

Time and Story in Sahtú Self Government
Intercultural Bureaucracies on Great Bear Lake

by

Faun Ember Rice

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Department of Anthropology
University of Alberta

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Abstract

This thesis explores aspects of self-government in Délı̨ne, NT, Canada, a Sahtú Dene community of approximately 550 people. Délı̨ne's Final Self Government Agreement (FSGA) was passed by the federal government of Canada in 2015, and the research for this thesis coincided with the beginning of Délı̨ne's one-year transition into self government. The FSGA follows the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement of 1993, and the region falls within Treaty 11. This thesis' primary question is: What are the shared stories about the future of self-government that people in Délı̨ne tell? Subsidiary questions and themes that emerged from the research process include: How does the history of the Sahtú region inform contemporary negotiations, agreements, and the stories told about them? How do new roles created by institutions of governance impact the people who hold them? How does the text of a self-government agreement diverge from the ideas that people have about self-government?

Using a combination of collaborative ethnographic methods (including participant observation, qualitative interviews, and community feedback) the material for this thesis was gathered over the course of two months, August to September of 2015. All interviews were conducted in English, though many in Délı̨ne speak Sahtú Dene (North Slavey or Athapaskan). Field data were analyzed using a qualitative coding technique then combined with a regional and topical literature review to produce the document to follow. I open with a discussion of methodology, followed by a partial history of self-determination and colonialism in Délı̨ne, from time immemorial to the beginnings of land claim agreements. Next, the Canadian state's legal approach to self-government negotiations is examined, providing a background for some of the legal obstacles that

Indigenous communities may face. I highlight a few key sections of the text of Délıne’s Final Self Government Agreement before identifying four different ways of thinking about the future of self-government and intercultural bureaucracies, as discussed by participants in Délıne.

The four different approaches to self-government’s future inform accompanying stories that help individuals in the Sahtú region frame what it means to be traditional, modern, or negotiate the two, in occupation, language, economy, and lifestyle. The first identified story is that self-government is a bubble created for culture to occur within, and that the bubble may shrink or pop if the people on its edges are worn down. The second story is that Dene values, languages, and lifestyles will eventually replace colonial history and values using self-government as a framework to do so. Third, people may invoke a commitment to excel both as Dene and as bureaucrats but keep the two roles separate, being “strong like two people.” Fourth, many in Délıne have faith in their community’s spiritual strength and the prophecies that will allow it to withstand exterior pressures and change those who visit for the better. This thesis’ presentation of history informs its discussion of current hurdles, structural challenges, hopes, and plans for Indigenous self-government. All three chapters are intended to be descriptive rather than prescriptive, but they conclude with thoughts about how the stories presented may be useful for people working in intercultural bureaucracies in Canada.

Anthropology has been largely critical of the impact of land claims and self-government agreements on Indigenous communities’ ability to self-determine (see Coulthard 2007; Dokis 2015; Irlbacher-Fox 2009; Nadasdy 2003 for some key examples). This thesis acknowledges the structural difficulty of Indigenous self-

determination in a colonial state, but focuses on the ways in which Sahtú Dene peoples are reinventing and inverting the dynamics of marginalization. Positioned at a unique time of transition where both hopes and trepidations about self-government's future were running high in Délı̨ne, this thesis sketches pictures of the community's self-envisioned paths. Self-government narratives impact human actions, policy, and lifestyles; this thesis chronicles them for their social presence and the lessons that can be derived by reflecting on them.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Faun Rice. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Self-Determination in D el ıne: Cultural and Linguistic Revitalization in a Legal and Spatial Context,” Study ID: Pro00053105 on March 12, 2015. Additionally, Faun Rice received a Northwest Territories Scientific Research License from the Aurora Research Institute, Project Name “Self-Determination in D el ıne: Cultural and Linguistic Revitalization in a Legal and Spatial Context,” No. 15702 on July 06, 2015. The Northwest Territories Scientific Research License was issued with consent from D el ıne First Nation (Chief and Council), the Charter Community of D el ıne, the D el ıne Renewable Resource Board, and the D el ıne Land Corporation.

