

# It Flows/Runs Wildly/Crazily: Unravelling Settler Legacies on Stolen Mi'kmaq Land

by Sadie Beaton

Carrying many generations of settler land relations in Mi'kma'ki, Sadie Beaton is a listener, activist and PhD candidate currently living in Mtaban (Wolfville). Drawing on her own ancestral histories, her research engages with embodied archival practices, Indigenous politics of water, and collaborative storytelling to trouble the pioneer lies that stifle settler imaginations about what kinds of relations and futures are possible on these lands and waters. Her practices yearn in the direction of repair, responsibility, and liveable futures here.

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My mother went into labour in a crowded gym at Canso High School. Folksinger Stan Rogers was playing a kind of hometown show in a place long called Kamsook, in Eskikewaq. Though he'd been born in Ontario, Rogers spent summers on this shoreline with extended family, absorbing stories of hard-working fishermen and woodsmen. I bet half the audience was in tears, hearing their stories of blood and toil transfigured into folk hero ballads like "Make and Break Harbour" and "Fogarty's Cove." It was into these minor chords, wistful for an already fading lifeway, in an already dying town, that my mother's water broke and I was stirred into life in Mi'kmaq territory.

For most of my life, I didn't wonder what it meant to belong on the lands where my white, settler family have made their lives and told their stories over many generations. I spent my childhood feeling deeply connected to this rugged territory on the edge of the Atlantic, chasing mte'skm (snakes), picking klitaw (raspberries), catching aboodawejit (sculpins), and building forts out of moss and deadfall. Like many who grew up in in Eskikewaq, I also inherited a nostalgia for the hard-scrap livings so many of us must eke out in order to "belong." And I spent almost two decades at an environmental organization advocating for the kinds of fisheries, forestry, and climate policies that I hoped might secure sustainable futures here.

Until recently, I didn't recognize my home as Mi'kma'ki, the unsundered territory of the L'nu (or Mi'kmaq). I didn't associate the ever-expanding clearcuts or spectacular collapse of the cod fisheries that shaped my Eskikewaq childhood with broken treaty relations. For most of my career, I didn't even know that there *were* Peace and Friendship Treaties, let alone how the social and environmental crises raging around me related to Mi'kmaw people being hindered from their relational obligations.

Mi'kmaq rights and responsibilities are affirmed by the Peace and Friendship Treaties, which never ceded legal title to their lands and waters to the British crown or the Canadian state and guaranteed L'nu the liberty to hunt, fish, and trade as they had always done (Battiste 2016; Henderson 2001; Paul 2022). In 1725, Mi'kmaq Nation entered into a Treaty relationship with the arriving British settlers with an intention to extend a familial alliance and share Mi'kma'ki's bounty (Pictou 2019; Battiste 2016; Wicken 2012). Negotiated before Britain had secured a strong colonial foothold here, these agreements make no mention of land surrender and required the crown to obtain Mi'kmaq consent before building new settlements (Henderson 2001; Pictou 2017; Steigman and Pictou 2023; Wicken 2002).

Treaty scholars insist that the full significance of these agreements is not found in the static text but in what L'nu legal scholar Tuma Toun (2016) names as the L'nuwey Tplutaqan, the laws or justice systems of the Mi'kmaq. The Tplutaqan derives from “the sounds and sights of the sacred L'nu ecological spaces” and is fully expressed in the language, stories, and ceremonies that include the foundational concepts of M'sit No'kmaq, Netukulimk, and Tpi'tnewey (Denny and Fanning 2016; Henderson 2001; *M'sit No'kmaq* et al. 2022, 839; Prosper et al. 2011; Young 2016). These embedded Mi'kmaq philosophies express a generous and deeply relational way of knowing, co-created by an extensive web of human and more-than-human relationships that includes the lands and waters, as well as ancestors and future generations (Bernard 2018; *M'sit No'kmaq* et al. 2022; Sable and Francis 2012; Young 2016). As a settler, it is important both to acknowledge and to stay humble about these L'nu concepts because, as Young (2016) cautions, a full understanding of Tplutaqan is impossible without understanding Mi'kmaq cosmologies, which are embedded in the language.

