

Professor G. C. Clough, a biologist specializing in the ecology and geography of polar regions, estimated that within six months to a year, two thousand beavers could be lost. He further pointed to the fact that the effects of the construction would be felt on a much larger scale than the percentage of land directly involved in the construction. It would have repercussions on the surrounding areas due to the interconnectedness of ecosystems.⁶² In the 221-page Superior Court case, only two pages are dedicated to the testimonies of Cree and Inuit witnesses about their

⁶⁰ Viens, "Public Inquiry Commission," 40-41.

⁶¹ Gros Louis c. SDBJ, 104.

⁶² Ibid., 106.

relationship to the land. A much larger portion of the court judgement is dedicated to these settler experts' testimonies, indicating the disproportionate authority given to settlers who did not have the knowledge Indigenous communities had developed by living on the land for centuries. Scientific knowledge was privileged and Indigenous ways of knowing were relegated to the sidelines throughout the proceedings.

After lengthy negotiations between the Cree and Inuit and the Québec government, the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* was signed in November 1975. It was the first time such an agreement was made between a province and Indigenous peoples in Canada. This landmark of modern treaty-making in Canada continues to serve narratives of Franco-Québécois exceptionalism. However, the agreement itself was born out of settler-dominated litigations and was far from a final resolution of the conflict. The contrast between the initial trial and the appeal preceding the *JBNQA* demonstrates how the application of the law is tainted by justices' subjective perceptions of the conflict. The different settler witness testimonies on both sides also demonstrate the diversity of settler opinions based on their interests in the conflict. Scientists whose careers and livelihoods were independent of the outcome of the trial tended to value the well-being of ecosystems, whereas those testifying on behalf of the government and in favour of the project were mainly employed by the government itself or by Hydro-Québec. The latter valued the settler economy over environmental protection.

The two trials through which power over land and water was negotiated reveal that settler justice remains dominated by settler modes of thought. This ambiguity worked, in this case, to privilege the interests of the Bourassa government instead of fostering equitable compromise. Justices' definition and recognition of Indigenous rights to the land were influenced by their own

understandings of power and the values they upheld. The evidence they chose to value as well as the meaning they ascribed to words differed, which explains their coming to different conclusions about the conflict and what they considered just. In this conflict, the perceived opposition of the modern — or settler — to the traditional — or Indigenous —, capitalist settler supremacy, as well as patriarchal anthropocentrism were guiding principles for arriving at the final judgement.

The SDBJ and Hydro-Québec deliberately attempted to manipulate the facts in order to serve their economic interests, all the while trying to maintain an image of benevolence by claiming that Indigenous communities would supposedly continue to benefit from their development endeavours. In her research about the gendered impact of hydroelectric development on Anishinabe communities, Brittany Luby argues the following:

limited attention to breast milk reflects an ingrained masculinist perspective in the literature of hydroelectric development. Historians have bemoaned the inundation of Indigenous hunting grounds, spaces traversed predominantly by Indigenous men. Some have also acknowledged that flooding can disrupt big game migration routes, posing significant threats to the intergenerational transmission of men's hunting knowledge.⁶³

Exploring the effects of the destruction of indigenous foodways following the construction of the La Grande hydroelectric complex, the next two chapters turn to some of the gendered ways in which this paternal benevolence was used to impose and justify increasing settler control over Indigenous lives and attempt to further assimilate and subjugate them through the institutionalization of health in the decades following the adoption of the *JBNQA*.

⁶³ Brittany Luby, "From Milk-Medicine to Public (Re)Education Programs: An Examination of Anishinabek Mothers' Responses to Hydroelectric Flooding in the Treaty #3 District, 1900-1975" *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 32, no. 2 (2015): 365.

Chapter 2

Attempted Disembodiment of Indigenous Women from Northern Geographies

Arthur Samuels, a writer from Montréal, visited Chisasibi for the first time in the late 1980s, nearly two decades after the initial announcement of the La Grande River hydroelectric project. Chisasibi was the new settlement of the Cree community displaced from the island of Fort George in 1980. The community's relocation was called for due to the predicted erosion of their island resulting from the Société de Développement de la Baie James' (SDBJ) disruption of the natural flow of the La Grande River.¹ The road system that was built for the purpose of building dams provided people from the South greater access to the wild nature of the North. It was along these roadways — portrayed by Québec politicians as the gateway to a new land to be colonized by the modern forces of the state² — that the writer travelled to arrive at the settlement. As his driver took him deeper and deeper into the dense forest, Samuels wrote:

Although earlier I had forced myself to stop wondering whether I would ever see any real signs of life out here in this near-wilderness and had taken it on faith, I didn't really believe it until I saw this almost brand-new little settlement slipping into sight up ahead, as reassuring as a beacon in the night. Buildings, cars, activity, people! I had arrived in Chisasibi.³

In this passage, the narrator's discomfort about the wilderness — which he dissociated from the living world — is apparent. He found comfort at the sight of a modern settlement with buildings and cars, to which he seems to ascribe more value than to the living forest itself. He wondered if he “would ever see any real signs of life,” as though the forest were not a complex living organism

¹ “History and Geography,” Cree Nation of Chisasibi, accessed July 30, 2021, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_formatting_and_style_guide/web_sources.html.

² Stéphane Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois, 1944-2005* (Québec: Septentrion, 2016), 86.

³ Arthur Samuels, “A Glimpse of the North,” in *L'expérience de la Baie James: Guide pour les professionnels de la santé qui travaillent parmi les Cris du Nord québécois*, pp5-9, edited by Helen B. Atkinson, and Gordon Magonet (Québec, QC: Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux du Gouvernement du Québec, 1990): 7-8.

in and of itself; as though buildings and cars were more representative of the living world and as though the living world revolved around humans. As described in the introduction, the James Bay and Northern Québec hydroelectric project was framed within a similarly anthropocentric rhetoric of technological mastery and virile domination over nature, whose resources would be harnessed to serve and liberate the Franco-Québécois population from the control of Anglophone economic and political interests.⁴

Samuels' account was published in 1990 by the Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services as a chapter in a guide intended to inform non-Indigenous healthcare workers about the cultural and social context of James Bay and Northern Québec. The chapter presumably represented a common feeling settlers experienced when arriving in the area, overwhelmed by the vision of a non-urbanized landscape. In the 2017 documentary film *Colonization Road*, Ojibwe Elder and former Chief of Curve Lake First Nation Doug Williams describes the anthropocentric worldview of settlers:

I think the early early settlers had a real difficult time with what they called a wilderness, which is, of course, we don't have a wilderness. We have... this is our home. When the land grabs were starting to happen, they were giving away our whole camps, and our shorelines and our islands and the river miles and all that stuff. We had to move. In fact we were being shot at. It's a history that started with conflict. So we had to move. We had to move.⁵

In the same documentary, Mi'kmaq lawyer, professor, and activist Pamela Palmater describes the building of roads by settlers from an Indigenous perspective: "To me roads, railways, they're like an infection; not just metaphorically, but actually. It was a way of invading our territories without legal authority, without consent. And what are roads used for now? They literally bleed our

⁴ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'État Québécois*, 195.

⁵ Michelle St. John, "Colonization Road: The Path of Reconciliation is Long and Winding," CBC docs, November 24, 2017, video, 44:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u03qLJ50bf4&t=60s>.

territories dry of people, of resources—everything that matters to us—and they pose a hazard.”⁶ Interestingly, the intrusion of Hydro-Québec and the Société de Développement de la Baie James in northern territories coincided with the deployment of healthcare institutions to serve the Indigenous population. These institutions, I argue, were rooted in a gendered, and anthropocentric vision of progress promoted by the Québec state at the time.

Following the signature of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* in 1975, the Québec government was compelled to establish healthcare services in the region in response to local communities’ relentless protest against its blatant disregard for their land, waters, and way of life.⁷ Five years after the signature of the agreement, the Quebec Native Women (QNW) association presented an incriminating report to the federal government about the Québec healthcare system’s discrimination and violence against Indigenous women. This chapter explores how this settler colonial gendered conception of wilderness and modernity was translated into the healthcare services provided in the region. At the same time, it reveals how Indigenous women experienced and responded to institutionalized expressions of heteropatriarchal settler sovereignty, more specifically in regard to motherhood, reproduction, and nutrition.

In order to explore these phenomena, I examine three kinds of sources. The first is a guide produced by the aforementioned Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services (QMSS) to inform non-Indigenous healthcare workers sent to the area about Cree culture, history, and health. This serves to tease out the settler government’s portrayal of Indigenous women’s health in regard to nutrition. The second is a series of information bulletins published by the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB), which was created as part of a provision of the

⁶ Michelle St. John, “Colonization Road.”

⁷ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l’état québécois*, 363.

JBNQA in 1975. These short bulletins were distributed to the patients of the eight Cree communities of Northern Québec for educational purposes. The third and last source analyzed is the report presented in 1980 to the federal government by QNW to denounce the injustices Indigenous women were subjected to at the hands of the Québec healthcare system. Putting these sources in conversation makes space for a more complex analysis of the forces at play in the establishment of healthcare services in the James Bay and Northern Québec context. I argue that Hydro-Québec's disruption of Indigenous foodways and the healthcare system's subsequent increased surveillance and control of Indigenous women's bodies through the deployment of nutritional science is a direct expression of how the Québec state's gendered, racialized, and anthropocentric discourse of territorial sovereignty operated to disembody and disconnect Indigenous women from the land and waters.

Health & Capitalism

The process of institutionalizing healthcare in postwar northern Québec was rooted in a climate of capitalist competition for control over the land and its resources. The provincial healthcare system had started to emerge in the 1920s with the creation of the Service provincial d'hygiène in 1922 and the Service d'assistance publique in 1921. At the time, healthcare services were predominantly managed by religious institutions.⁸ In the 1930s, free clinics began to open their doors near Indigenous communities in Abitibi Témiscamingue, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, on the North Shore, as well as in Atikamekw Nehirowisiw territory. These clinics were part of an initiative launched by the provincial Ministère de la Colonisation. In Eeyou territory, certain health services were previously offered by missionaries and managers of the Hudson's Bay Company, a practice

⁸ Jacques Viens, "Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Québec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress, Final Report" (public inquiry report, Québec, 2019), 54.

that continued, in some areas, until the 1950s. The first private northern hospital was founded in 1930 near the site of the Fort George Catholic Residential School in James Bay.⁹ The healthcare system experienced an important shift in the early 1960s, as the Québec government started to explore the natural resources available on its territory, with particular attention to the north and its complex network of rivers.

The new wave of Québec nationalism that emerged following the sudden passing of Maurice Duplessis in 1959, whose mandate was marked by authoritarianism, opened the doors to new opportunities for the Franco-Québécois population to assert itself as a liberated nation capable of competing with other nations on the world stage. Meanwhile, Canada sought to protect its northern borders from Soviet invasion in the midst of the Cold War. In Québec, this process fostered competition between federal and provincial authorities over the control of health institutions, notably in the social service and healthcare sectors.

In response to newly adopted federal laws on the deployment of these services, the Québec government sought to assert its authority over the management of its own population. The province thus held an inquiry into health and social welfare service delivery, leading to the formation of a centralized provincial healthcare system in the 1960s and the adoption of a universal healthcare plan in 1970.¹⁰ In an effort to explicitly assert its sovereignty over the territory, Québec formed the Direction Générale du Nouveau-Québec in 1963 to oversee the replacement of federal services by provincial ones in the north.¹¹ In 1965, the Fort George free clinic became the first hospital to

⁹ Viens, “Public Inquiry Commission,” 55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

be subsidized by hospitalization insurance. The services offered to Indigenous northern communities, however, remained very limited.¹²

The Québec government's involvement in Indigenous health further depicts settler colonial instrumentalization of what Jason Moore has termed "cheap nature"¹³ as a means to advance the province's modernization while ignoring the damage done to the land and its populations — human and nonhuman. As described in the previous chapter, no study of the potential environmental damage was conducted before the La Grande project was set in motion,¹⁴ and the Indigenous communities directly affected were not consulted.¹⁵ According to the Premier Robert Bourassa's rhetoric at the time of the project's announcement, the area to be flooded was so remote from any settler communities or urban centres that the damages would remain unseen and unimportant in comparison to the economic gains the project would generate.¹⁶ The profits, however, were reserved to the settler population, as the government failed to provide adequate compensation and assistance to the communities.

Eyou communities would not profit from the 'development' of their land and would have no access to the electric power generated by the river that flooded their land until as late as 1986.¹⁷ This demonstrated the government's convenient exclusion of Indigenous peoples from its conception of the Québec population. By claiming the project's purpose was the betterment of living conditions for the population of Québec, politicians completely disregarded the existence of Indigenous communities as part of the body politic. The state's creation of institutions that would

¹² Viens, "Public Inquiry Commission," 70-71.

¹³ Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene Part II: accumulation by appropriation and the centrality of unpaid work/energy" *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45, no. 2 (2016): 253.

¹⁴ James F. Hornig, editor, *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 20.

¹⁵ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 354.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

work to dictate and constrain—all in the name of caring for—the lives of Indigenous people following the *JBNQA*'s adoption would nonetheless serve to assimilate and incorporate the Indigenous population into the Québec state.

The years following the agreement's signature were marked by yet another wave of state intervention in northern communities regarding matters of health. Several surveys were conducted to measure the health of the populations surrounding areas of industrial development.¹⁸ These interventions, however, were rooted in an idea of health that did not consider local ways of knowing and sought to replace them with a Western scientific framework of health aimed at promoting labour and productivity.¹⁹ Collected data did not return to the communities, and little was said about the ways in which it would be used. In this way, the government claimed ownership over medical data while promoting a conception of health that was supposedly universal and culturally neutral, which served to support its claims to benevolence towards Indigenous communities.²⁰ This humanitarian rhetoric, as argued by historian Mary-Ellen Kelm, was integral to the colonial project, and used as a tool for assimilation; the absorption of Indigenous peoples into settler culture was portrayed as the only possible way to secure their achievement of acceptable health standards.²¹ The Québec government's attempts at asserting its sovereignty across the entirety of the territory defined by its borders thus involved the intensification of assimilation practices directed at the Indigenous population surrounding areas of resource development.