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Glossary of Terms

Déłıne: Translated by the community as “where the water flows,” Déłıne is the newer official name of the charter community of Fort Franklin, though it existed as a place name for the region where Great Bear River feeds into the lake long before the settlement.

Déłıneot’ıne or Déłıne Got’ıne: Translated as “People of Déłıne.” These two formulations of the phrase were used interchangeably in my presence. The new Government of Déłıne will be called the Déłıne Got’ıne government.

Dene: Translated as “The People,” Dene is used in this thesis in several different ways: first, as a term for self-identifying Dene people. Many people might say they were “technically” Métis, or of mixed heritage, but that they still identified as Dene. Second, Dene is used to refer to the Athapaskan/Athabaskan Language Family. In this thesis, someone “speaking Dene” is speaking North Slavey, the most common form in the Sahtú region. While North Slavey as a language can be further broken down into Hare, Mountain, and Bearlake dialects, this thesis will use Dene, Sahtú Dene, or North Slavey rather than more specific demarcations.

Sahtú: Translated as “Great Bear Lake,” Sahtú is often used as a personified proper noun. Differentiated from “The Sahtú” by the absence of a definite article, identifying the lake’s name rather than a larger region.

The Sahtú: Translated as “the Great Bear Lake region,” also used to refer to the territory demarcated by the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement. This includes the communities of Colville Lake, Fort Good Hope, Norman Wells, Tulita, and Déłıne.

Sahtúot’ıne, Sahtúgot’ıne, Sahtú Got’ıne, Sahtú Dene: All translated roughly as “People of the Sahtú region.” While these designations refer to Dene from each of the communities and surrounding regions listed above, it is also often used interchangeably with Déłıne Got’ıne to refer to the people who live on Great Bear Lake, rather than the whole land claim region.

Móla: A person of European Origin – also used to signal European cities, institutions, and organizations.

Tłıchq (Dogrib): A Dene region that neighbours the Sahtú, term also used for the associated people and language.

Chapter One

Context and Regional History

1.0 Introduction

Long before I came to Délı̨nę I met a few Sahtú community members at the University of Alberta: language teachers, in Edmonton for professional development courses. In one of the campus' crowded halls on an early Monday morning, I was distributing registration forms and different colours of language revitalization lanyards when one woman selected a bright blue cord, “the colour of Great Bear Lake!” and slung it around her neck to rest on her Délı̨nę First Nation hoodie. Two years later, I arrived in Délı̨nę dusty and tired from a long meander in the Yellowknife airport; my host family greeted me with the same energetic pride. I followed in the footsteps of a long line of graduate students renting out their spare room, but they showed me around their community with no sign of fatigue or exasperation. People in Délı̨nę love their home, and bring their love of it with them to all contexts: to universities, offices, dances, and negotiations.

Délı̨nę, a Dene community of over 500 people, sits on the shore of Great Bear Lake in Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT). It is a land of discontinuous permafrost – there are small pine trees, boreal forests, and shrublands in which caribou, foxes, bears, and moose can be found, along with the wolves that howl each night in harmony with the curfew alarm. It also has visitors: people come to Délı̨nę and leave Délı̨nę frequently, taking pieces of it away with them. Along with the students are bureaucrats, Dene people who live elsewhere, corporate representatives, and/or politicians. The boundaries between those categories are fuzzy at best and the histories and futures of each are intertwined, but words like ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ continue to create meaningful separations.

I went to Délı̨nę to study its Final Self-Government Agreement (FSGA), which was passed by a community vote in 2014 and by all levels of Canadian government as the Délı̨nę Final Self-Government Agreement Act (formerly Bill C-63) on June 11, 2015. The negotiation and transition team is housed in an office in the Délı̨nę Land Corporation (DLC) building, wherein most people speak both English and Dene. People employed by organizations like the DLC may take ‘bush days,’ or hunting, trapping, and gathering time off work to go on the land surrounding Great Bear Lake. It is never too long before

they return to their offices to review financial reports, draft leases, or prepare for meetings. During the time of my fieldwork, people employed in bureaucratic jobs in particular often seemed to feel that they held twin lifestyles in tension; however, the community as a whole was similarly concerned with the future of Dene governance and its impact on day-to-day life. An open question in Délı̨ne of 2015 was: how will self-government impact the community with respect to language, heritage, and lifestyle? What will change, if anything? How, and to what end?