Robin Cavanaugh and Alfred Metallic (2002) describe the relational basis of the treaties as an “extended family system ideology whereby we enter into sacred agreement for the purposes of extending our interconnectedness and interdependency with each other” (quoted in Pictou 2019, 51; see also Battiste 2016; Henderson 2001; Young 2016). As L'nu scholar, activist, and Honorary District Chief, Sherry Pictou (2019) explains that Mi'kmaq practices of treaty-making, which long precede colonization, have long been “informed by principles of mutual responsibility, obligation, and interdependence” (51; see also Battiste 2016; Henderson 2001). These relational blueprints allowed for settlement to occur, bringing settlers into a wider web of existing relationships and responsibilities (Battiste 2016; Pictou 2019; Young 2016). As Mi'kmaw Water Protector Kiju Kukuwes Wowkwis has summarized, “We made Treaties for you [settlers] to live off the land and for all of us to live together in harmony and peace, as long as you don't mess with the environment, plain and simple” (in Beaton 2018).

It was only after I became involved in the Treaty Truckhouse Resistance, a Mi'kmaw-led struggle against a proposed natural gas storage project, that I began to understand Mi'kma'ki as "a space of multiple and overlapping colonial violences since 1604" (Wysote and Morton 2019, 480). The more time I spent in this resurgent geography along the Sipekne'katik River, the more I began to suspect that my inherited settler worldviews were not equipped for sustaining life here (Estes 2019). Mi'kmaw Water Protectors up-ended everything I thought I knew about caretaking the lands and waters. They showed me that what threatens "the environment" is not just broken policies but broken land relations that stem from settler colonialism, an invasive structure that requires ongoing dispossession of Mi'kmaw lands for settler use (Coulthard and Simpson 2016; Pictou 2019; Veracini 2011; Wolfe 2006).

I've started bringing my mother to visit places where our settler ancestors once walked. Recently, we followed my great grandfather's steps to Sheet Harbour, where dark mineral waters from the East and West River churn through Eskikewaq's rocky topography, traversing a provincial game sanctuary, around the ruins of old mills and dams built for driving logs and through newer dams built for generating electricity for Nova Scotia Power. According to the Community Museum, the Mi'kmaq call this place where the two rivers meet to flow together Weijooik, meaning, "flows/runs wildly/crazily."

"Settler" is a relational term for someone who makes Indigenous land "their home and source of capital," most often describing those of us from "the European-descended sociopolitical majority" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). Scholars trouble over this imperfect label, which arguably either obscures or makes overly special the role of whiteness, social class, modes of arrival, and other complex factors (e.g., Byrd 2011; Fung 2021; King 2016; Phung 2011; Razack 2002; Trask 2000; Ward 2015). But the term generally sums up my lineage in Mi'kma'ki, situating me into both a set of predictable behaviours and a tight relationship with ongoing land theft (Macoun 2016; Tuck and Yang 2012; Whyte 2020).

My mother is taken by Weijooik's dark eddies and asks to stop roadside several times. She wants to look, to smell, and to remember. We even trespass onto an old camp property where her grandfather worked. I'm glad to stop and listen to the memories the water provokes. Some of it is reverie, like reckless play at the hydropower dam. But there's painful memories too.

Anishnaabe-Ukrainian writer Patty Krawec reminds us that "being a settler is not something you are, it is something you do" (Krawec 2022, 178). But I'm learning that settlers like me continue to be appalling relatives, not so much because of any conscious choosing but because colonialism depends on us to continue betraying relationality (Shotwell 2016; see also Tallbear 2019). Settler land relations are contingent on a continued reproduction of what settler and Mi'kmaq researchers Travis Wysote and Erin Morton (2019) have dubbed the "pioneer lie," a deeply embodied structure of feeling that cuts off settler curiosity and obscures Indigenous jurisdiction, effectively normalizing exclusive settler entitlement to the lands and waters (Mackey 2016; Rifkin 2011 after Williams 1958).