¹⁸ Christopher Fletcher, "Measuring Inuit Health from Ungava to Nunavik via Nouveau Québec: Episodes in the History of Researcher-Subject Relations," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 47 no. 2 (2017): 215.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

²¹ Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), Kindle, loc. 101-102.

Settler Denial & Mother-Blame

As early as the nineteenth century, the colonial enterprise in Canada worked to construct a portrait of Indigenous women as bad mothers, a rhetoric that was used to justify policies of child removal.²² The continuation of assimilation practices carried out by the Québec healthcare system in the postwar period can be seen as a perpetuation of the dynamics of what scholar Sarah Carter has termed “mother-blame.”²³ Carter argues that settler colonialism rested upon the control of women’s reproduction,²⁴ and that the securing of settler hegemony necessitated the imposition of Judeo-Christian standards of heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong marriages.²⁵

A considerable portion of the report published by QNW in 1980 about the discrimination Indigenous women faced in Québec’s healthcare institutions addressed issues related to Indigenous women’s reproduction. Among the most aggressive forms of discrimination the women’s testimonies denounced were practices of forced sterilizations and child removal. They also denounced the lack of information available to them about contraceptives and family planning, a situation that prevented them from making informed decisions about their own reproductive health.²⁶ In his groundbreaking monograph *When Did Indians Become Straight*, Mark Rifkin discussed the state’s imposition of heteropatriarchal marriage as a way to detribalize Indigenous peoples, delegitimize their existing kinship networks, and undermine their social fabric.²⁷ Translating Indigenous personhood into forms legible to the state, marriage as an institution

²² See Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016); Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

²³ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 149.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶ Quebec Native Women. *Mémoire présenté le 20 août 1980 au Ministère de la Santé et du Bien-Être Canada par l'association des Femmes Autochtones du Québec*, (Montréal: Québec Native Women, 1980), 6.

²⁷ Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5-6.

operated to eliminate Indigenous forms of sociality and spatiality. It regulated privatization, resource distribution, and citizenship through the imposition of heteronormativity.²⁸

In the same vein, Krista Walters' study of the Nutrition Canada Survey from 1963 to the 1970s demonstrates the persistence of this ideology well into the twentieth century. Walters argues that the survey was based on the colonial idea of Indigenous women as bad mothers whose families were, consequently, weak and diseased. Canada declared nutrition a national priority as a way to justify the establishment of educational programs designed to assimilate Indigenous mothers and their families.²⁹ In the midst of World War II, malnutrition came under special scrutiny due to its effects on soldiers and workers' strength and productivity. Under the circumstances of wartime pressure for asserting state power on the world stage, malnutrition came to be regarded as a threat to the nation's strength and virility (more on this in chapter 3).³⁰ The programs put in place by the federal government were disproportionately aimed at mothers. They embraced the notion that nutrition was a personal responsibility, one that required mothers to ensure the good dietary habits of the family in order to fulfill their duty as citizens.

Based on the Canadian Food Guide, the Québec Ministry of Health's guide for health practitioners working in James Bay, along with the CBHSSJB information bulletin, were designed in the same context of settler colonial attempts at assimilating Indigenous peoples and incorporating them into the settler economy. By scrutinizing Indigenous mothers' childcare practices, provincial health authorities sought to impose upon them the modern ideal of the

²⁸ Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?*, 19.

²⁹ Krista Walters, "'A National Priority': Nutrition Canada's Survey and the Disciplining of Aboriginal Bodies, 1964-1975," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Valerie J. Korinek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 445.

³⁰ Ian Mosby, "Making and Breaking Canada's Food Rules: Science, the State and the Government of Nutrition, 1942-1949." In *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Marlene Epp, and Franca Iacovetta, and Valerie J. Korinek, pp.409-32 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 417.

heteropatriarchal nuclear household, rooted in the domestication of women. The solutions put forward by the Québec Ministry of Health in resolving health issues in the James Bay region thus specifically targeted women as the primary caretakers of their communities' and families' health. They ignored the lack of access to nutritious foods faced by Indigenous women as a result of settler encroachment on their lands, which prevented them from meeting these health ideals. Educational campaigns about nutritional health carried out by the Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services thus reinforced the idea that Cree and Inuit women were unfit mothers and caretakers. These campaigns offered solutions they did not have the resources to implement due to the government's lack of funding to compensate for the loss of biodiversity and the destruction of foodways at the root of the problem.

The August 1983 *Information Bulletin* of the CBHSSJB reports some of the findings of the nutrition survey that was carried out in Chisasibi, for the purpose of which 49% of Chisasibi households were consulted. The survey found that 97% of the persons in charge of preparing food in the households were women, and that the shopping as well as the cooking were done mainly by the mother. They were also in charge of cleaning and cooking the wild meat. Accordingly, most dietary education programs targeted women, holding them responsible for the health of their children and communities. Consequently, much of the CBHSSJB *Information Bulletin* publications contained information about children's health and nutrition directed at mothers.

In 1983, the CBHSSJB distributed pamphlets adapted from the Ministry of Social Affairs of Québec's original pamphlet dedicated to expecting mothers in the province. The pamphlets contained information about topics such as breastfeeding, bottle-feeding, the introduction of solid foods, good hygiene, and a secure environment. The January 1986 issue also discusses the dangers of dental cavities for young children. The article reads: "Strong, white and shiny when they enter

the mouth, if these teeth are not taken care of, by the mother, they will soon get cavities.”³¹ It continues with a documentation of the dramatic health issues that can be caused by cavities, while making women specifically responsible for their children’s poor dental health. This issue, however, is once again directly related to the introduction of imported foods and the reduced access to traditional food sources.

The mother/child health program introduced by the CBHSSJB involved increased control of mothers and children through extensive monitoring of the child’s health, both during and after pregnancy. The program involved education about breastfeeding and nutrition.³² The three clinics put in place to offer mothers services followed them and their children in the prenatal, post-natal, infant, and preschooler stages. The lack of adequate food and infrastructure — as judged by idealistic settler standards that even the majority of the non-Indigenous population failed to meet — as well as the degradation of traditional sources of security and livelihood resulting from settler encroachment made it extremely difficult for Indigenous women to emulate the state’s nutritional ideals, whether they wanted to or not. The settler government and institutions nonetheless continued to scrutinize them and to hold them accountable for their communities’ health and social difficulties.

Discriminatory Access to Resources

All three of the source bases under analysis provide substantial evidence of the lack of resources and infrastructure contributing to the poor health of Indigenous communities. In 1983, a survey

³¹ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay* (Chisasibi: Communications Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, 1986).

³² Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay* (Chisasibi: Communications Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, 1988).

was conducted in Chisasibi upon community leaders' demand to monitor the effects of industrial development on the population's nutritional health. The survey's results were published in the *CBHSSJB Information Bulletin*, which was distributed in the community to warn people about the risks of contaminated foods and nutritional deficiencies. The report outlined issues related to families' access to quality products, mainly in terms of high food prices and low wages. It reported that 48% of the population consulted customarily ran out of money to buy food before their next pay cheque.

In addition to the lack of funds preventing community members from purchasing sufficient amounts of food, there was a clear lack of diversity and quality in the products available from the stores. Twenty-two percent of the people interviewed for the survey claimed they had bought food that was either stale or even rotten. Canned foods with added preservatives were thus more popular despite their lower nutritional quality.³³ Paradoxically, the Ministry of Health's guide for non-Indigenous healthcare workers sent to work in the region assured its readers that they would have access to healthy foods: "You will find almost everything you need: meat, fresh fruit and veg, canned or prepared foods and condiments."³⁴ It also suggested they order special foods from Val d'Or supermarket in case they wish to eat specific foods that were not readily available in the area.³⁵ This points to the ability of settlers to afford foods that the majority of the Indigenous population could not.

³³ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay* (Chisasibi: Communications Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, 1983).

³⁴ Helen B. Atkinson, and Gordon Magonet, Eds., *L'expérience de la Baie James: Guide pour les professionnels de la santé qui travaillent parmi les Cris du Nord québécois* (Québec, QC: Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux du Gouvernement du Québec, 1990), 137.

³⁵ Atkinson et. al., *L'expérience de la Baie James*, 137.

The QNW report, for its part, stated that clinics and dispensaries had very limited medication supplies, causing nurses to reserve their use to extreme cases. The kinds of medication available were also extremely limited. The association claimed that only cough syrup, aspirin, and vitamins were used to treat ill children.³⁶ QNW also presented the case of a woman who was given aspirin to treat a skin infection. The doctor who treated her was known as the *médecin à pilules* (pill doctor) and visited the community only one day a month. These shortages of staff and resources were observed in all the reserves consulted by QNW.³⁷ The association further condemned the provincial government's failure to provide reimbursement for the treatment of status people on the basis of their living off-reserve. The association claimed that the lack of employment opportunities on reserves forced many to relocate in order to find work — most often at very low wages.³⁸

Interestingly, QNW was formed in response to gender discrimination in the federal *Indian Act* causing women to lose access to reserves and band resources when marrying a non-status man. As early as 1968, Mary Two-Axe Early, a Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) woman from Kahnawà:ke, a reserve just outside of Montréal, formed the Equal Rights for Indian Women movement to push against the *Indian Act's* sexist provision. Section 12.1 b) of the document stated that a woman with Indian status who married a non-status man would lose her status, and would also lose her ability to transmit her status to her children. As a result, these women and their children were, in many cases, immediately excluded from their reserves, and lost access to band funds as well as to any other resources intended for them. This exclusion remained even in cases where the woman was separated from her husband. By contrast, white women who married status men gained Indian

³⁶ Quebec Native Women. *Mémoire*, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

status even when they had no Indigenous ancestry whatsoever and could thus access the reserve as well as their husbands' band resources.³⁹

Ojibwe woman Jeanette Corbière Lavell and Haudenosaunee woman Yvonne Bédard both undertook legal proceedings in the early 1970s to assert their rights to maintain their Indian status after marrying non-status men. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled against the women in order to safeguard the legal integrity of the *Indian Act*.⁴⁰ During the initial trial, Lavell was told by the judge that she should be happy a white man had agreed to marry her in the first place, testifying to the racist and sexist biases underlying these court proceedings.⁴¹ Once again, these women had to appeal to the International community in order to hold Canada accountable for addressing this issue.

In 1981, the case of Wəlastəkwewiyik (Maliseet) woman Sandra Lovelace culminated in the UN Human Rights Committee ruling that Canada had violated the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* through the unjust treatment of Indigenous women.⁴² The Indian Act was thus amended in 1985, resulting in the recovery of Indian status for these women and their children. The partial reversal of this provision resulted in increased tensions on reserves, as male-dominated band councils considered women who “married-out” as outsiders. Since bands already had very limited resources to distribute to their existing population, the reinstatement of a large number of women whose ties to the community had long been severed was not particularly

³⁹ Viens, “Public Inquiry Commission,” 74.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁴¹ Alanis Obomsawin, “Mother of Many Children,” National Film Board of Canada, video, 57:00, https://www.nfb.ca/film/mere_de_tant_denfants/.

⁴² Viens, “Public Inquiry Commission,” 74.

welcome. These women were marginalized and nicknamed C-31s, after the name of the bill that had given them back their status.⁴³

Such legal mechanisms were engineered to assimilate Indigenous women into the settler body-politic and sever their ties to their homelands, cultures, and communities while reducing the costs of the state's fiduciary obligations towards Indigenous communities. Inspired by the Equal Rights for Indian Women movement, the Native Women's Association of Canada, as well as QNW were founded in 1974 out of this struggle against colonialism and its patriarchal ideology. Among other issues, these organizations mobilized against the adoption of Indigenous children outside their communities—a phenomenon that later became known as the Sixties Scoop—, discrimination against Indigenous women within the healthcare system, and violence against Indigenous women more generally.⁴⁴

In their 1980 report, QNW claimed that non-status women in the Bersimis community on the north shore of the St. Lawrence river had to travel sixty miles to deliver their babies or see a doctor in case of illness. This scenario was found to be commonly experienced by women living on or near reserves across the province. This was due to the fact that clinics situated on reserves only offered services to people who possessed a band number. Those who did not were refused treatment, regardless of the gravity of their situation.⁴⁵ Access to resources therefore not only operated along racial lines, but also depended upon gender. This phenomenon originated from the historical dislocation of Indigenous women from their kin networks in order to free the land of obstacles to the modernity project. This denial of responsibility by the settler state operated to

⁴³ Joanne Barker, introduction to *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*, ed. Joanne Barker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 20-21.

⁴⁴ Viens, "Public Inquiry Commission," 74.

⁴⁵ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 18.

conceal the role of contamination of traditional food sources in the proliferation of health issues in affected areas, while educating Indigenous communities — and particularly mothers — about proper nutrition and hygiene.

In their 1988 publication, the CBHSSJB discussed community concerns surrounding the level of mercury in fish as well as cesium and cadmium in moose and caribou populations.⁴⁶ These phenomena were a direct result of the environmental consequences of the building of dams on the La Grande River. The publication contained a full article on how methylmercury was absorbed through the food chain in and around flooded areas and how it could affect the foetus and cause health complications. For this reason, women of childbearing age in the James Bay and Northern Québec area were surveyed each year in order to measure the concentration of methylmercury in their blood. The board did not, however, advise women not to consume fish, which suggests the boards' reluctance to encourage people to abandon Cree foodways.⁴⁷ The introduction of these specific hazards and illnesses testifies to the state's responsibility for the degradation of health in these communities.

In March 1984, the CBHSSJB published an article about gastroenteritis, telling mothers what to do in order to prevent it. The article mentioned that several Cree children had died from the illness and called for mothers' adequate management of water supplies and the practice of good personal and environmental hygiene. As some communities did not have aqueducts, drinking water was distributed by the community, and had to be stored adequately in a special container that had to be kept in a cool and clean place, with the lid hermetically closed. The board advised mothers to wash the container once a week. It further claimed that the entire home should be cleaned, and

⁴⁶ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin*, 1988.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

garbage disposed of in a garbage can with a lid. The article warned mothers that leaving garbage lying around outside could contaminate the snow, and bacteria could be released into the water when the snow melted. This represented a hazard for young children playing outside and touching everything with their hands.