While answers to questions about the FSGA's influence may lie decades or centuries in the future, this does not prevent a community in transition from developing theories and stories about what will come. Community discourse uses today's knowledge to illustrate different versions of the best and worst of possibilities. Stories about bureaucracy and governance's role in Délı̨ne come from an engagement with history, and their intracultural and intrapersonal variations acknowledge the numerous variables that might sway Délı̨ne's destiny in any particular direction. Both history and stories about the future have "a social force in the living present" (Rosaldo 1980: 61) such that they may inform policy initiatives, local priorities, or how parents prepare their children. Self-government narratives impact human actions, policy, and lifestyles; this thesis chronicles them for their social presence and the lessons that can be derived by reflecting on them.

I will begin by addressing methodology, ethics, and research questions before turning to history. Chapter One also serves as a regional literature review. It traces a chronological line from Dene origins and time immemorial, through the fur trade and colonization, to the negotiations that eventually created room for state-legislated self-government. A number of the topics included, such as the sections on Historical Dene governance (1.1), Treaty 11 (1.6), and uranium mining on Great Bear Lake (1.7), are especially meaningful subjects of discussion for people in Délı̨ne. They have shaped the lives of many Dene people, and they also pertain to the second half of this thesis by influencing ideas about self-government and reified notions of traditional culture, modern culture, and their relationship throughout time.

It is often hard to say what 'traditional' and 'modern' really mean, but the labels have real power in Canada today. In historical literature, law, and social settings, Dene and Aboriginal 'pre-contact' lifestyles are often connected with tradition and passivity

while Settler government and industry is often connected with modernity and assimilation. It becomes difficult to talk or think about history in Canada without implying that modernity slowly assimilated (modernized) traditional lifestyles. With this framework in mind, I will contend that many of the eras surveyed in Chapter One demonstrate that ‘contact’ and culture change have not been unidirectional: Indigenous peoples have shaped and continue to shape history significantly.

In Chapter One, I contextualize Délı̨ne’s arrival at a Final Self Government Agreement. Chapter Two then presents ideological trends in Canada’s perspective on Indigenous rights and self-determination in Canada by using examples from other communities and case law. In this chapter, the ways in which we talk about the traditional and modern to simplify conversations about culture change play out in courts, Indigenous self-government in a colonial context, and in Délı̨ne’s own negotiated document.

Importantly, ideas about what it means to be traditional, modern, or between the two may operate as recolonizing tools in courts of law, but have a very different array of potentials in the Sahtú. Chapter Three identifies four different ways of thinking about the future of self-government and intercultural bureaucracies in Délı̨ne: each uses ideas of what it means to be traditional and modern in a notably different way than the statutes and cases in Chapter Two. Accordingly, Chapter Three’s sketch of discourses in the Sahtú also contains many tools for thought for self-styled settler-allies (a category I include myself within). The four stories about the future of self-government in Délı̨ne, with lessons that can be applied beyond, include (1) bureaucracies as rapidly shrinking bubbles for culture to occur within, (2) intercultural institutions like self-government as opportunities for Dene values to transform Canada, (3) being Dene and being a bureaucrat as two different skills to be mastered, and (4) self-government as foretold by prophecy. These four stories about the future all contain lessons for people operating within intercultural bureaucracies; they hint at what to aim for or avoid in order to help bring legal self-government as close as possible to genuine self-determination.