Navigating potholes and roadkill, and my mother's childhood anecdotes, there are moments I feel something of the violence of ongoing dispossession ripple through me. The clearcuts everywhere. The abandoned camps. And something mom said about why her brother could never shoot a deer. What he had seen and the ways he felt responsible.

The car radio reports on massacres in Palestine. There is silence in the car.

Feminist writer Donna Haraway contends that for those of us concerned with broken relations, "our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (Haraway 2016, 1). Responding to nudges from Mi'kmaw comrades and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I have begun disturbing the surface of my own family's story of colonial settlement. Considering that my broke-ass "pioneer" heritage is typical of many white settlers making home here, my re-

search traces the emergence of settler land relations in Mi'kma'ki through my own family lore. I'm wondering what becomes possible when we tease out stories that highlight rather than obscure the deep mess of choices we're entangled with: stories from the archive, the land, and our everyday relationships, stories that deflate the entitled pioneer lie of *terra nullius* (Wysote and Morton 2019).

This essay attempts to share some of my emergent practices—some academic and some not-so-much—that tug at the tight mechanics of my inherited settler logics. I've been informing myself with anticolonial research practices across many disciplines and landscapes as “a practice of affirmation, repair and resurgence, looking upstream to see structures of violence” (Liberion 2021, 137). But I'm also kinda making it up as I go along because there is something that beckons beyond the .pdfs, reels of microfiche, and even the Truckhouse teachings. There is spooky magic to consider, too, when I get lost on the way to museums, encounter animals on moonlight paths, or visit graveyards with my mom. And I'm becoming convinced that noticing this is part of contending with the colonial archives stored in storied settler bodies like mine.

I lay tobacco at the Weijooik's edge, as requested by my friend and mentor Cathy, whose Mi'kmaw ancestors long hunted and trapped around here. Through and despite ongoing colonial violence.

## Atop E'se'katik: Locating My Settler Ancestry

Indigenous peoples often distinguish themselves from settlers as “those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how they came to be in a particular place” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6). My “colonization story” begins with emergence of settler land relations and accompanying narratives of entitlement in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded territory of the L'nuk, or Mi'kmaw people, which contains seven districts ranging through what is now called the Canadian Maritimes, along with parts of Quebec and Maine, to Newfoundland. For the Mi'kmaq it is weji-sqali'tiek, which means something like “we arose from here” (Sable and Francis 2012).

Coming home in grade six with family tree homework, I had questions. But my mother had evasions. “My family doesn't have a tree,” she explained. “It's more of a bush.” I remember adding a flourish of coiled branches and getting a bad grade. I was surprised, then, when mom got a subscription to Ancestry.ca a few years ago. The digital tree was bushy with question marks, too, but this time she was ready to look for some answers.

Nova Scotia is a place my ancestors surely did not sprout from but rather landed roughly into, after eighty-six days and several deaths, on a sailing ship called *The Pearl* (Bell 1961; Hebb 1974). The first of them to arrive were born into hereditary serfdom in a Germanic region of the dwindling Holy Roman Empire (DesBrisay 1895; Teal 1994). The lands they lived and worked on were under the feudal control of whatever baron, prince, or bishop had most recently wrested control of these contested agricultural “dukedom” along the Rhine River (Bell 1961, 87-97). There had been a century of constant war and the birth throes of the modern state increasingly squeezed my peasant ancestors. Historian Winthrop Bell describes the region as one “sacked and burned and reduced to... misery” in the 1700s, as landed gentry were escalating both the enclosure of common lands and the exploitation of enserved farmers attached to these lands (Bell 1961, 96; see also Federici 2004, 21).

Our first ancestor-hunting trip brought us to the World Heritage town of Lunenburg, once known as the clamming area of E'se'katik, now preserved by the United Nations as “the best surviving example of a planned British colonial settlement in North America” (UNESCO, n.d.). Mom and I visited museums and a genealogical archive, learning that our earliest ancestor to obtain land-as-property in Mi'kma'ki was a twelve-year-old Germanic “foreign protestant” named Adam, part of a settler cohort well documented and celebrated on Nova Scotia's south shore as pioneering heroes.