In her study of Indian Hospitals in Canada, Maureen K. Lux discusses a similar phenomenon that took place in Winnipeg, where settlers dumped their sewage and chemical waste in the river, causing dramatic outbreaks of gastroenteritis. The Indian Hospital field nurse was quick to put the blame on Indigenous women for feeding their children bottled milk rather than breastfeeding them. Although some of the women had no choice but to do so in order to go to work, the rhetoric of mother-blame was deployed by the nurse to advocate for the removal of children from their mothers and families. Sadly, the water at the residential school where the children were sent was also contaminated, which caused a gastroenteritis outbreak among the students. A 1957 report by health officials in the area claimed that gastroenteritis due to water pollution was killing more than the infamous tuberculosis infectious disease.⁴⁸

In the case of James Bay, this problem arose from the destruction of large swathes of land due to the building of dams. Confined to a much smaller area, communities needed to adapt to a new sedentary lifestyle in which fishing and hunting were increasingly restricted. Although most families continued to engage in fishing and hunting and to consume wild meat and fish, the new conditions imposed upon them drastically limited their mobility. As a result, both the Ministry of Health guide and the Cree Board of Health indicate the dramatic increase in consumption of imported goods, such as canned foods and other packaged foods. This phenomenon in turn caused

⁴⁸ Maureen Lux, *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada, 1920s-1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), Kindle, loc. 399.

the increase in non-organic garbage production, which was at the source of the problem at hand. Such restrictions, coupled with the government's inaction in regard to the engagements it agreed to when signing the *JBNQA*, caused several issues within the communities, especially in relation to infrastructure.

The lack of a proper sewage system as well as the absence of an adequate garbage collecting system had dramatic impacts on the communities' health and well-being. As shown in the pamphlets, however, the responsibility was placed upon mothers to ensure the security of the environment for the sake of their children's health. The gastroenteritis epidemic that resulted was dealt with by handing out educational pamphlets intended to teach people — mainly mothers — how to avoid issues that were in fact caused by land dispossession and governmental indifference. Mothers were not only blamed and held responsible for the death and poor health of their children, but this rhetoric was in turn used to take their children away from them and to forcibly sterilize them under the rubric of benevolent paternalism.

Mothers were also warned that not all water should be considered safe to drink, especially not the river water. The board stated that: "This water brings about gastroenteritis, it must absolutely be boiled for twenty minutes in order not to be sick." They then urged mothers to give their children only boiled water from ages zero to four in order to avoid an outbreak. The article also discusses the lack of bathrooms in some houses, which could be a source of contamination.⁴⁹ This demand for Indigenous mothers to increase their level of hygiene can be understood in the historical context of discrimination against Indigenous motherhood on the basis of Victorian standards of hygiene, according to which settler society judged the level of civilization of a

⁴⁹ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay* (Chisasibi: Communications Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, 1984).

population. The work of historians of maternalism such as Sarah Carter and Margaret Jacobs demonstrates the use of such rhetoric to justify child removal policies in turn-of-the-century settler colonial societies such as Australia, Canada, and the United States.⁵⁰

QNW blamed the poor health conditions of Indigenous women and their communities, on the establishment of reserves and the drastic change in diets and medical practices that accompanied increased settler intervention. Changes in dietary patterns due to environmental disruption, the introduction of foreign food items, as well as the poor living conditions imposed upon communities through their exclusion from the settler economy that profited from the destruction of their land and water, were clearly identified as the main sources of illness in the report.⁵¹ These women knew where their problems originated, and they expressed that clearly in a report they wrote according to settler bureaucratic standards. The QNW report challenged the state's amnesia by demonstrating its failure to meet its obligations under the *JBNQA*. Once again, the responsibility to care for the outcomes of environmental damages was assigned to mothers.

QNW also denounced the discrimination faced by Indigenous women at the hands of healthcare workers on the basis of their supposed lack of hygiene. They reported the common practice of treating Indigenous women after all white patients in settler hospitals, regardless of the gravity of their case, and complained that they were treated like dogs. In one case, they reported that a nurse was complaining about a female Indigenous patient's lack of hygiene, and that the nurse asked the patient to clean her genitals with a steel brush to get rid of her urine smell. The patient's condition, however, required that she bathe several times a day. The real issue was thus not the patient's hygiene, but rather the nurse's prejudice.⁵² The association described several other

⁵⁰ See Carter, *Imperial Plots*; and Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*.

⁵¹ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 19.

⁵² Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 11.

cases in which the health of Indigenous female patients was deemed unworthy of care and attention. The report further located the structural character of the lack of sanitation measures on reserves for which the state was accountable. The association blamed this issue on the long-standing conflict between the federal and provincial governments as to whose responsibility it was to provide services to the Indigenous population. Both governments rejected responsibility, and Indigenous communities suffered the consequences of this dispute.⁵³ Scrutinizing women's hygiene was in fact a way for the settler state to reject responsibility for contamination as well as to pursue its assimilationist educational campaigns under the banner of benevolence.

Pathologizing Indigenous Illness

To address issues related to the contamination of traditional food sources in the region, settler experts writing in the Ministry of Health guide for health workers, much like the CCHSSJB had done, suggested solutions that would merely lessen the health impacts of pollution rather than acknowledging and addressing their source. Dentist LeRoy R. Shaw, for instance, suggested that “controlled water fluoridation is the safest and most cost-effective way of preventing dental caries.”⁵⁴ Economic concerns were here evidently expressed in regards to reducing the state's responsibility towards Indigenous peoples. This reveals the dentist's capitalist epistemology, as the main criterion he highlighted in facing the issue was an economic one rather than offering what was best for the communities. Shaw blamed the high occurrence of dental disease in the communities on “poor dietary habits and a lack of sustained incentive towards prevention.”⁵⁵ Although he did mention the recent introduction of non-traditional dietary patterns as the cause of the high occurrence of cavities among children, Shaw largely ignored the history of starvation and

⁵³ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁴ Atkinson et. al., *L'expérience de la Baie James*, 132.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 127.

the imposed shift in Indigenous diets due to land, water, and animal contamination following the construction of the dams. His use of the term “non-traditional” suggests that their new diet was more modern, and that they were simply not yet accustomed to such foods.⁵⁶ Such assumptions about indigenous people’s maladaptation to the modern world were rooted in a vision of progress that was widely used at the time — and still today — to depict the higher occurrence of cardiovascular illnesses and diabetes in Indigenous communities as natural and independent from structural inequalities.

As the Canadian Food Guide (CFG) was based on settler cultural ideals as well as state interests, the rules it promoted worked to stigmatize and pathologize Indigenous food cultures and eating habits. This was particularly true when it came to dairy products and processed foods.⁵⁷ The CFG, for instance, strategically reserved an important section to milk and dairy – which were generally absent from most northern communities’ nutrition at the time of the guide’s creation – in order to boost sales in the agro-business sector.⁵⁸ The Chisasibi survey demonstrates the extent to which these nutritional guidelines impacted Indigenous consumption patterns following drastic environmental change and settler encroachment on Cree foodways. This process was made possible, in large part, by the reform of younger generations, whose majority had been sent to Indian Residential Schools to be assimilated into settler culture.

In the survey, elderly people claimed that they did not eat dairy products, fruit, and vegetables because they were not accustomed to them. Sixty-eight percent of children, however, drank milk on a daily basis. Older groups ate more bannock, whereas the youth ate more bread. Members of younger generations also ate more fruit and vegetables, store-bought meat, chips,

⁵⁶ Atkinson et. al., *L'expérience de la Baie James*, 131.

⁵⁷ Mosby, “Making and Breaking Canada’s Food Rules,” 421-22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 421.

French fries, soft drinks, cookies and other types of junk food than the adult population, and especially elders.⁵⁹ Ignoring the colonial enforcement of settler food cultures upon Indigenous peoples and its harmful repercussions, the Ministry of Health's approach to the health issues resulting from this important shift in Cree diets worked to pathologize Indigenous illness, thereby absolving settlers of colonial guilt.

Asserting Cree Agency

Although the figures presented in the Chisasibi survey demonstrate the widespread adoption of certain settler food items, traditional foodways maintained their importance within the community. For instance, the report states that most people had a freezer, but that they mainly used it to store "bush food." Wild meat was consumed by everyone, particularly ptarmigan, caribou, moose, duck, and beaver. The report concludes by calling for the establishment of educational programs about store-bought food, including budgeting, cooking, and consumer information. It also found that 60% of the population would be interested in taking such courses, and that 70%, mainly from the younger generation, was interested in courses about traditional food.

In addition, the Cree Board of Health addressed comments to non-Indigenous people living in or visiting the Cree communities, insisting on the fact that the Cree had freezers and used them to store the wild meat they caught while hunting.⁶⁰ This suggests that the board wished to correct misconceptions some settlers had about Cree lifeways. The fact that they used freezers demonstrates their use of modern technology, but the fact that they used them to store traditional foods suggests that they maintained their own cultures and traditions. Similarly, the article about nutrition during pregnancy in the 1988 issue suggests that women refer to a Cree adaptation of the

⁵⁹ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin*, 1983.

⁶⁰ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin*, 1988.

Canadian Food Guide's four categories in order to ensure good nutritional intake. The meat and substitutes category included game, as well as fish, and the bread and cereal category included bannock.⁶¹ This directly challenged the settler state's rhetoric of modernity, predicated on the idea that modern science and technologies were associated with a superior potential future and that traditions — more specifically Indigenous — belonged in the past and needed to make way for monocultural civilization.

The Cree Board of Health was clearly aware of the correlation between decreasing traditional food intake and heightened occurrence of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In its 1988 special issue on mother-child health services, the board states that special care for pregnant women had always been important in Cree culture, but that the introduction of modern science in the region allowed them to save children who were dying from infectious diseases for which they had no cure traditionally. The board also stated, however, that at the same moment, the Cree were more exposed to certain things that were detrimental to their health, such as alcohol and imported foods.⁶² These newly introduced diseases, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and anemia, were used by Québec healthcare as a means to justify the increased surveillance of expecting mothers. The Cree Board Health strongly advised women to go to the clinic right away when they thought they might be pregnant, as the failure to treat these illnesses — which more commonly occurred during pregnancy — could result in serious damages to the baby's or the mother's health.⁶³

The common occurrence of infectious diseases that had been introduced into Indigenous communities during early contact with Europeans also contributed to the increased scrutinization

⁶¹ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin*, 1988.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

of Indigenous mothers, who were instructed to bring their children to extensive follow-up appointments to vaccinate their children against various illnesses such as tuberculosis after birth.⁶⁴ For instance, Dr. Robert George Ferguson at Fort Qu'Appelle sanatorium conducted the controversial experimental vaccination of Indigenous infants against Tuberculosis in the 1920s.⁶⁵ Other dangerous and often brutal experiments were conducted on Indigenous patients in Indian Hospitals, such as the violent removal of ribs without general anesthesia for cases of Tuberculosis.⁶⁶ The omission of the history of these diseases' introduction and of their instrumentalization by the settler state to systematically institutionalize Indigenous people is telling, once again, of the settler amnesia that punctuates the Québec Ministry of Health guide in regards to the responsibility of settlers in the degradation of Indigenous communities' health and livelihoods.

Controlling Reproduction

Another service offered to mothers by the mother-child health program was information about birth control.⁶⁷ In their 1980 report, QNW demanded that doctors explain their conditions to female patients. One of the areas they wanted more information about was contraceptive methods. QNW denounced the practice of tubal ligation—an irreversible method of sterilization—on teenage girls from 16 to 18 years old following the birth of their first child. The report condemns such practice as genocidal and radical means to control childbirth on reserves. They explain that doctors undertook the procedure when the mother was in great pain, and often half-conscious, in the process of, or immediately after, giving birth. She was pressured into agreeing to a procedure she

⁶⁴ Atkinson et. al., *L'expérience de la Baie James*, 198.

⁶⁵ Lux, *Separate Beds*, loc. 701.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 1413.

⁶⁷ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, *The Information Bulletin*, 1988.

did not fully understand, as the doctor explained the necessity of it due to the poor sanitary and economic conditions in which the child would be raised.

QNW thus demanded the transmission of more information about less radical forms of birth control to women, as they viewed the lack of information, characteristic of the state's indifference towards Indigenous women, as an important issue in relation to this practice.⁶⁸ They further demanded the eradication of all practices considered experimental and the use of tubal ligations as a last resort in cases in which it was absolutely necessary in order to preserve the patient's health, rather than for social reasons. In such instances, the association demanded, the women must be given all necessary information, as well as one month of reflection in order to make an informed decision.⁶⁹

In her monograph entitled *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women*, Karen Stote argues that the reproduction of Indigenous women was seen by the federal state as an impediment to the colonial project. In certain cases, policies were put in place to limit their reproduction.⁷⁰ Stote further argues that such practices were directly related to the state's funding priorities and a general disregard for Indigenous lives. The colonial government's enforcement of Indigenous dependency on public services through mechanisms of population control such as Indian Affairs, Indian Hospitals and Indian Residential Schools had facilitated the state's acquisition of Indigenous lands and resources. Forced sterilizations were thus a convenient tool for the state to reduce its financial obligations by controlling population size in Indigenous communities.⁷¹ QNW's report states very clearly that Indigenous women were aware

⁶⁸ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁰ Karen Stote, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 8.

⁷¹ Stote, *An Act of Genocide*, 7.

of this phenomenon and condemned it unequivocally in the following passage: “La ligature des trompes s’est effectuée dans plusieurs reserves comme moyen radical pour le contrôle des naissances. [...] le gouvernement doit prendre les mesures nécessaires pour enrayer un tel genocide sur la nation indienne.”⁷² Using the word genocide as early as 1980 to describe their experiences in a report presented to the federal government, Indigenous women across Québec resisted fiercely to the province’s attempts at ignoring their plight.