1.1 Methods

I met the woman who was to become my Délı̨ne host mother, Bernice, at a University of Alberta summer program. I help coordinate a series of classes on Indigenous Language Revitalization, and she attended for the second time the July before

I began my MA program. We solved some problems with her on-campus housing and stopped for a coffee before her next class; sitting in the Student's Union building, Bernice began telling me all about Délı̨ne's Self-Government Agreement. I did not know it at the time, but her extended family was involved in both the FSGA negotiations and the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement. When she said, in 2014, that I should come stay with her for my field research I was only beginning to learn about all of these documents, not to mention the history and context of the Sahtú region. This beginning was indicative of the research method to follow. Entering the community is like watching a Dene drum dance for the first time, knowing you are supposed to watch and learn by doing rather than asking too many questions, but being certain that your first few times round the floor will look and feel quite clumsy. When in Délı̨ne, my goal was to participate usefully, meet people, have conversations, and see where they took us. Ethnographic participant observation informed by a small number of qualitative interviews forms the bulk of my research data, supplemented by other texts from scholars in Délı̨ne and the Sahtú region.

After meeting Bernice and agreeing that it would be interesting to stay in her home and learn about self-government, I spent the first year of my MA coursework trying to formulate a theoretical background and research questions. Much of my time was dedicated to creating a rough ethical framework for this topic. Canadian history includes many well-intentioned scholars gathering information from Indigenous communities: the research may never return to its home, but can generate policy that defers to academic credentials rather than cultural knowledge. Paulette Regan, the Director of Research for Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, argues that students and academics in my position can try to 'unsettle' our internal settlers by learning how to 'restory' research (2010: 230). Rephrased, she means that a commitment to humility might allow us to understand a historical narrative from a second point of view; "that *how* people learn about historical injustices is as important as learning truths about *what* happened" (Regan 2010: 11).

In anthropology, the call for ethnography developed by history comes most famously from Rosaldo (1980). On our quest to unsettle the settler, however, a 'view' of history is not sufficient for good research; rather, we must recognize our own immersion

in any history, with an eye to our own heritage. Necessarily, this encompasses both ancestry and professional heritage, as the position of ‘researcher’ is traditionally colonial (Regan 2010; Smith 1999). This tension becomes very palpable in fieldwork. Every relationship and social connection is founded in far more than the requirements of an MA, yet the degree’s structure meant that I came, I learned, and then I left again, taking my notes and a pair of moccasins with me. These problems can only be partially mitigated, I believe; if we ever think we are solving them entirely we may lose the humility that is so important to writing a text based on bounded perspective.

In writing and presentation, I have sought to include my own voice enough to remind the reader that this thesis is a narration from a particular position: that of a settler, student researcher, and intercultural administrator, doing fieldwork from the first time. I have sought to address history from multiple perspectives while maintaining an awareness of the limits of my experience. Accordingly, any oral histories and community perspectives are given in this thesis to the best of my knowledge, but my knowledge is quite limited by the mere two months I spent in Délı̨ne. There are many Dene scholars who have recorded oral histories in great detail, including (but not limited to) Fobbie Tatti (2015) who just published her thesis on Sahtúgot’ı̨ne spirituality, and a number of works by George Blondin (e.g. 1990; 1997; 2006).

During my fieldwork, I attempted to incorporate community feedback into my data collection by keeping a fieldwork blog. I shared my posts with friends from the Sahtú on Facebook and via email, and some (mostly people who knew me well) were interested enough in it to give their thoughts after the fact. Additionally, any individuals whose names appeared in this thesis were given a draft and time to review its contents before choosing to be identified or remain anonymous in the final version.

As I developed an understanding of my topic alongside its ethics, large questions emerged about the impact of self-government agreements on land management, language use, and economy. Having never conducted fieldwork before, I did not know how large and ambitious some of these lines of questioning were. Délı̨ne was in its formal year of transition while I was there in 2015, in preparation for full FSGA implementation. Self-government’s restructuring was not yet established enough for anyone there to know how it would change the community in years to come. Thus, as I was up north, my focus

shifted iteratively between research and reality, and the theme I ended up drawing from fieldnotes and interviews became:

What are the shared stories about the future of self-government that people in Délı̄ne tell?