We learned that Adam first arrived at the great harbour of Kijipukuk, long known as an abundant hunting and fishing area and sacred L'nuk gathering place (Bell 1961; Hebb 1974; Paul 2022; Teal 1994). Governor Edward C---wallis had unilaterally “founded” the British settlement of Halifax there just two years prior, an act of colonial aggression that betrayed the 1725/26 Peace and Friendship Treaty, a legal agreement premised on a mutual recognition of sovereignty that did not cede title, and required Mi'kmaq consent before building new settlements (Paul 2022; Pictou 2015).

Adam was indentured for his passage by John Dick, a Swiss recruiter contracted by C---wallis on behalf of the British crown to attract “productive” Germanic serfs to help build the new colonial settlement of Halifax (Bell 1961; Sable and Francis 2012). Dubbed a “soul seller” by competitors for his failure to mention the sovereign Mi'kmaq, Dick's handbills made use of *terra nullius* to hone in on the aspirations of landless, war-weary serfs, promising not only land-as-property but an escape from religious persecution and from ongoing conscription into seemingly never-ending battles (Bell 1961). As my ancestors disembarked, touching Mi'kma'ki for the first time, their “pioneer” bodies were already conscripted into both physically dispossessing Mi'kmaq from their lands and embodying and reproducing the emotional logics of *terra nullius* that were key to fortifying Britain's colonial claim (Mackey 2016; see also Coulthard 2014).

*Terra nullius* is a Latin term meaning “land belonging to no one,” historically used to justify the colonization of lands that were perceived as uninhabited or uncivilized by European powers. Using this doctrine, colonizing nations including Canada claimed sovereignty over territories without recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples who had lived on the land for millennia. The doctrine was historically applied in Canada, to justify the appropriation of Indigenous lands by European settlers. The *terra nullius* framework has now been explicitly rejected by Canadian courts, most notably in the 1973 *Calder v. British Columbia* case, which recognized Indigenous land rights predating European settlement. This legal shift paved the way for further recognition of Indigenous rights to land, culminating in the landmark *Delgamuukw* (1997) and *Tsilhqot'in* (2014) cases, which affirmed the legal status of Indigenous land titles and sovereignty. While *terra nullius* is now widely considered an invalid legal concept, Canada has yet to uphold the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to govern their territories.

Survivors of *The Pearl* arrived to a colonial outpost at war. They were likely shocked to learn that L'nuk sovereignty was being asserted through expressive and deadly raids (Wicken 2002; Bell 1961). Governor C---wallis had declared the Mi'kmaq as “Rebels of His Majesty's Government or as so many Banditte Ruffians,” two years earlier, instructing newly arrived settlers to “annoy, distress, and destroy the Indians everywhere,” and placing a bounty on their scalps (PANS RG1, vol 209, Oct 1, 1749; see also Paul 2022). These foreign protestant newcomers were directed to pay their debts to the British crown by building government works, which turned out to be military fortifications to defend the outpost from ongoing L'nuk attacks (Bell 1961).

Sipekne'katik Warrior Chief Jim Maloney generously states that my ancestors “came here broken people, they had nothing, they were running away and promised a different place. But they didn't realize there was theft involved, and mayhem and genocide” (in Beaton 2018). Critical whiteness scholar David Dean describes this as a typical colonial “set-up” where “a small Western European ruling class found manipulative and violent ways to dislodge the European masses from their traditions of political, cultural and religious resistance to domination, and enlist them as foot soldiers of a growing capitalist empire” (Dean 2023 n.p.). Pioneer shares etymological roots with words like “pawn,” “pedestrian,” and “peon,” denoting a foot soldier or serf held in servitude that was typically sent ahead of more high-ranking units to cut down forests, dig trenches, and clear trails through “enemy territory.”