At the same time as Euro-Canadian women were fighting to decriminalize abortion in Canada, Indigenous children were systematically abducted from their mothers and put up for adoption in white families at an unprecedented rate. In the historical Sixties Scoop, one third of Indigenous children in Canada were taken away from their families by child welfare services and given to white families for adoption, completely severing contact with the birth family.⁷³ As argued by Karen Stote, the forced sterilization of Indigenous women in Canada is part of the larger context of systemic racism inherent to the settler state and Western medicine more generally. Estimates suggest that some 1,200 Indigenous men and women were sterilized in Canada between 1970 and 1976. The patients were sterilized in federally operated institutions and the majority of them were women. Doctors often declared that the patients were mentally deficient, which waved the obligation for informed consent in order to conduct the procedure. Stote understands this phenomenon as being part of settler efforts to sever Indigenous people’s ties to the land.⁷⁴ Although a growing body of research explores this issue in Canada, no scholarship focuses on the case of Québec. The report prepared by QNW nonetheless indicated that the province was not exempt

⁷² Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 7 (my translation from the French: “Tubal ligation was performed in several reserves as a radical means to control births. [...] the government must take the necessary measures to eradicate such genocide upon the Indian nation.”).

⁷³ Chris Bruckert, and Tuulia Law, *Women and Gendered Violence in Canada: An Intersectional Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 284.

⁷⁴ Karen Stote, “Birthright Denied: The Sterilization of Indigenous Women,” *Herizon* (2017): 17.

from issues of forced sterilizations and medical racism, and that its healthcare system played an important role in perpetrating such colonial violence against Indigenous mothers.

In the Québec Ministry of Health guide, dentist Shaw states that in 1986, two hundred children were transferred to southern hospitals for the treatment of dental cavities, which he called “baby bottle caries.”⁷⁵ QNW reported cases in which the lack of funds did not permit women to accompany their ill children during emergency airplane transfers to Southern hospitals. In one of the cases, a mother waited a week before signing the papers to allow for the transfer because she feared that her child would never be handed back to her. She and the father had to pay for a stranger’s ticket for them to take the child with them on the plane. In many of these cases, the child was in critical condition, which meant that mothers might never be able to see them again.⁷⁶

The QNW report also discussed the suspicion of many Indigenous parents due to the occurrence of child removal. It mentions the case of a woman from Weymantachie who brought her sick child to the hospital to get treatment. When the illness persisted, the child was placed in a foster home in order to remain close to the hospital. The hospital staff later asked the mother to sign papers, which she could not read. They simply explained to her that the signature would give them authorization to act in the child’s best interest. Only after signing it, did she realize the form was in fact providing her consent for the adoption of her child. QNW explained that this phenomenon was not an isolated case, but rather part of a larger structure of discrimination.⁷⁷

Maureen K. Lux’s research shows that putting the children of Indigenous patients in foster homes in Southern reserves or in hospital wards was common practice in Indian Hospitals across Canada. This practice was conducted for children requiring the hospital’s services as well as for

⁷⁵ Atkinson et. al., *L’expérience de la Baie James*, 131.

⁷⁶ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 16.

⁷⁷ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 22.

those whose mothers were patients of the hospital. Children were sometimes eventually adopted by white staff.⁷⁸ Writing about the relationship between gendered violence and resource exploitation, Seneca scholar Mishuana R. Goeman states:

Civilizing the Indian was a large part of colonization, and one of the main methods of erasure was to Christianize the Indian and to change the bodily and sexual practices of tribal communities, which often had multiple genders based on roles performed rather than biological organs. Through the legislation of gendered criminality that relied on Christian doctrines, women in many Native communities lost much control over their social lives and practices and control over their bodies.⁷⁹

The scholar further argues that child removal is the product of settler policies that repudiate the existence of Indigenous family and kinship formations that do not fit settler domesticity and direct biological descent.⁸⁰ Settler colonialism's livelihood relies on the production and maintenance of what she calls "unjust geographies." According to her, Indigenous spatial justice values bodies of water, of land, and human bodies equally, and the neglect of the connection between humans and nonhumans is foundational to settler colonialism.⁸¹ Goeman further points to the link between Indigenous women's bodies as early sites of struggle in the colonization of the Americas, through which the land was portrayed as a female virgin to be fertilized by civilization.⁸² This settler fetishization of Indigenous women and of the land is echoed in Québec politicians and Hydro-Québec representatives' depiction of the North as a wild territory to be conquered and dominated for the benefit of the Southern population.

⁷⁸ Lux, *Separate Beds*, loc. 2676.

⁷⁹ Mishuana R. Goeman, "Ongoing Storms and Struggles: Gendered Violence and Resource Exploitation," in *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*, ed. Joanne Barker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 110.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 107-8.

⁸² Goeman, "Ongoing Storms and Struggles," 113.

Language Assimilation & Intergenerational Divide

One of the first things Robert Bourassa did when state involvement in the North became necessary for the sake of justifying the dams was to make French the official language in the region, which would be the language taught in schools.⁸³ Many of the communities affected only spoke their own Indigenous languages, but some had been sent to English residential schools in Ontario, as the missionaries visiting their communities and establishing missions there did not differentiate between the Ontario and the Québec Cree of James Bay. As a result, those who did speak a settler language spoke English rather than French.

Language figured as an important cause of discrimination against Indigenous patients in Québec hospitals in the QNW report.⁸⁴ The women demanded access to interpreters and claimed that the doctors were not informing them sufficiently about their diagnosis or treatment, in part due to the language and cultural barriers they faced when seeking services. In one case, a woman was held in the emergency room for eight hours, and when her husband complained about the wait, the staff replied: “Comment voulez-vous qu’on la soigne, on ne sait même pas ce qu’elle veut dire!”⁸⁵ They called not only for the increase of medical personnel dispensing services on reserves, but also for the workers to be able to adapt to the cultural setting and traditional medicine of the Cree. For that purpose, they demanded that more Cree personnel be hired and that an increased control over matters of health be exercised by the communities themselves.⁸⁶

The history of assimilation of Indigenous children in the Indian Residential School system and the prohibition of Indigenous languages enforced by these institutions illustrates the role of

⁸³ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 364.

⁸⁴ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, A.2, (my translation from the French: “How can you expect us to treat her when we don’t even know what she is saying?”).

⁸⁶ Quebec Native Women, *Mémoire*, 15.

language in severing kinship relations through enforced monoculture. Many Indigenous children who were taken away from their families to be sent to Residential school or given up for adoption lost their ability to speak their language and were unable to communicate with elders who had not learned colonizer languages. This served to undermine the parents' and elders' authority and credibility in the eyes of the younger generation, who had been taught to be ashamed of their own cultures, languages, and lineages.⁸⁷ The case of James Bay is particularly telling in this regard, as it can be read in relation to the Anglophone-Francophone rivalry in Québec.

As the province sought to maintain its distinct culture, politicians adopted several laws to foster the preservation of the French language. Among these efforts were the *Official Language Act*, adopted in 1974 to declare French the only official language in the province, and *Bill 101*, adopted in 1977, creating the *Charte de la langue Française* and requiring children of immigrants to attend French rather than English school.⁸⁸ Franco-Québécois portrayed themselves as victims of Anglo-hegemony since the British Conquest. They had legitimate historical grounds for demanding that their language and culture be protected and promoted. However, this struggle to preserve Franco-Québécois culture served to obscure Francophones' role in undermining and eroding Indigenous languages and cultures within the province. Accordingly, in the historical and cultural context outlined in the Québec Ministry of Health guide for non-Indigenous healthcare workers, no acknowledgement was made of the systematic assaults on Indigenous languages in the Indian Residential School system. It acknowledges the two residential schools that were built in the James Bay region, but does not discuss children's systematic assimilation into Judeo-

⁸⁷ See John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Indian Residential School System, 1879-1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017).

⁸⁸ Peter Gossage, and Jack I. Little, *Une Histoire du Québec: Entre tradition et modernité* (Montréal: Éditions Hurtubise, 2015), 339, 341.

Christian cultural standards. Inuit and Cree patients were systematically sent to Indian hospitals in the South to receive treatment they had not been informed about, and they were left with no means of communicating with the Francophone personnel. The Franco-Québécois struggle to preserve French thus contributed to the miscommunication between Indigenous peoples and settler staff. It exacerbated discrimination against the former and thus contributed to the perpetration of violence against Indigenous peoples.

While their land and water were undergoing rapid changes as a result of Hydro-Québec's development project, Indigenous women were excluded from official negotiations with the government, and yet they were disproportionately affected by the results of this settler encroachment on their lands. The sources examined for this chapter have shown the extent to which these women were targeted by health campaigns, as their maternity and childcare practices came under intensifying scrutiny. Bearing the brunt of their communities' health and well-being, Indigenous women, and particularly mothers, were pathologized by the patriarchal healthcare system, suffering the consequences of settler denial and colonial violence. Rivalries between the Canadian and Québec governments over control of the land, population, and resources worked to exacerbate this violence. Although they were on the forefront of major political struggles against colonialism, the literature on the James Bay and Northern Québec conflict between the provincial government and their communities obscures the importance of their resilience.

Recent events leading up to the death of Atikamek woman Joyce Echaquan in a Trois-Rivières hospital speaks volumes about the persistence of discrimination against Indigenous

women in Québec's healthcare system.⁸⁹ The blatantly racist comments of non-Indigenous hospital staff, as well as their refusal to take her condition seriously are reminiscent of the testimonies of Indigenous women in the QNW report. Uncovering the structures working to oppress and silence Indigenous women while recognizing their strength and agency in resisting colonial powers is thus essential to forming a better understanding of this process of negotiating power and the reproduction of the mechanics of discrimination enabled by settler denial.

⁸⁹ Fanny Bédard, "Joyce Echaquan: Malgré les appels répétés, Legault évite le terme racisme systémique," *Radio-Canada* online, June 10, 2020, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/espaces-autochtones/1739082/racisme-systemique-francois-legault-joyce-echaquan-atikamek>.

Chapter 3

Culinary Colonialism and the Politics of Recognition

The second wave of hydroelectric nationalization in Québec, starting in the 1960s, was tied to the provincial state's desire to open the northern frontier to civilization, and take control of the territory and administration of its Indigenous population.¹ Following the implementation of Robert Bourassa's grandiose La Grande hydroelectric dam project in the James Bay region in the early 1970s, however, Indigenous communities directly affected by the resulting ecological devastation forced the state to change its approach. The government had completely ignored their existence and their rights to the land, destroying thousands of square kilometers of their land in the name of Québec's economic emancipation. The signature of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA)* in 1975 had become a landmark of Indigenous-settler relations in the province and served to further promote the Francophone province's distinct character. However, as the state failed to meet its obligations over the course of the 1980s, the Cree and Inuit found creative ways to simultaneously address health crises within the new settlements and hold the government accountable to respect its obligations towards them.

As the massive hydroelectric development project rapidly displaced the Cree and Inuit, destroying their land and food sources, these communities were left to fend for themselves as the state pursued its plans to become an autonomous modern nation. Over the course of the 1990s, in part due to the highly mediatized conflict between the Québec government and the Kanien'kéhaka community of Kanesatake over rights to the land in 1990, which became known as the Oka crisis, issues pertaining to Indigenous rights to the land in Québec started to gain more attention. The decade was also marked by the intensification of the *souverainiste* movement, mobilizing the

¹ Stéphane Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'État Québécois, 1944-2005* (Québec: Septentrion, 2013), 355.

Franco-Québécois population around a second referendum for the secession of Québec, held in 1995.

Stéphane Savard argues that Québec's territorial integrity is threatened every time Indigenous peoples remind Québec of their presence.² The historian demonstrates Hydro-Québec's deliberate erasure of Indigenous peoples' existence from 1944 to the 1970s. The state representatives were then forced to recognize their presence as the Cree and Inuit communities took action in the face of the La Grande project and its destruction of their living spaces and ways of life. Between 1972 and 1984, the Québec government thus reluctantly recognized certain rights of Indigenous peoples and offered them integration into the Québec body-politic, all the while maintaining its full control over resource development.³ With the signature of the *JBNQA*, the Cree and Inuit were pressured into giving up their territorial rights in exchange for specific so-called privileges and symbolic participation in environmental protection and economic development organizations.⁴ This allowed the government to maintain the integrity of the province's territory and ensure its development according to the norms and priorities of the South.

Faced with intensifying criticism about the recognition of the Indigenous population's rights to the land, however, the provincial state was forced to acknowledge Indigenous grievances and to better meet its obligations towards these communities. In the James Bay and Northern Québec region, this meant working towards a better implementation of the *JBNQA*. The tools and support provided, however, remained rooted in a history of culinary colonialism, and designed to once again promote Franco-Québécois supremacy in the region. The Cree, once more, found ways

² Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état québécois*, 352.

³ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 364.

to expose the government's negligence, and used the tools designed to uphold the settler state's legitimacy to challenge its authority and assert their own sovereignty.

As part of these renewed efforts on the part of the Québec government, Santé Québec conducted another health survey among the nine Cree communities of James Bay and Northern Québec in 1991 and published, a year later, a preliminary report on its findings entitled *Santé Québec Health Survey among the Cree of James Bay*. The survey was held after Cree leaders demanded that the ministry adapt its research tools to their nation's particular cultural and historical context and more accurately analyze their health situation. It was based on the nutritional standards of the Canadian Food Guide (CFG) and measured and recorded calories, nutrient-intake, types of food eaten, and dietary habits of 400 Cree households. The preliminary report did not include any historical contextualization, and simply provided very short statements about the research findings without much analysis.

Only six years later, in 1998, would a much lengthier report entitled *A Dietary Profile of the Cree* offer greater detail on the nutritional data recorded and its interpretation. The present chapter analyzes this 100-page report on food and nutrient intake among the Cree.⁵ I argue that the deployment of settler health and nutritional standards in James Bay and Northern Québec Cree communities in the 1980s and 1990s allowed the Québec government to continue to ignore Indigenous sovereignty and pursue its resource development goals, while changing its discourse in response to the persistence of Indigenous resistance. Moving from a rhetoric of denial to one of strategic recognition allowed the state to maintain a public image of paternal benevolence. This

⁵ As part of the *JBNQA*, two different regional councils of health and social services were created, one Inuit and the other Cree. This chapter examines the deployment of nutritional science in Cree communities exclusively due to source availability, but it also discusses the role of the Inuit in resisting further encroachment on Cree and Inuit foodways.

chapter further demonstrates the Inuit and Cree's ability to harness settler science to expose the flawed logic of the modernity paradigm and to promote their own agenda of sovereignty in the face of growing Québec nationalism and resulting settler encroachment on their lands.

