

**Land and Language Reflection: My Ancestry and their Role in Colonialization**

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### **Abstract**

My ancestors, as any family that is not Indigenous to Turtle Island, immigrated to Canada. The majority of my family has never been overly invested in knowing our settler roots, and on both my mother and father's sides, we have lived on Turtle Island for many generations. I did my best using both facts and what speculation I can draw from our collective histories. From this some conclusions are telling and allow me to reflect on my and my ancestor's relationship to the concept and practice of colonialism.

### **Land and Language Reflection: My Ancestry and their Role in Colonialization**

The Wright's, whose name comes from the anglicized, Scottish name McIntyre name which means "son of the wright", or the Scottish "son of the carpenter,". They were from Scotland and immigrated to British Columbia in the late 1800's, settling in Victoria. They changed their name to fit in with the British settlers once they immigrated. They chose to migrate from Scotland in light of the Scottish clearances, in which the Scottish farmers were pushed out by wealthier people in order to expand crops for sheep, which was largely enforced by "... a radical reappraisal of social priorities." (T.M. Devine p. 157). Once in Canada, the Wright's assumed careers in the logging industry on the West Coast of BC. The offspring of the Wrights sought after careers in education and in accounting.

My mother's side of the family came from Norway, England, and Germany. My great, great grandfather came from Germany, moving first to the United States in the early 1900's, and made his way to Canada entering into the logging industry in Kaloya Bay, BC. The Norwegian side came from my great grandpa's side of the family. They were processed into Canada in Wingham, Ontario where they changed their name from Jorgensen to Wingham in order to seem more British. At the time, Norway was an unstable county. They came to Canada to escape the poverty inflicted by the aftermath of WW1. My mother's side of the family ended up in Prince Rupert BC, where they began their involvement with the commercial fishing industry.

After inquiring into my family's journey as immigrants from Europe to Turtle Island, it is evident that they are contributors to the colonial attitudes that pervade Turtle Island today. They have directly inflicted pain and suffering onto the Indigenous people of Turtle Island. From both my mother's and father's side of the family, we moved to Canada and took part in the natural resource economy the land had to offer. They adopted the ideology of assuming Turtle Island was "vacant land" and stole from its resources in order to build a better life for themselves, profiting from what was not ours. Before immigrating here, my mother's side would have spoken Norwegian and German, my dad's side of the family would have spoken English. Each family moved here with the assumption that English was the language of the land, and presumably inflicted this ideology onto everyone they encountered. Though in modern day Canada, English and French are thought to be our primary languages, after doing the first part of this project I have discovered that the language of the land is the language of whatever local Indigenous nation's land you reside on. The language of the land I live on is Halkolelem, *hə́nqə́mihə́m*. It is vital, as a new generation of my family to bring recognition to the harm my ancestors have caused to the Indigenous people of Turtle Island. There is a concept of "Seven Generations Teaching". This teaching explores the idea that "What we do today impacts the next seven generations to come. Conversely, what happened in the past seven generations impacts us today," (Lavallee, Poole 2009 p. 273), this exemplifies that the negative inflictions of our ancestors has an impact on both everybody they touched in their lifetimes, and me as their descendant. It also implies that what I do today will impact my descendants for seven generations to come, this teaching brings forth the awareness that "We can have a positive

impact on the next seven generations or a negative impact depending on our choices of as individuals and as a collective,” (Lavallee, Poole 2009 p. 273). This is an incredibly valuable teaching to be conscious of in our lives, we must take responsibility for the actions for our ancestors who have come before us, and, in turn, make the mindful choice to have a positive impact in the world today so that future descendants may live in the light of our positive influences. This directly applies to many of the complicated intricacies around what my ancestors have done through their imperialistic views and how they have directly harmed Indigenous people. My ancestors have either consciously or unconsciously accepted and enforced the fact “...that Indian’s fortunes were supposed to be harder than whites...” (Vine 2003, p. 3). It is my responsibility as a new generation to question this thought and acknowledge that the reason Indigenous people face such hardship is of my ancestors own doing.

When it comes to Turtle Island many view it as a place to use (resources or otherwise) for personal benefit. We typically call this “use of natural resources” and consider the resources either to be used or protected; with environmentalists wanting to preserve it. Who we fail to consult (and are arguably the only people we should consult) are the Indigenous people, who’s land both sides are fighting for. In the Pacific Northwest “The Quinault tribe had been pleading with non-Indians to refrain from littering its beaches but to no avail... the tribe wanted to protect its resources,” (Vine 2003, p.5). Similarly, in Clayoquot Sound, located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, there has been much friction and debate between the loggers and environmentalists over what is to be done with the profitable old growth rainforest. In this

debate, as is a common occurrence, "...the Nuu-chah-nulth—a confederation of First Nations that live on the west coast of Vancouver Island... were not adequately consulted, even though the land at issue lay entirely within their traditional territories and had never been ceded to colonial authorities or to the federal state," (Willems-Braun 1997 p. 7). This is an issue that is all too common in our colonial world.