Detailed archival records led us to the specific addresses of properties first granted to Adam in E'se'katik—a town, garden, and farm lot. Later that afternoon, we found his final resting place, on lands he had cleared himself on a placid elbow of the Pijinuiskaq (Lahave River), which means “having long joints or branches.” The graveyard is encircled by ancient oaks, which I noticed mostly because we kept getting beamed by their acorns. Mom felt these falling acorns were a sign of malevolence.

I wonder how my ancestors would have coped emotionally with the soul-seller's lie. Many scholars point to this jurisdictional dissonance as the crux of settler land relations: anxiety, denial, and entitlement (Slater 2020; Mackey 2016; Barker 2012). Macoun and Strokasch state that “settler colonialism operates as a fantasy, in the sense that it endlessly merges together its desires and reality. For example, settlers simultaneously assert colonialism to be finished while seeking to finish it, and proclaim the land to be empty in the same moment they confront an Aboriginal person” (Macoun and Strokasch 2013, 433-34). Vigorous and ongoing Mi'kmaq resistance to dispossession serves as a potent and uneasy reminder for settlers that the colonial fantasy is far from realized.

During a solemn moment, I tried to photograph my mom contemplating Adam's headstone. But as I steadied the camera, there was a loud bang. The photo shows thick black smoke unfurling directly from our ancestor's grave, though it was actually coming from a burning shed across the Pijinuiskaq. We laughed nervously as sirens began to wail and Mom said flatly, “Well of course something blew up.”

## Haunted Cards: Exorcising Colonial Archives in Mi'kma'ki

When I first visited the Nova Scotia Archives, I didn't know what I was looking for or how to use the finding aids. I flipped aimlessly through a deep drawer of index cards when one lingered. In cursive, it said: “*Playing cards used to divide land lots.*” As I pencilled down the reference, a spectral whisper shivered through my spine, advising me that these cards would need shuffling.

As settler archivist Avery Gordon asks “How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?” (Gordon 2018 18). Gordon defines haunting as “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (Gordon 2008, xvi). Irish ethnographer Fiona Murphy notes that while “we primarily see the archive as a storehouse of memory and fact,” they serve a further function, “where unpacified ghosts with unfinished business await, yielding stories and letters different from expectation” (Murphy 2011 481). Murphy's archival practices detect “little stories lie in waiting to challenge the master narrative of the nation-state” where as psychoanalyst Nicholas Abraham states “what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (Abraham 1994, 493; in Murphy 2011, 171).

Put another way, settlers like me were made to disregard treaty relationships and invest in settler-defined nation-state futures (Tuck and Yang 2012). Maintaining settler occupation here requires me to nurture the twisted fantasy of *terra nullius* that denies ongoing Mi'kmaq sovereignty through asserting banal, everyday settler activities (Tuck and Yang 2012; Mackey 2016). Settler historian Renée Bergland (2000) calls this “spectralization,” an iteration of the pioneer lie that simply vanishes Indigenous people from their lands and the historical record, transforming them into ghosts who live on in white settler imaginations (see also Ghaddar 2016; Gordon 2008).

Increasingly, I'm understanding the emotional logics of the “pioneer lie” as structures of settler *un*-feeling and *un*-relating. Former TRC research director Paulette Regan (2010) contends that because it is nearly impossible to ignore evidence that Canada was built through colonial violence, settlers choose instead to deny their complicity (see also Macoun and Strokasch 2013). This elaborate charade is maintained, often subconsciously, in an attempt to resolve our “uncomfortable and precarious dis-location as usurper, and replace the Indigenous people as the natural, historical, rightful and righteous owners of the land” (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández

2013, 77). The acrobatics required to avoid feeling implicated in colonial violence (and feel entitled to the land) entails denials of relationality that are necessarily disembodied, leaving us haunted (Slater 2020, 818).