Masculine Expertise & Nutritional Science

Indigenous-settler relations in Québec in the later decades of the twentieth century were regulated by a settler belief in the superior power of techno-science strengthened by the rise of masculine expertise associated with the emerging modern state. In a chapter published in 2018, historian Maghda Fahrni describes the development of this phenomenon in Montreal at the turn of the twentieth century. She states that: "This knowledge, based on reason, logic, and science, was gendered masculine and was actively opposed to other kinds of knowledge, gendered feminine, namely those informed by emotion, intuition, and tradition."⁶ The development of such expertise culminated in the rise of the welfare state, through which a large-scale network of state-administered institutions would provide politicians with new ways of controlling and regulating the population. The deployment of nutritional science played an important part in this process.

During World War II, nutrition experts became a powerful tool for the state to carefully measure and calculate food rations in order to maximize its strength, both in battle and within its own borders.⁷ Historian Ian Mosby's work explores the role of male scientists and nutrition experts in promoting dietary and health ideals based on the normalization of white, middle-class, heteropatriarchal nuclear households: ideals which were grounded in the state's interest in labour

⁶ Magda Fahrni, "Early Twentieth-Century Quebec and the Construction of Masculine Technical Expertise," in *Making Men, Making History: Canadian Masculinities across Time and Place*, eds. Peter Gossage, and Robert Rutherford (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 57.

⁷ Krista Walters, "'A National Priority': Nutrition Canada's Survey and the Disciplining of Aboriginal Bodies, 1964-1975," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Marlene Epp, and Franca Iacovetta, and Valerie J. Korinek, pp. 433-451 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 445.

productivity and agricultural needs during World War II and the early postwar period.⁸ Mosby demonstrates the arbitrary character of nutritional guidelines, as the lack of significant research prevented experts from backing up their claims with sufficient evidence.⁹ The author discusses leading experts' denial of the correlation between income and nutrition, blocking any possibility for state intervention in the form of wealth re-distribution.¹⁰ Instead of addressing the structural conditions of malnutrition, they advocated for the establishment of educational programs to teach poor people how to use their available income to buy the right kinds of foods.¹¹ This growing investment in nutritional knowledge led to the creation of the Canadian Food Guide (CFG), which then became the dominant framework of reference for determining healthy eating habits associated with ideals of Canadian homemaking.

Krista Walters' research demonstrates that under the pretense of humanitarianism, the CFG was used to promote a homogenous food culture based on budgeting, efficiency, and technology, and degrade both Indigenous and immigrant foods and preparation techniques.¹² Nutrition was an important site in which these mechanisms of population control were enacted, especially in regards to Indigenous peoples, who were disproportionately targeted by these measures, as settler interests in resource exploitation called for their dislocation from the land.

The federal Indian Hospital system was part of the process of institutionalizing medical knowledge. Similar to the Indian Residential School system, the reality in these hospitals was much more gruesome than in the hospitals reserved for the settler population. Horrific experiments

⁸ Ian Mosby, "Making and Breaking Canada's Food Rules: Science, the State and the Government of Nutrition, 1942-1949." In *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Marlene Epp, and Franca Iacovetta, and Valerie J. Korinek, pp.409-32 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 409-10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 424.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 412.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹² *Ibid.*, 445.

were conducted on Indigenous patients from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, as documented in Maureen K. Lux's groundbreaking monograph *Separate Beds*. Her research testifies to the disastrous effects of yet another modern scientific institution, and shows how these hospitals caused the deaths of thousands of Indigenous peoples who were more often than not forcibly held and used as lab rats by the welfare state.¹³ Karen Stote's *An Act of Genocide* describes the ways in which the Canadian legal system targeted Indigenous women for coerced sterilization throughout that period.¹⁴ The welfare state, backed up by a biased legal system that was portrayed as fair and rational, served to marginalize, ignore, and abuse Indigenous women disproportionately.

In 1945, experts were sent to Indigenous communities and Indian Residential Schools gravely affected by malnutrition and starvation in order to conduct an unprecedented series of nutritional studies on them.¹⁵ Poor diet in these communities was the result of colonization, disruption of ecosystems, epidemic diseases introduced by newcomers, growing dependence on settler foods, and settler policies designed to free up land for their own use and dispose of Indigenous bodies as the state saw fit. Mosby's work analyzes some of these nutrition experiments, throughout which subjects were forcibly starved in order to measure the limits of the human body. One of the surveys discussed in Mosby's study took place in the James Bay region from 1947 to 1948.¹⁶ These experiments, the author argues, were more about ensuring Indigenous peoples' self-sufficiency in order to cut down on state expenses than to save the communities from starvation.¹⁷

¹³ Maureen K. Lux, *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada, 1920s-1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), Kindle, loc. 2551.

¹⁴ Karen Stote, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 7.

¹⁵ Mosby, "Making and Breaking Canada's Food Rules," 147.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

Québec utilized similar structures to promote its own agenda of resource exploitation, as the provincial state sought to compete with these techno-scientific standards of progress and development.

In the same way as federal institutions had done, Québec healthcare thus contributed to the erosion of Indigenous kinship networks that posed a challenge to the integrity of Franco-Québécois claims to sovereignty. The health issues facing Cree and Inuit communities following the construction of dams as outlined in the previous chapter were striking examples of the devastating consequences of modern development projects and their destruction of ecosystems to feed the rapidly expanding global economy. They also demonstrate the Québec government's persistent indifference towards Indigenous lives. Those who suffered the consequences of modernity most drastically were people who did not fit neatly into legal categories of citizenship, those who were considered less deserving.

Adapting Settler Nutritional Discourse

By the 1990s, the Cree had gained an important measure of influence in the management of their healthcare services. Both provincial and federal governments, however, had long delayed the fulfillment of their payment obligations under the *JBNQA*, thus preventing them from building basic infrastructures for their newly sedentary settlements. Through their active participation in the creation of their own healthcare institutions, they nonetheless used nutritional science to better articulate the impacts of hydroelectric dams on their communities with respect to settler understandings of health. Written in collaboration with members of the Cree communities as a way to ensure its cultural relevance, the 1998 dietary profile report published by Santé Québec demonstrates their influence in shifting narratives about their own health. For instance, the tools used by nutritional experts were adapted to better fit the Cree's cultural and historical context.

The original survey included three phases. The first phase consisted of face-to-face interviews conducted by Cree interviewers, the second required participants to undergo blood tests and physical measurements at a community clinic, and the third phase was a twenty-four-hour diet recall, in which participants were asked to describe all the food they had eaten in the twenty-four hours prior, including details about recipes used, quantities consumed, and dietary supplements taken.¹⁸ The study used measurement standards from the Québec Nutrition Survey, and relied on the Canadian Dietary Information system (CANDI) to categorize different foods.¹⁹ The data collected was then compared to quantities recommended in the Canadian Food Guide.²⁰

The final report mentions that the use of the Canadian Food Guide to measure the health of the Cree is not always appropriate, as certain foods considered essential to a healthy diet according to the guide, such as fruit and vegetables, were much more difficult to acquire in the region due to their high prices.²¹ The report further states: “In a northern region which has never had a dairy industry, it is not surprising that the elderly do not consume much milk or many dairy products.”²² The survey was therefore adapted, and incorporated other foods rich in calcium in order to account for the fact that people observing a more traditional diet devoid of dairy products derived this nutrient from other foods.

Furthermore, the group including meat, fish, poultry, and alternatives in the original Canadian Food Guide was renamed “meat, game, fish and birds” in order to better represent Cree foodways.²³ The Recommended Daily Allowances (RDAs) provided by Health and Welfare

¹⁸ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile of the Cree, Santé Québec Health Survey of the James Bay Cree 1991: Food and Nutrient Intake*, eds. C. Daveluy, and L. Bertrand, (Montreal: Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux, Government of Québec, 1998), 9-10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 26.

Canada were used as a basis of comparison to assess the Cree's nutrient intake. This system contains two main categories. The first one, macronutrients, includes carbohydrates, proteins and lipids, and the second one, micronutrients, contains vitamins and minerals.²⁴ The working group adapting research tools developed an additional twenty food groups to better represent Cree diets.²⁵ The Cree thus used the tools created by settlers and adapted them to their understandings of health and nutrition, creating their own technologies in the process and demonstrating the value of the traditional foodways that had been greatly affected by the construction of dams in the region.

In 1993, an annotated bibliography of the health of the Eastern James Bay Cree was compiled by the Montreal General Hospital and funded by the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB). It was intended as a means for the Cree to better assess the needs of its population and provide them with useful information to make decisions about services provided and policies enacted.²⁶ Although this meant exposing the Cree to the very structures of knowledge production that had caused them harm in the first place, using these measurements not only allowed them to adapt and use this knowledge in ways they considered relevant and valuable to them. It also allowed them to build arguments that were considered valid by the settler justice system, which proved to be their most effective recourse against these projects at the time. The judicial system was the only authority the government responded to so rapidly.

Knowing that its legitimacy and popular support relied on its respect for the judicial system and on its ability to project a public image that showed its benevolence, fairness, and rationality, the provincial government was forced to comply when its image was under threat. The Inuit and

²⁴ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁶ Montreal General Hospital, *The Health of the Eastern James Bay Cree: Annotated Bibliography*, eds. Claudette Lavallée, and Elizabeth Robinson (Montreal: Northern Quebec Module, Montreal General Hospital, 1993), iii.

Cree thus used this knowledge to adopt tactics that would attract the government's attention by threatening to uncover its disregard for Indigenous lives. The use of nutrition and health data to demonstrate the destruction involved in the government's hydroelectric project was part of the Cree's strategy to hold the government accountable.

The 1997 dietary profile further demonstrated the role of settler nutritional intervention in northern communities in degrading intergenerational kinship ties. One of the recurrent themes throughout the report was the difference between elders and the younger generations in terms of dietary preferences. Traditional foods were found to be more popular among older people, whereas store-bought foods were more popular among the youth. For instance, the survey stated that older Cree people consumed broth, a traditional source of calcium, and that young children did as well, but that children of school age tended to dislike it.²⁷ Furthermore, the survey found that younger people consumed higher quantities of white bread, rolls, pasta and rice. On the other hand, Cree aged 50 to 74 consumed more bannock. People who spent more time in the bush consumed more bannock than others. Members of the older generations, similarly, consumed less fruit and vegetables.²⁸

The consumption of milk and poultry was less common among older Cree, who preferred game and wildfowl.²⁹ Whereas older people derived most of their fat consumption from animal and game fat as well as lard, younger people relied more heavily on butter, oils, margarine, and shortening.³⁰ The latter also consumed higher quantities of soft drinks and fruit juices, whereas members of the older generations consumed more tea. People between 35 and 49 years old

²⁷ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

consumed more coffee.³¹ Children were found to consume higher quantities of milk, yoghurt, Kool-Aid, and Tang (fruit-flavoured beverage), whereas elders consumed more tea, bannock, game, wildfowl, fish, goose fat and lard. Elders did not care for the taste of dairy products, except for spreads such as CheeseWhiz. The report found that the consumption of traditional foods was low in the general population.³²

In the concluding remarks, the report pointed to a study that revealed the importance of elders in transmitting knowledge surrounding traditional food preparation, and in developing programs involving activities such as growing traditional foods in community gardens. These projects would contribute not only to the promotion of healthier diets, but also to the strengthening of social and cultural ties within the communities.³³ In the survey's 1992 preliminary report, members of the younger generations' diminishing respect for their elders, along with other issues stemming from the erosion of the communities' social fabric, such as alcoholism, conjugal and family violence, and more, figured among the various issues identified.³⁴ This acknowledgement of the changes in diets between older and younger generations shows the persistent effects of the disruption of the Cree's food supplies due to settler encroachment on their land.

From Denial to Symbolic Recognition

Despite Indigenous peoples' protests about the Québec healthcare system's poor treatment of Indigenous peoples throughout the province, and particularly women, the Santé Québec report on the dietary profile of the Cree makes no mention of the historical abuse Indigenous peoples faced at the hands of settler healthcare. This demonstrates the government's persistent refusal, well into

³¹ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 41-2.

³² *Ibid.*, 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁴ Santé Québec, *Santé Québec Health Survey among the Cree of James Bay: Features* (Montréal: Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux, 1992), 36.

the 1990s, to admit responsibility for creating the structural conditions that led to this violence. Although the government was presented with striking evidence of medical racism and institutional abuse, the Santé Québec report on the Cree's dietary habits did not acknowledge the existence of such issues and their contribution to the poor health of the communities.

In the report's introduction, various reasons for the Cree's changing dietary habits over the course of the twentieth century were identified. The first reason stated was the depletion of game, and more particularly the disappearance of great caribou herds, causing important food shortages and increasing the Cree's vulnerability to epidemic diseases.³⁵ The collapse of the fur trade economy in the 1940s was also mentioned as an important factor affecting Cree families' health.³⁶ This phenomenon, along with over-hunting and the ripple effects of settlement in Québec were felt in the north, where Indigenous elders shared stories of scarcity and starvation towards the mid-twentieth century. Around that time, Indian Affairs agents began raiding hunting camps and confiscating fishing and hunting gear under the pretense that the Cree were hunting out of season. Such regulation stemmed from settler concerns about control over land and resources. As the Cree had lived from hunting, fishing, and trapping for millennia, such intrusion by colonial governments into their territory was a precursor for a new, aggressive wave of settler encroachment on Indigenous foodways and kinship networks in the James Bay and Northern Québec area.³⁷

Over the course of the 1970s, Québec experienced an economic recession under the Bourrassa government.³⁸ With the rise of nationalist sentiments in the province and the growing support for the newly created Parti Québécois, founded in 1968 by popular television host and

³⁵ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 4.