Indigenous people are seldom consulted with the attention they deserve, yet it is their land at hand, the land they had lived on and preserved for thousands of years before colonizers came and stole it. It is the same settlers who invaded Turtle Island and are now killing it. Colonizers think of the precious earth we depend on as "...a 'resource landscape' rather than a 'cultural landscape'," (Willems-Braun 1997 p. 12), it is these ideologies and assumptions that are dangerous and threaten not only anybody who resides on Turtle Island's soil, but the Indigenous culture itself. The Indigenous people are the healers and interpreters of the land, and without them, sacred natural beauty like the beaches of the Pacific Northwest and the rainforests of Clayoquot Sound will perish. These are issues that require us to look past our imperialistic and colonial views and seek the advice from Indigenous people, of whom these issues affect most. Environmentalist and foresters are fighting over the land as if by nature they are entitled to it, both environmentalists and foresters are actively practicing colonialism.

I come from a Eurocentric world and have been raised with Eurocentric values. I have the responsibility to attempt to heal the wounds my colonial ancestors have inflicted on Turtle Island's land and its Indigenous people. The time for a call to action is now, and, as a colonizer, I

must acknowledge that we cannot do this without the teachings and guidance of Indigenous people. It is time to give Indigenous people a voice. "Indian '*band*' and '*band councils*' are NOT "*indigenous decision-making institutions*," they are colonial institutions imposed by the government of Canada through its racist, colonial Indian Act under its Constitution Act 1867," (Diabo 2019 pp. 7). These types of Eurocentric values and impositions will not bring progress to issues Indigenous people face and the perpetrator of the issue cannot be the healer. Indigenous nations need their voices to be heard in order to make a change to concerns of the environment and other Indigenous issues. One step towards this type of progress is land based education. Because "if colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect all people to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land," (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, Coulthard 2014, pp. II). The way to solve issues with the land is through learning about it - this is a concept Indigenous people have great historical practice with. If we were all learning and being educated about the land, by the land we live on, we would be taking a step in the direction of healing. This form of education can "leave us with room for optimism despite the stranglehold that colonial education currently has in Canada and other settler nations," (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, Coulthard 2014, pp. III). Though I am already engaged in a colonial education here at KPU, I can be conscious with what I am learning. I can question the morals of the teachings I am absorbing and ask myself, 'is this coming from a place of Eurocentric, imperialistic or colonial view?', and often I might find that the answer is yes. However, this is still a step in the direction of conscious learning and it also

provides an opportunity to challenge the ideas and Eurocentric frameworks that have been passed down to me from my ancestors.

Throughout all of the research and ideas explored in this paper I must acknowledge that where I come from is a place of a privileged Eurocentric background. It is important to know who's land I reside on because it is not mine. In order to make any progress, all settlers that reside on Turtle Island must acknowledge the harm we have caused, whether it be direct or indirect. The first steps to healing and understanding our complicated history here in modern day Canada is to first acknowledge that in some way we have inflicted harm upon Indigenous people, and the next action lies within looking past Eurocentric ideas by educating ourselves on the truth of what colonization has done to the Indigenous people. We cannot reconcile without first acknowledging this. How exactly we reconcile, I do not know. What I do know is that from vulnerability and a willingness to learn comes the potential for understanding. Perhaps this is the first small step that any of us can take right now, to open our hearts, our minds, and be willing to be present with the healing process that anybody who resides on Turtle Island must undergo. Our strongest point of action is to actively listen to Indigenous peoples voices.



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**\*Attached below are the peer review notes done by Breanna Himmelright**

Jayne Wright

- Paragraph 2, sentence 3: "unforced" should be "enforced"
- Paragraph 2, sentences 1+4; apostrophe not needed in "Wrights"
- Paragraph 3, sentence 6; sentence can be changed to "They came to Canada to escape ~~the~~ the poverty inflicted by the aftermath of WWI"
- Paragraph 4, sentences 4+5; sentences can be combined
- Paragraph 4, sentences 7+8; sentences can be combined
- Paragraph 4, sentence 9+10; sentences can be combined
- Paragraph 4, sentence 10; sentence can be broken in half
- Paragraph 4, sentences 10+11; sentences can be combined
- Paragraph 4, sentence 13; sentence comes across as redundant, can be removed
- Paragraph 5, sentence 2; "environmentalist" should be "environmentalists"
- Paragraph 5, sentences 5+6; sentences can be combined
- Paragraph 5, sentences 7+8; sentences can be combined

- Paragraph 5, sentences 9+10; sentences can be combined
- Paragraph 5, sentence 10; sentence can be broken in half
- Paragraph 5, sentence 12: \*Wording towards the end can be changed to "seek the advice from Indigenous people, whom these issues effect most"
- Paragraph 5, sentences 13, 14, 15; sentences 13+15 can be combined, sentence 14 can be removed
- Paragraph 6, sentence 3; sentence can be removed
- Paragraph 6, sentences 4+5<sup>6</sup>; sentences can be combined and reworded
- Paragraph 6, sentence 7; sentence can be removed
- Paragraph 6, sentences 8+9; sentences can be combined
- Paragraph 6, sentences 11+12; sentences can be combined, bit about Indigenous people + land-based education can be removed
- Paragraph 6, sentence 13; sentence can be removed
- Paragraph 6, sentences 14+15; sentences can be combined

Conclusion: I found your voice to be quite strong, and your points to be quite clear. I would've liked to know a bit more about your family history and the roles played by your ancestors in colonial processes. I also found your reflection paragraphs to be a bit long - perhaps longer than necessary. You had a lot of good ideas and insights in these paragraphs, but it felt like you didn't have a lot of time to organize them and express them in a cohesive manner. Overall, however, I see a lot of potential. With a little reworking, this could be an amazing piece to read!

Breanna