My great grandfather helped out at a hunting and guiding outfit in Weijiook. It hugged the border of the Liscomb Game Sanctuary, a gated landmass where hunting was prohibited but settler clearcutting was licenced by the government. As elsewhere in Mi'kma'ki, treaty-affirmed Mi'kmaw jurisdiction over these hunting territories was ignored by wardens, leading to arrests and worse for L'nuk who "trespassed" (Parker 1994). The retired game warden avoided my eyes when I asked about relationships between settler and Mi'kmaq hunters. He had nothing to say about the many laws that not only prohibited Mi'kmaq from hunting on their own territories but also made legal representation illegal until 1951 (Paul 2022). He didn't mention anything about burning down Mi'kmaq camps in the sanctuary.

Paulette Regan's experience with the TRC informs her contention that before anything like "reconciliation" can begin, settlers must "unsettle the settler within" by renouncing the persistent national "peacemaker" myth that idealizes the pioneer lie, imagining settlers as benevolent and innocent rather than perpetrators of violence. She urges settlers to redirect the substantial energy we spend on denial towards acknowledging the trauma we sustain through denying our relationality with the land and the Indigenous people who rightfully govern it (Regan 2010, xx).

But settler modernity continues to nip our decolonial curiosity in the bud, harming the ability of settlers like me to imagine settler-Mi'kmaq relations beyond narrowly conscripted storylines (Mackey 2016; Ahenakew 2023). When I asked the warden about my great-grandfather, he chose his words carefully. He drove me to see his gravestone at a small churchyard deep in the woods, carved with a spitting image of the church. "I doubt he ever stepped foot in it though," he chuckled. A memorial quilt hung inside the church, with custom squares honouring community members, embroidered with fishing rods, wildflowers, eight-point bucks in the crosshairs, sewing needles, and all-terrain vehicles. My great grandfather's square stood out to me: a losing hand of cards.

Unravelling the pioneer lie that twists through my family line has begun to feel a little bit like an exorcism. The more I ask spooky questions, the more I recognize a disembodied *terra nullius* in the form of nebulous untold stories that insist on replicating into the present, haunting settler archives and settler bodies. Riffing on Rae Spoon, settler philosopher Alexis Shotwell reminds us that "colonial ghosts live in the bones of their descendants and inheritors" (Shotwell 2016, 23). Or as Mi'kmaw scholar Tiffany Morris puts it, "if the history of relationality to the land is made ghostly through settler colonial occupation, that history is necessarily disembodied" (Morris 2023, 30). In other words, the land is haunted because it is stolen (Bergland 2000).

## Sanctuary as Dispossession: Violence in the Borderlines

The tattered playing cards that first conjured my family's settler land relation show up in the archives as neutral, even playful, objects. But holding the actual cards in my hands felt uncanny, thick and heavy with the frivolity and the violence of British colonialism. I shuffled them clumsily, waiting to understand what was to be done—or undone.

One spring morning in 1753, each foreign protestant man in Halifax, including 14-year-old Adam, was invited to draw a playing card from this deck, which had been marked to correspond to a parcel of land in E'se'katik. It was a simple game that dealt my family out of indentured servitude to the crown and into settler land relations (Bell 1961; DesBrisay 1895). But it was not played in cooperation with the Mi'kmaq, an act of *terra nullius* that broke the terms of the recently brokered 1752 Peace and Friendship treaty (Paul 2022; Wicken 2012; Bell 1961). This was a moment of settler colonial dispossession, where the intimate land relations that had long governed Mi'kma'ki were obscured through a simple game of cards into relations of domination, also known as "property law" (Nichols 2020).

Mi'kmaw law both sprouts from and emphasizes the deep flux of Mi'kma'ki's ecology, where an astonishing abundance of beings have long co-existed in elastic, overlapping jurisdictions held together by treaty agreements (Cavanaugh and Metallic 2002; Lewis in Beaton 2018; Sable and Francis 2012; Young 2016). But the imported settler land relation that my ancestors came to embody stems from a peculiarly British method of claiming territory that might be summarized as “finders keepers,” but is also shaped by a fixation on “certain boundaries” (Mackey 2016, 45-46). It is a system both politically and emotionally predicated on “an illusion of permanency and inevitability” that not only interrupts L'nuk responsibilities but also collective forms of ownership, which aim to dissolve the Mi'kmaq nation into individual subjects (see Waziyatawin 2012, 76; Lelièvre 2017).