³⁷ Cree Nation Government, "Together We Stand Firm," Vimeo, February 29, 2012, video, 1:28:00, <https://vimeo.com/37667349>.

³⁸ Peter Gossage, and Jack I. Little, *Une Histoire du Québec: Entre tradition et modernité* (Montréal: Éditions Hurtubise, 2015), 334.

beloved figure of the *souverainiste* movement René Lévesque, Bourrassa's government began to lose popular support. This climate contributed to the election of Lévesque's Parti Québécois in 1976.³⁹ After the victory of the "no" during the first referendum for the separation of Québec in 1980, as well as the failure of Lévesque's attempts at negotiating the recognition of Québec's distinct character within the context of the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in the following years, Québec's revolutionary potential was starting to wane.⁴⁰ This culminated in the reelection of Robert Bourassa in 1985.⁴¹

A year later, he announced his decision to move forward with the next phase of his hydroelectric development plans, called the Great Whale project, once again without consulting the Cree and Inuit. The thirteen-billion-dollar plan involved the construction of four new plants, which would affect seven more rivers, and ultimately result in the flooding of another 12 000 km² of land.⁴² As the Cree and Inuit were only beginning to see the full extent of the damage caused by phase one of the project, leaders organized a general assembly to discuss the matter. They chose to oppose the project, especially knowing that the building of more dams would result in even greater contamination of the fish in the area. While community leaders once again turned to the courts to voice their opposition, their previous disillusionment with the settler justice system following the signature of the *JBNQA* forced them to find alternative ways to defend their land.

In 1990, after the leaking of documents revealing Hydro-Québec's contracts with the United States for the exportation of an estimated twenty-five billion dollars worth of hydroelectricity from James Bay, community representatives also decided to draw attention from

³⁹ Gossage et. al., *Une Histoire du Québec*, 334.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁴² Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état Québécois*, 387.

New York City, the most important buyer of hydroelectricity from James Bay at the time. The Cree and Inuit built the Odeyak, a mix between a canoe and a kayak (representing the union of Cree and Inuit traditions and their relationship to waterways), to paddle down to New York City in time for Earth Day in order to protest the building of more hydro dams on their territories. The creation of the Odeyak was reminiscent of the Wampum belts used by Indigenous nations to record treaties during early colonial encounters.

In *Mère de tant d'enfants*, a documentary film honoring the place of Indigenous women in their communities released in 1977, renowned Abenaki activist and filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin described the Wampum belt as representing a canoe and a boat sailing side-by-side without interfering with each other, designating the two parties of a treaty. This served to assert the nation-to-nation relationship intended by these agreements.⁴³ This time, the Odeyak emulated the alliance of the Eeyou Cree and Inuit against the Québec government's failure to respect the non-interference clause these initial agreements entailed. The gesture drew international attention, and New York subsequently cancelled their contracts with Hydro-Québec upon being made aware that they were economically disadvantageous for them. While travelling south to the Big Apple, stopping in various towns and cities along the way to expose the injustice they were faced with due to the rising demands of the modernizing south, the Cree and Inuit promoted the idea of energy conservation. By doing so, they gained an important measure of support from the public. Indigenous leaders were thus able to use and adapt settler scientific discourse not only to denounce

⁴³ Alanis Obomsawin, "Mother of Many Children," National Film Board of Canada, 1977, video, 57:00, https://www.nfb.ca/film/mere_de_tant_denfants/.

Québec's actions, but also to propose solutions, gaining the support of important members of the scientific community.⁴⁴

In February 1994, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously ruled in favor of upholding the 1990 National Energy Board (NEB) precedent, which had required Hydro-Québec to submit development plans intended for resource exportation to a federal environmental assessment.⁴⁵ The decision overturned the previous Federal Court of Appeals' ruling in favor of Hydro-Québec's exportation of energy without reviewing the potential environmental impacts of such initiatives.⁴⁶ The Supreme Court ruling was a major setback for the Québec government, as it was forced to recognize greater federal jurisdiction over its development projects. Although this was a major victory for the Grand Council of the Cree, the court denied its request that Hydro-Québec's seven export licenses, granted by the NEB in 1990, be declared illegal.⁴⁷

Premier Bourassa was then forced to postpone the project due to the negative press it was attracting as well as to the court ruling in favour of the Cree requiring Hydro-Québec to conduct full environmental assessments prior to beginning the building stage of Great Whale. The fact that Bourassa had once again failed to conduct assessments and consult with the Cree over a decade after the signature of the *JBNQA* directly conflicted with his discourse on clean energy and sustainable development. But Hydro-Québec was under pressure to begin the project, as interest on loans was accumulating, and Bourassa was eager to start producing enough energy to justify the project in itself. The provincial state thus decided to illegally begin setting up work camps

⁴⁴ Cree Nation Government, "We Rise Up," Vimeo, September 26, 2013, video, 1:22:55, <https://vimeo.com/75493243>.

⁴⁵ Mark Clayton, "Canadian Court Ruling Heartens Native Groups," *The Christian Science Monitor* online, March 2, 1994, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1994/0302/02041.html>.

⁴⁶ D.B. Smith, "James Bay Cree Claim Victory," *Windspeaker Publication* online, 1994, <https://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/james-bay-cree-claim-victory>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

before the assessment was even conducted in order to save time. This attitude on the part of Hydro-Québec and the provincial government demonstrates their continuous disregard for Indigenous rights to the land in their race for profit, as well as their inconsistent respect for the authority of the justice system.

In the face of growing public scrutiny and criticism, however, the Québec government during the 1990s was compelled to change its discourse and began to follow Canada's postwar strategy, using Hydro-Québec as a tool for the promotion of a multicultural province during the 1990s.⁴⁸ When Cree and Inuit protests against the Great Whale project threatened to tarnish Québec's image, politicians denied responsibility and accused Indigenous leaders of lying.⁴⁹ Towards the end of the decade, Hydro-Québec would nonetheless more frequently opt to consult Indigenous communities affected by its projects in a bid to avoid the threat of further conflicts.⁵⁰ Before the early 1990s, cultural differences between Franco-Québécois and Indigenous peoples in Québec were perceived by the government as undesirable obstacles to be overcome, Québec politicians' approach started to shift towards a greater acknowledgement of cultural diversity as a strength, at least in theory.⁵¹ In practice, however, conflicting interests between the Québec state and Indigenous peoples persisted.

Cree and Inuit leaders would have to wait until 1999 for a new partnership based on the promotion of sustainable development to be written into law.⁵² Only in 2001 with the Paix des Braves would a nation-to-nation relationship be established.⁵³ Other First Nations, however, continued to be ignored by Hydro-Québec and the provincial state, testifying to Québec's

⁴⁸ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état Québécois*, 350.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁵¹ Viens, "Public Inquiry Commission," 91-92.

⁵² Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état Québécois*, 380.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 381.

consistency in denying Indigenous rights to the land.⁵⁴ In response to questions from members of the opposition about consultation with Indigenous communities when he first announced the La Grande Project in 1971, Bourassa simply claimed that it was unnecessary as they would have access to employment through the project and would therefore benefit from it. The introduction of wage labour into the communities, however, further increased their reliance on imported foods, limiting people's ability to engage in hunting and fishing.

The Dietary Profile report published by Santé Québec, by contrast, marks a departure from the idea that wage labour was beneficial to the Cree. By 1981, according to the study, one-third of the population between fifteen and sixty-four years of age consisted of waged workers. By the time the survey was conducted a decade later, only one quarter of the population over fifteen years old was spending four months or more hunting in the forest. The proportion increased with age, demonstrating the younger generations' lower level of engagement in the traditional lifestyle.⁵⁵ These data serve to demonstrate the negative effects of the introduction of wage labor into Cree communities, directly contradicting the progress-oriented idea that providing jobs would benefit them.

By the time the 1998 dietary profile of the Eeyou Cree was written, the Québec Ministry of Health had recognized the cultural and nutritional importance of traditional foodways to Cree survival. This was an important shift away from the government's initial refusal to acknowledge their value. For instance, the dietary profile report mentions the high level of fatty acids contained in fish and marine mammals, which helps prevent cardiovascular disease and cancer.⁵⁶ The report further refers to a 1994 Health Canada study confirming the high nutritional value of traditional

⁵⁴ Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l'état Québécois*, 383.

⁵⁵ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

Indigenous diets. Game's nutritional value was considered fifty percent higher than that of domestic meat.⁵⁷ Such acknowledgement of the value of Indigenous foodways points to Québec's changing attitude towards Cree and Inuit diets. But it also suggests that this value can only be measured and ascribed by western science for it to be validated in the eyes of the settler state.

Although the quality of traditional foods was long known in these communities, this type of knowledge was dismissed by the government until verified by the scientific method, the only reliable source of validation recognized by the settler culture and its modern order. By contrast, foods introduced into communities by settlers were said to have low nutritional value and were even identified as agents of illness in the survey's report. It also acknowledged the increased concentration of the population in permanent settlements, limiting reliance on traditional foodways and facilitating the introduction of commercial foods in the communities as additional vectors of dietary change in the region.⁵⁸

The data gathered showed that the Cree population consumed higher amounts of domestic meat and poultry introduced by settlers than the fish, wildfowl, and game that traditionally formed the basis of Indigenous diets in the area.⁵⁹ Most people in the communities nonetheless regarded "white people's food" as unhealthy.⁶⁰ This belief was corroborated by scientific evidence presented in the report. High cholesterol was identified as a problem among the population at large, a condition that is associated with increased consumption of commercial foods.⁶¹ Lard, for instance, one of the first food items introduced into Indigenous diets by settlers, was found to be devoid of the nutrients present in traditional sources of fat. Fruit-flavored beverages, also

⁵⁷ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 76.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

introduced by settlers, were found to be lacking in health-promoting nutrients as well.⁶² Such information directly contradicted the presumed superiority of modern foods, and thus the idea that settler science and technology offered the possibility of prosperity and infinite progress. In this case, the import of processed fats and sugars, reliant on modern technology and food production networks, were found to cause the degradation of health rather than its promotion. The Crees therefore instrumentalized nutritional standards observed by settlers to expose the contradictions of the modernity paradigm in a report based on the settler-approved scientific method, giving more weight to their arguments against mass industrial development on their territory.

The report revealed the Crees' resistance to modern conceptions of food as mere commodity by discussing its cultural value in their communities. By doing so, it challenged the settlers' scientific relationship to food and efficiency, a relationship that was grounded in a vision of progress based on maximization of productivity through the control of population as a source of labour, and land as a source of raw capital. For instance, the data showed that the commodification of traditional foods due to the shift towards wage work was perceived negatively by many, associating it with a "rupture with the traditional past."⁶³ The report also contains several passages acknowledging the links between traditional foodways, health, and attachment to the land. The report states:

Attachment to the land also seems to exert an influence on food preferences. The Whapmagoostui Cree view their identity as one associated with the land and traditional food. Traditional food is seen as a basic prerequisite for good health, which unites a sense of well-being and vitality with resources that come from the land, the provider. From this point of view, 'white man's' food is unhealthy. [...] It should be understood that in a period of cultural dislocation, the Cree's deep attachment to traditional food has a meaning that goes far beyond the immediate satisfaction of physiological or nutritional needs.⁶⁴

⁶² Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 88.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

This passage demonstrates a vision of food that was tied to both social and ecological networks, giving value to relationships between the people and the land that modern food production networks had severed in the name of abundance. The market economy did not recognize the value of these relationships, which facilitated the implementation of projects that altered ecosystems for profit. The growth of the environmentalist movement in the seventies and eighties, however, led to the recognition of the value of the land and wildlife, albeit maintaining a paternalistic view of humans' relationship to nature, one in which humans ought to protect a fragile, pristine natural world.

Colonial Environmental Protection & Interconnected Foodways

The analysis presented in *A Dietary Profile* demonstrates the Québec state's acknowledgement of the impact of hydroelectric development on Cree foodways and health. This idea ran counter to the state's persistence in depicting hydroelectric power as a source of clean energy throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It therefore further demonstrates Québec's shifting strategy from one of denial to one of symbolic recognition towards the end of the 1990s. The report stated:

The geography of the land and development projects also have an impact on diet. [...] In certain areas of Canada, including Québec and Ontario, the liver of wild game is unfit for human consumption because it contains heavy metals such as cadmium. In addition, industrial pollution has led to high levels of mercury and other toxic waste in the flesh of certain fish species. It is even advised that pregnant women in certain communities should completely avoid eating fish. (Health Canada, 1994) Mercury pollution, caused by the hydroelectric dams in the James Bay region, has exposed certain consumers of fish to this toxic substance. In the areas surrounding the large facilities at La Grande (LG1) and La Grande 2 (LG2), consumption of any fish is forbidden.⁶⁵

Although the nutritional value of Indigenous food items was recognized in the report, their contribution to the development of a distinct Franco-Québécois diet in earlier times was ignored.

⁶⁵ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 23-4.

Indigenous foodways played a major role in helping settlers adapt to their new environment during the early stages of colonization. Taking a closer look at the history of wildlife conservation in Québec highlights some of the ways in which Franco-Québécois and Indigenous foodways were intertwined since early colonization. In the first chapter of his monograph *Wildlife, Conservation, and Conflict in Quebec, 1840-1914*, historian Darcy Ingram's work also describes the importance of hunting and fishing a plethora of wild species to the diet of French Canadians well into the nineteenth century. Settler diets were intertwined with the environment and with Indigenous foodways, forming what Marlene Epp describes as a hybrid diet.⁶⁶

Rich and nutritious cultivated foods produced and consumed by Indigenous populations across the Americas such as the three sisters – corn, beans, and squash – were also incorporated into European diets and exported to the Old World.⁶⁷ The turn towards industrial food production, however, radically changed settlers' relationship to food, and eventually led to the relegation of Indigenous food cultures to the realm of tradition, one that ran counter to the logic of modernity. As masculine ideals began to shift from the pioneer who braved the wilderness and adapted to its conditions in the early stages of colonization to the modern expert who carefully manipulated and tamed nature to serve its interests, the practice of hunting and fishing for subsistence became increasingly viewed as less civilized. These activities would be reserved to wealthy men, following the British tradition of sport hunting.⁶⁸

Ingram's study demonstrates the development of a state-administered private system of wildlife conservation in Québec.⁶⁹ His research shows how the promotion of the

⁶⁶ Marlene Epp, "Eating Across Borders: Reading Immigrant Cookbooks," *Social History* 49, no. 96 (2015): 52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁸ Darcy Ingram, "The New Regulatory Environment," in *Wildlife, Conservation and Conflict in Quebec, 1840-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 42.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

institutionalization of fishing and hunting practices by elites who promoted sport hunting were part of a broader agenda of imposing new modes of production in the colony, and, by the same token, eliminating the hunter-gatherer economy.⁷⁰ He further argues that the growing interest of sportsmen in regulating game and fish was anchored in their deeply paternalistic worldview, and reflected their understanding of the place of fish and game in society.⁷¹ This movement, according to the author, sprung from a growing awareness of humans' ability to drive species to extinction towards the mid-1800s.⁷² This concern was rooted in a desire to maximize land productivity, as hunting and fishing were seen as ways to utilize resources on land that had little agricultural potential.⁷³

Protection measures were thus aimed at increasing the yield of fish and game resources to secure food, which would in turn promote settlement and economic development of a larger territory, and contribute to maintaining social order within the colony.⁷⁴ One of the major groups involved in this movement was the Natural History Society of Montreal (NHSM). Created in 1828, it was an intellectual group whose main interest was to promote science, industrialization, economics, colonial nationalism and industrialization. As part of its activities, the NHSM compiled and classified animal species native to North America throughout the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ The relationship of settlers to environmental protection was thus inscribed in a progress-oriented framework in which nature served human interests and was managed and controlled as a way to promote the growth of an industrial, capitalist economy. The development of the North of Québec over a century later would in many ways echo this attitude towards environmental protection.

⁷⁰ Ingram, "The New Regulatory Environment," 36.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

While growing environmental awareness across the western world positioned modern states as benevolent protectors of wildlife and the natural world throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Cree's technological contributions were a direct contradiction to the modern-traditional dichotomy from which settler governance institutions derived their legitimacy. The late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by the rise of a new way of understanding humans' relationship to nature across the western world. The concept of sustainable development, emerging in the early 1980s, started to influence the ways in which modern nations perceived technological development. Industrial projects increasingly had to respond to standards of environmental protection as citizens, scientists and Indigenous groups contested the destructive nature of large-scale modernization projects.

The *JBNQA* (and later the Paix des Braves) was portrayed by politicians as the proof of Québec's benevolence towards Indigenous peoples and its avant-garde environmental consciousness, consolidating the vision of a distinct and competitive Franco-Québécois nation in the race towards modernization. The deployment of nutritional science as well as the dismissal of the connection between Québec and Cree foodways can thus be understood as part of the continuity of elevating knowledge that was considered simultaneously distinctly Québécois and European in origins over Indigenous knowledge and technology.

The linguistic conflation of settler and modern in describing knowledge is imbued with the notion of settler superiority, as modernity implies a linear progression of time and a rupture from a traditional past. This in turn suggests that cultures that do not fit settler standards – Indigenous in this particular case – are perceived as less advanced, and therefore of lesser value. Their worth then becomes, according to this framework, tied to a sense of nostalgia, calling for the need of modern society to ensure their protection. They become commodities, serving the state's need to

project a positive image to conceal the devastating effects of its modern development projects, and allowing for it to remain idle in the face of these very communities' demands for retribution. Economic development for the South could thus, in this scenario, safely remain the government's ultimate, non-negotiable, and legitimate priority.

Maintaining Settler Forms of Governance

The report's recommendations in addressing health issues in northern communities point to the Québec government's reluctance to address solutions involving land and resource distribution or governance structures that would threaten the settler state's dominance. In avoiding this issue, the Québec state was able to project a benevolent image in response to growing public criticism of its earlier practices, while offering partial solutions to offset health problems among Cree communities. For instance, the report recommended higher intake of calcium and vitamin A for the whole population, vitamin C and folic acid for elders, iron for women between 18 and 34 years of age, and vitamin D for women 50 to 74 years old. It also recommended that health education be aimed at facilitating these changes and promoting better nutrition.⁷⁶

The report found that the Cree no longer seemed to consume wild roots, indigenous plants, or the contents of caribou stomach, which were great sources of carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals.⁷⁷ In response to this issue, the recommendations included more intervention programs to promote consumption of specific foods, such as wild roots and indigenous vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and dairy products. A nutritional intervention strategy including the promotion of information about cooking methods, the nutritional value of various foods, the importance of maintaining a diverse diet, the benefits of exercise, as well as the merits of eating several balanced

⁷⁶ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 88.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

meals a day, was proposed as a solution to nutritional deficiencies among the population.⁷⁸ Managing a food budget and knowledge of food preparation techniques were considered to be lacking, especially among the youth. Research participants suggested workshops and classes as solutions to this issue.⁷⁹ These solutions proved convenient for the provincial government, as they required Indigenous peoples to adapt to modern nutritional standards instead of forcing the state to rethink its distribution of land and resources.

A Dietary Profile highlighted the inadequacy of the modern food-production and distribution systems in northern communities, but it offered solutions that involved further intrusion of modern settler foods into Indigenous diets rather than addressing the theft of land and resources perpetrated by the settler state. The high cost associated with fresh food such as fruit and vegetables was considered a hindrance to attempts at incorporating foods with higher nutritional content into people's diets. The report acknowledged the relationship between household income, geographic access, and dietary choices. It mentioned the high costs associated with the shipping of food to remote northern communities, and recognized that many did not have sufficient funds to purchase food before their pay cheque came.

The report posed the following questions: "Does a paying job interfere with or supplant activities related to a larger consumption of traditional food? Is it accompanied by better nutrition found in store-bought foods? In brief, what changes in the diet have occurred as a result of this economic transformation?"⁸⁰ Although this shifting attitude points to the increasing awareness about the negative effects of the incorporation of Cree communities to the settler economy, the report simply states in response that answers to these questions have not been found. Further

⁷⁸ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 89.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

studies on the relationship between food consumption and income were thus recommended, and larger issues involving the commodification of food and introduction of wage labour into Cree communities conveniently avoided.⁸¹ For instance, demands that subsidies for air transportation of essential foods be maintained in order to allow for relief measures to be effective were also stated.⁸² The increased use of airplanes in the postwar years, however, was presented in the report's introduction as an "impetus to dietary acculturation."⁸³ Such solutions did not threaten the pursuit of settler economic interests in the region or the integrity of the Québec territory, but rather offered an opportunity for settler institutions and scientific knowledge to further penetrate into Cree communities. These measures remained rooted in the very institutions that historically worked to promote settler colonial encroachment on Indigenous foodways and kinship ties. This proposal, therefore, allowed for the colonial project to continue in exchange for limited recognition, sanctioning the dominance of settler modes of governance.

Although Cree negotiators managed to safeguard an important degree of control over these structures over time through persistent protest and legal action against the Québec state, the very framework through which the Cree were forced to operate did not recognize traditional governance structures beyond symbolic acknowledgement. The report also failed to mention that the two decades following the signature of the *JBNQA* were marked by both federal and provincial governments' withholding of compensation payments, which prevented communities from building the basic structures they needed for survival in a permanent settlement.⁸⁴ While the signature of the Paix des Braves occupied public attention with its promise of reconciliation and

⁸¹ Santé Québec, *A Dietary Profile*, 89.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴ Cree Nation Government, "Delivering the Promise," Vimeo, May 3, 2012, video, 1:24:46, <https://vimeo.com/41494497>.

mutual respect in 2002, some twenty-seven years after the signature of the *JBNQA*, the Québec state passed a bill that would transfer governance powers from the Cree Council to the French-Canadian mayors of the settler towns in the region, without consulting the Cree.⁸⁵ The government therefore maintained a measure of power over the Cree that would safeguard its status as dominant governing body. The land, resources, and population remained subordinated to settler modes of governance, production, and distribution through legal loopholes to an extent that satisfied the provincial state's ability to pursue its modernization project while simultaneously portraying itself as benevolent and accommodating to Indigenous communities.

Examining the role of nutrition in the process of colonizing foodways provides a useful window onto settler colonial dissociation of humans from nature through the organization and compartmentalization of knowledge according to Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal values, allowing for the erasure, invalidation, or appropriation of the contribution of actors considered to belong to lesser categories (Indigenous, black, immigrant, female, nonhuman, etc.) to knowledge production. Although it repeatedly stated the importance of traditional foods to Cree health, the conclusions of Santé Québec's 1998 report on the dietary profile of the Cree failed to consider the most important factor in maintaining Cree foodways: rights to the land and distribution of resources. This attitude is consistent with the provincial and federal governments' efforts at promoting and maintaining a positive public image while consistently resisting any attempts from the Inuit and Cree at asserting their rights to the land.

⁸⁵ Cree Nation Government, "Our Way, Our Future," Vimeo, March 15, 2016, video, 1:29:09, <https://vimeo.com/159068116>.

Towards the end of the 1990s, Québec moved from an attitude of disregard to one of paternalistic recognition. The provincial state, in other words, maintained a benevolent image while pursuing its economic and political interests at the expense of Indigenous peoples' livelihoods. The Cree, along with other First Nations in the province, continued to threaten the government with lawsuits and to attract media attention to pressure the settler government into providing them with minimal compensation. Québec continued to pride itself for the concessions it was forced to make in order to maintain its electorate, all the while firmly holding on to the status quo. Hydro-Québec served as a tool for reframing the state's role in negotiating Indigenous-settler relations in the province in a way that intended to reassure the Franco-Québécois population of its position as righteous owners of the land and its resources.

Epilogue

Making Way for New Earthscapes

The *Mouvement des Jeunes Souverainistes* currently claims 2,300 members in Québec. This separatist youth group maintains that the values held by the Québécois nation are fundamentally different from those of the rest of Canada. Some mention the necessity to break away from the oil and gas economy promoted by the federal government. In the current context, discourses about the distinct character of Québec are regaining popularity, as some argue that Québec would be better equipped to face the climate crisis free from its political bondage to Canada.¹ In a recent interview, one of their members, Charlotte Massue, stated: “On a tous le même but commun d’un Québec plus vert, plus inclusive, et en somme plus libre.”² But is the province really that different? Does the majority of Québec share this vision?

The current governance structures in Canada are based on colonial systems rooted in discrimination. Following the gruesome discovery of the remains of over 1,500 Indigenous children buried in unmarked graves on the sites of Indian Residential Schools across Canada,³ the Trudeau government’s latest appointment of Inuk woman from Nunavik Mary Simon to the position of Governor General of Canada – whose mandate, ironically, is to represent the Queen of England – serves to demonstrate the federal government’s pursuit of its politics of symbolic recognition.⁴ Indeed, despite the current Prime Minister’s charisma, his expression of regret for

¹ “Ces jeunes qui rêvent d’un 3e référendum,” *Rad*, October 30, 2020, video, 3 :23, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iy_etSK1Ko8.

² *Ibid.*, (my translation from the French: “We all have the same goal of working towards a greener, more inclusive, and ultimately freer Québec.”).

³ Paula Newton, “More Unmarked Graves Discovered in British Columbia at a Former Indigenous Residential School Know as ‘Canada’s Alcatraz,’” *CNN* online, July 13, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/13/americas/canada-unmarked-indigenous-graves/index.html>.

⁴ Catharine Tunney and John Paul Tasker, “Inuk Leader Mary Simon Named Canada’s 1st Indigenous Governor General,” *CBC News*, July 6, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-gg-mary-simon-1.6091376>.

Canada's colonial past, and his promises to make necessary changes towards reconciliation, the Trudeau administration's track record in regard to Indigenous peoples reveals its persistent resistance to change and its relentless pursuit of violent colonial policies, especially when it comes to resource exploitation on Indigenous lands. His electoral platform based on a discourse of multiculturalism, diversity, and equality serves to obscure the present realities of Indigenous peoples and to soothe the guilt of the non-Indigenous population while the state pursues its capitalist agenda.

Whatever the young sovereignists may believe, the Québec governmental structures are rooted in similarly discriminatory modern ideals, and the Francophone province's claims to difference serve to obscure its own role in perpetrating colonial violence. Even outside of the Canadian body-politic, the province needs to take a hard look at its own history and to recognize the role of the Franco-Québécois population in creating these issues. This is fundamental to the process of creating new alternatives for the future.

This thesis has sought to uncover some of the contradictions in the rhetoric of exception adopted by Francophones in the province. Current conversations surrounding hydroelectric resources and the environment among the Franco-Québécois population continue to revolve around the concepts of wealth (*richesses*) and heritage (*patrimoine*). These terms are imbued with the idea that French Canadian settlers gained ownership of the territory through inheritance, thereby implying an erasure of the very existence of Indigenous sovereignty and governance structures from our memories. Sophie Brochu, current CEO of Hydro-Québec, continues to perpetuate the myth of hydroelectricity as a clean form of energy. Describing it as green energy (*énergie verte*), she maintains that the James Bay development in the 1970s was an ingenious idea

that allowed Québec's energy sector to become environmentally sustainable.⁵ Hydro-Québec's advertising campaigns now promote a transition towards electric vehicles as a viable solution for the future. However, Indigenous peoples are still left out of these conversations, and the idea of green energy remains obscure in public discourse about potential futures.

Despite several controversies throughout its history, Hydro-Québec's status remains very much tied to the promotion of Québec as a distinct, progressive nation in the face of the current climate crisis. In 2016, actress Christine Beaulieu's play entitled *J'aime Hydro* became a major success. It discussed Hydro-Québec's destruction of ecosystems, and criticized its involvement with foreign investors. The play promoted the idea that Hydro-Québec was the foundation of Québec's distinct character, and advocated for a better protection of natural resources in terms of protection of Franco-Québécois heritage. Such discourse further promotes the idea that the land and resources belong to the French population, a myth that obscures the violence and dispossession inherent to the foundation of the province. Considering potential avenues for the future requires recognizing this violence and its perpetuation by the provincial institutions.