In settler colonialism, “colonisers move to a new setting and establish their ascendancy” through the theft and exploitation of Indigenous lands (Veracini 2011, 1). Tuck and Ree underscore the ongoing violence of this land relation, describing it as “the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts” (Tuck and Ree, 2013, 642). My ancestors established themselves by clearing large tracts of land of both trees and Mi'kmaq presence as required “improvements” to retain land as property in the new colony (Bell 1961). Because it turns out that the “pioneer lie” of *terra nullius* didn't legally require believing Mi'kma'ki to be uninhabited by people at the time of colonial contact—but only of so-called “productive people” (Mackey 2016).

The colonial card trick summoned several generations of farmers in my lineage, characters like “Big Lem,” famed for his ability to knock men out with a single punch. Many are buried at the foot of a large sixth-generation operation called “Indian Garden Farms,” a name that conjures the L'nuk caretaking relations that my ancestors helped replace with the violence of “productive” property relations. But my great grandfather jags the ancestral line, eluding the archives, obscuring even his mother's name. He runs away in his teens, eventually abandoning his generational claim to land along with his plot in the family cemetery.

Mi'kmaq partners continue to extend settlers an invitation into the treaty relationship (*M'ist No'kmaq* et al. 2022; Pictou 2019; Wysote and Morton 2019; Battiste 2016). But after centuries of violent settler relations, Mi'kmaw legal scholar Tuma Young first urges a “‘radical and daunting’ transformative shift for the dominant culture, requiring ‘deep changes in how knowledge and reality are constructed and experienced’” (Young, 2016, 82). It's a tall order but as Mi'kmaw and settler research partners Travis Wysote and Erin Morton offer, “if these shared agreements could lead to a mutual understanding of peace, one defined apart from white possessive logic, the treaties could also lead to a return to Mi'kmaq governance and law on Mi'kmaq land” (Wysote and Morton 2019, 493; see also Moreton-Robinson 2015).

The Peace and Friendship treaties are clear that settlers have no role in governing Mi'kmaq lives but rather an obligation to ensure that Mi'kmaq partners are not hindered from their own responsibilities to the lands and waters here (*M'ist No'kmaq* et al. 2022; Wicken 2002; Young 2016). But Canada has not upheld this relationship, redirecting demands for Mi'kmaq sovereignty towards shallow cultural recognition or “reconciliation without land” (Alfred 2023; Coulthard 2014; Pictou 2019 and 2015; Simpson 2017). For this reason, Mi'kmaw legal scholar Sherry Pictou points away from state negotiation processes, towards the potential for informal “small-t treaty partnerships” between Mi'kmaq and settler groups—and the land itself—and to shift relational understandings and further Mi'kmaq resurgence (Pictou 2017, 144-45; see also Pictou 2019, 57).

## H(a)unting Beyond Historical Legacies and Settler Self-Absorption

I've been sharing tea and stories with my friend and mentor Cathy for about a decade. In the early days, I couldn't get enough of her “Mi'kmaw stories.” Punctuated with jokes and riddles, she patiently outlined the ongoing genocide, from the violence of British contact, to centralization, residential schools, missing and murdered relatives, to the constant violations of hunting and fishing rights. But when the tea was gone, she would always refrain, “Your people have stories, too, Sadie. What do you know about them?”



A few years ago, I found a map of traditional Mi'kmaw traplines spanning Eskikewaq. Just upstream of the Weijook in and around the sanctuary, I traced a tangible intersection of our family stories, where my great grandfather and Cathy's grandfather both likely hunted. Yearning to re-configure relations with Cathy beyond these historical legacies has compelled me through debilitating settler awkwardness to explore this confluence, but I'm also terrified of replicating exploitative patterns. I am deeply suspicious that this research remains driven by an embodied *terra nullius* that swerves away from my own ancestral wounds to justify an innocent, comfortable life on stolen territory (Morgenson 2009). As Potawatomi scholar and organizer Kyle Whyte underlines, "consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity are qualities of relationships that are critical for justice-oriented coordination... yet they are precisely the kinds of qualities that take time to nurture and develop" (Whyte 2020, 2). And with this kind of colonial violence between us, I am thinking this means generational time.