In the wake of the tragic murder of a black man, George Floyd, at the hands of Minneapolis police officers in the United States in May 2020, which sparked intense reactions across the world and propelled the Black Lives Matter movement to new heights, Québec Premier François Legault reassured the public, claiming that systemic racism did not exist in the province.⁶ This statement came just a few months after a 486-page report was published by the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Québec, revealing the

⁵ "Sans Filtre #157 – Sophie Brochu, PDG d'Hydro-Québec – Repenser l'énergie & Réparer les erreurs," Sans Filtre Podcast, video, 1 :52 :25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HtUMKyQisM>.

⁶ Fanny Lévesque, "Rapport de la Commission Viens, un an plus tard: 'Encore à la case départ,'" *La Presse*, Septembre 28, 2020, <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/2020-09-28/rapport-de-la-commission-viens-un-an-plus-tard/encore-a-la-case-depart.php>.

systemic discrimination against Indigenous people perpetrated by provincial institutions and officials. The report stated that “[...] by building unwarranted bridges, and dams that were deemed necessary and reassuring—public services intruded into territories with no understanding of their true nature. Territories with sensitive issues at stake, including physical and mental health, justice and parent-child relations.”⁷ The commissioner outlined 142 recommendations for action in response to the issues identified in the inquiry. A year later, Viviane Michel, president of Quebec Native Women, claimed that nothing had changed since the report’s publication, despite Legault’s public apology on behalf of his government a few days after its release.

The Commission was put in place after several Indigenous women living in the Val d’Or region came forward to denounce the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse they were subjected to on a regular basis by the police force on the basis of their indigeneity. The remains of Indigenous woman Jeannie Poucachiche were found on the side of highway 117 in 2003, the day of her twentieth birthday. In 2014, Algonquin woman Sindy Ruperthouse was reported missing. She has not been found since, and when reporters visited her parents to inquire about her disappearance, they were told that police had not even bothered to contact Ruperthouse’s family for the investigation. These events, among others, prompted the women of Val d’Or to speak out.⁸ Of the 14 police files that were under investigation, eight led to further investigation, while the officers in question were sent away on paid administrative leave. No prosecutions were made, and most of the officers have returned to work since.

⁷ Jacques Viens, “Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Québec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress, Final Report” (public inquiry report, Québec, 2019), 7.

⁸ “A Case of a Missing Indigenous Woman in Val d’Or, Quebec, led to another shocking story,” *CBC News* online, December 12, 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/investigation-into-val-d-or-now-available-in-english-1.3362534>.

These incidents are part of the larger issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit persons plaguing Canada today. As part of his electoral platform, Justin Trudeau had promised to open an inquiry into these deaths and disappearances, which led to the release of a final report in June 2019. It included a separate report for the province of Québec, and accused the Canadian government of perpetrating a genocide against Indigenous peoples. No other province received the same level of scrutiny in the inquiry. The Legault government presented Bill 96 last May, aiming to reform the French Language Charter (Bill 101) to counter recent setbacks in the protection of French in the province. The bill aims to amend the Constitution to designate French as the only official language in the province.⁹ Such efforts to revitalize French with are rooted in the perceived importance of remembering our past. This thesis is thus intended as a proposition to not only remember our past, but also to revisit the ways in which we remember it.

Nutrition is one of the many conduits through which settler colonial cultures operate and reproduce themselves by deflecting blame and responsibility for the ills plaguing Indigenous communities in regard to Indigenous women. Connecting the case of Indigenous women's experiences of the Québec Healthcare system to global dynamics of heteropatriarchal environmental racism serves to acknowledge the role of intersectional hierarchies of imperialism in the current planetary crisis. More recent events testifying to the intensification of the climate crisis have sparked public outcry for world leaders to take serious action to fight against the destructive effects of pollution. In an excerpt of a study conducted by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, climate economist Nicholas Stern declared that the

⁹ Stéphane Bordeleau, « Québec dépose sa réforme de la loi 101 pour 'porter le flambeau avec fierté', » *Radio-Canada*, May 13, 2021, https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1792778/reforme-loi-101-depot-quebec-jolin-barrette?utm_campaign=later-linkinbio-radpointca&utm_content=later-17145312&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkin.bio.

world is facing complex interconnected challenges, and that unless these challenges are addressed simultaneously, none will be resolved. The full 4000-page report is due for publication in 2022 and is intended to guide future political decisions in order to minimize the damage caused by human overconsumption.

Indigenous peoples have long been on the receiving end of the scarcity and contamination created by modern development projects like the La Grande hydroelectric complex. For decades now they have criticized settler environmental abuse and actively resisted the destruction of ecosystems. The case of Wet'suwet'en in British Columbia, where the Trudeau government trespassed on Indigenous territory to build a pipeline against the will of its Indigenous custodians demonstrates the government's refusal to transition from the oil and gas economy towards renewable alternatives. Severing Indigenous kinship ties continues to be the means through which settler states seek to renew the hierarchies of domination upon which they thrive—albeit with much anxiety. From Canada's dumping of garbage in countries of the global South, to its continued commitment to fossil fuel and the construction of pipelines that periodically spill on Indigenous lands, the politics of the refugee crisis, sweatshops in Asia, the reaches of the imperial doctrines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and species continue to operate under the guise of progress and liberalism on a global scale, and continue to be challenged by those it seeks to silence. In light of these issues, it is all the more important for historians and other scholars and activists to continue to uncover the hypocrisy of the colonial system.

Maamuitaau, a documentary series produced by the James Bay Cree communities to bring Cree stories to life, is a direct example of the continuity of Indigenous resilience and ingenuity. An impressive number of episodes from the 37-season series are dedicated to elders sharing traditional knowledge, often featuring women teaching viewers traditional recipes and food

preparation techniques to ensure that invaluable knowledge is passed down to the youth. In creating the conditions to foster intergenerational bonds that have been under colonial assault ever since early colonization, notably due to the assimilation agenda of residential schools, Indian Hospitals, and the foster care system, their hope is that future generations will know how to care for the land and survive outside the framework of wage labour, recognizing, honouring and embracing the value of Indigenous cultures, technology, and knowledge. Kinship is thereby actively restored despite continued state encroachment on Indigenous land and the persistence of institutional structures of genocide across the settler colonial world. The silencing of Québec's responsibility in perpetrating historical trauma facilitates the reproduction of such colonial violence and inequalities. Uncovering the working of these dynamics is a major step towards forming new relations between settler and Indigenous populations as well as between humans and nonhumans.

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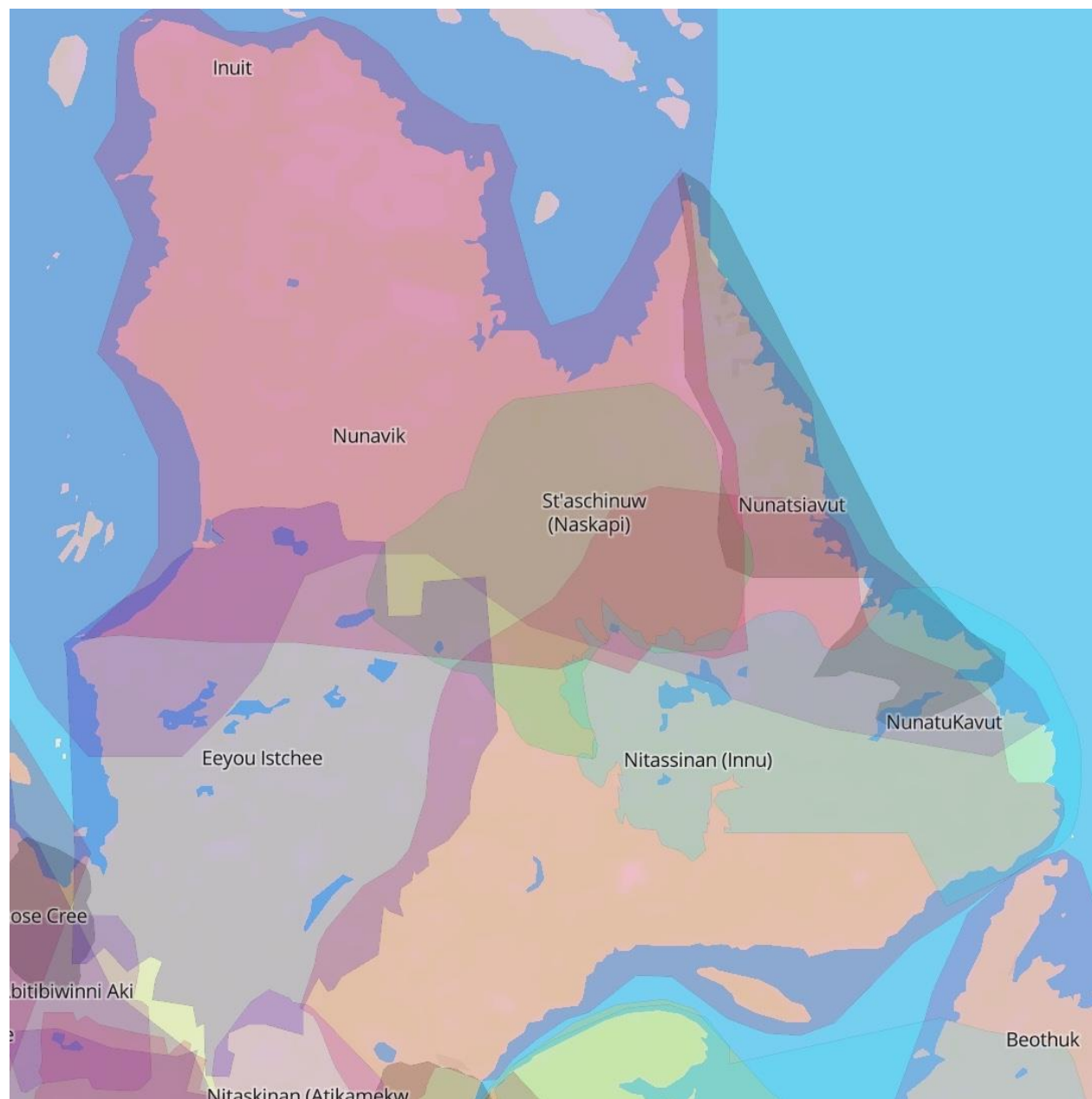
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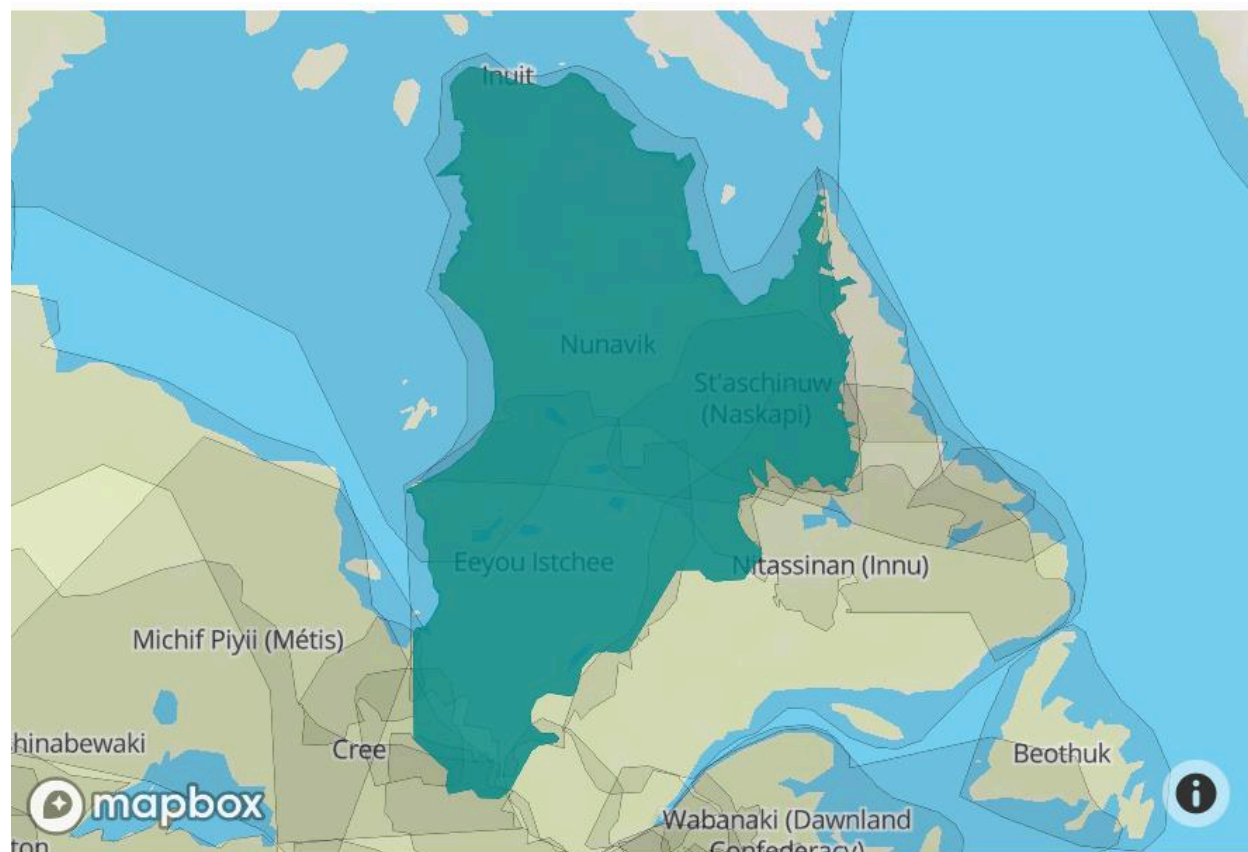
Appendix I



Indigenous territories within Québec borders

Map by Native Land Digital, retrieved from <https://native-land.ca>

Appendix II



Territory covered by the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement

Map by Native Land Digital, retrieved from <https://native-land.ca>