While the toxic pull of white saviourism is familiar, I'm relatively new to academia's embedded rewards for white settler scholars studying white supremacy and colonial violence (Tuck and Yang 2012). I'm too-slowly realizing that my proximity to Mi'kmaw water protectors attracts extractive academic "invitations to collaborate." As Métis thinker Zoë Todd warns, "not only do many universities across the country occupy unceded territory, they also currently mobilize the white possession of uncoded knowledge" (Todd 2017, n.p.). But I'm also haunted by black abolitionist scholar Tiffany Lesotho King's stunning observation that when white people begin studying settler colonialism, "an actual discussion of Native genocide is displaced by a focus on the white settler's relationship to land rather than their parasitic and genocidal relationship to Indigenous peoples" (King 2016, 4).

Indigenous scholars often encourage reconsidering research as a process of genuine relationship building (Absolon 2022; Tallbear 2014; Wilson 2008). I wonder what it would look like to embrace what Indigenous-and-settler scholar duo Jones with Jenkins describe as an inevitable "struggle between interests, and between ways of knowing and ways of resisting... to create a research and writing relationship based on that tension, not on its erasure" (Jones and Jenkins 2008, 475). While I recognize these relational contours from the Treaty Truck-house resistance, I've struggled to replicate it within the halls of academia.

Pursuits of innocence not only echo *terra nullius*, they also "shut down precisely the field of possibility that might allow us to take better collective action against the destruction of the world" (Shotwell 2016, 9). In what I imagine as a nod to my great grandfather's losing hand, settler scholars Adam Barker and Emma Battell-Lowman advise settlers to practice the fine art of failure, "to fail to uphold settler colonial relationships, to fail to properly inhabit and embody settler colonial structures, systems, and stories, and by necessity find ways to build relationships differently" (Battell-Lowman and Barker 2016, 199). Because this loser orientation requires us to relinquish our designs on Mi'kma'ki's future, and the myth of white benevolence that keeps us believing we have a role in managing Indigenous lives (Slater 2020).

When it comes to settler colonialism, Tuck and Ree say that "haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies" (Tuck and Ree 2013, 647). Exorcizing the centuries of colonial violence that flows through my veins and ongoing structures of oppressive relations requires so much more than family fact-finding, journalling about my feelings, and whatever amateur necromancy I'm calling a research method. It will require settlers like me to ditch the kinds of belonging we've come to understand as delineated through the certainty of fences and borderlines in favour of what Leanne Betasamoske Simpson describes as relations of "deep, reciprocal, consensual attachment" to land (Simpson 2017, 43). It is a process of recognizing and learning to practice, however imperfectly, the mutual and plural responsibilities so clearly outlined in the Peace and Friendship Treaties (Wysote and Morton 2019; Parasram 2023).

As Donna Haraway reminds us, "We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not all response-able in

the same ways” (Haraway 2016, 29). Living in peace and friendship in Mi’kma’ki means that people like me must learn to relinquish our heroic pursuits of “liveable futures,” embracing instead a kind of failure to belong in settler structures that Shotwell describes as “life without the promise of stability” (Shotwell 2016, 92).

Cathy has witnessed each of my settler moves to innocence from hungry listening to white saviourism, to whatever we might call the awkward stage of scholar flailing I’m embodying now (Robinson 2020; Tuck and Yang 2012). She doesn’t owe me patience, as I slowly untangle secrets and silences from the folk ballads and pioneer lies that obscure our ancestral entanglements. But it is my tentative hope that the small intimacies built through this kind of stumbling along might help unravel the restless settler entitlement that prevents people like me from becoming capable of relating to Mi’kma’ki’s lands, waters, caretakers, and phantoms beyond the violence of possession, and from enacting solidarity with the humility and reciprocity that living in treaty requires.

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