Chapter Three is dedicated to addressing this question. In the first two chapters, the reader will also see a number of subsidiary questions and themes that emerged from the research process, namely:

How does the history of the Sahtú region inform contemporary negotiations, agreements, and the stories told about them? How do new roles created by institutions of governance impact the people who hold them? How does the text of a self-government agreement differ from the ideas that people have about it?

My primary field site was the community of Délı̄ne, NT, Canada. According to the Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics, in 2015 Délı̄ne had 521 people, 476 of whom were Indigenous. In 2014, 57.5% of Délı̄ne reported that they hunted and/or fished (a percentage that comes close to the community's proportion of adults), 16.6% trapped, and 80.1% of households consumed foods that had been hunted or gathered. 78.5% of the Indigenous peoples in Délı̄ne spoke North Slavey¹, the regional First Language. During my time there it became clear that the youngest generation made up the missing part of this figure, and that the community was undergoing a familiar pattern of language shift that will continue to the next generation unless Délı̄ne intervenes soon. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *Atlas of World's Languages in Danger* (2011) characterizes North Slavey (Sahtú Dene or Sahtúot'ı̄ne Yatı̄) as "definitely endangered," based on the 2001 census. In conversation, most bilingual adults would report that Dene people younger than 30 predominantly did not speak the language, and some understood but still could not speak. 48.8% of 2014's jobs in Délı̄ne were in Government, Health, Social Services, and Education, and average personal income was \$14,495 CAD/year (Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics).

¹ While 'North Slavey' is still a commonly used name for this language in 2016 (both in the community of Délı̄ne and in academic work), there are many who prefer 'Sahtú Dene.' In this thesis I use the two interchangeably, but I suspect that North Slavey may be used less in coming decades because it was applied to the language from the outside.

If statistics could paint a complete picture anthropologists would be out of a job, but the overview should give a rough sketch of Délı̄ne at the time of fieldwork. The community cannot be reached by highway except for an ice road in late winter, and a cellphone tower arrived for the first time on September 16, 2015, towards the end of my stay. I lived in a log home with colourful decorations and a view of the lake for two months, August and September 2015. Most of my time was spent in the Land Corporation Building, soon to be renovated into a new structure that will house more branches of the new government. The lobby of this building is Délı̄ne's local café; people will come in to use the Internet or just sit on the couches and chat.

Along with lobby visitors, I had time (both during work and social hours) with the employees in the Lands office, the Self-Government office, the Délı̄ne Renewable Resources Council, and occasionally the Band Manager's office. In these locations I tried to volunteer my time where possible: occasionally helping edit grant proposals, set up audio recording equipment, or take notes for the drafting of land policy documents. I joined a beading group that gathered on weeknights in the Aurora College outpost, and this was where I met women who I may not have otherwise encountered; office jobs and especially positions of management and governance are mostly occupied by men in Délı̄ne, although this is beginning to change. For example, the Délı̄ne Got'ı̄ne Government (the new self-government chief and council) just held its first election, in which two female council members were elected. Women also make up most of the community's population of teachers. I spent a few days sitting in at the school to see if I could pick up some North Slavey (but in truth, I suspect that I only succeeded in distracting the small children).

It was amongst these office spaces, public spaces, classrooms, and the walks between them that I held most of the conversations this thesis is based on. I took copious fieldnotes, and when permission was given for me to record an event or conversation I did so and made transcriptions for more detailed use. During my stay I sat in on the Sahtú Secretariat Annual General Meeting, a Self-Government Transition workshop, and I participated in Délı̄ne's annual spiritual gathering. The latter was not intended for public use and out of respect I have not included any material directly from it, but it has nonetheless added some insight into history and spirituality in the Sahtú.

Secondary fieldsites included the Saoyú-ǰehdacho National Park cabin site, where a group from Délıne went to celebrate the ribbon-cutting of a new structure built by Délıne and Parks Canada. We reached this location by cutting across a small portion of Great Bear Lake. In addition to this campground, I joined my host family and many others from Délıne on a visit to Tulita in September for a Dene Handgames Tournament. Tulita is down Great Bear River from Délıne; we travelled by jet boat to get there and back. Finally, I have drawn from my experience in intercultural administration at the University of Alberta to inform some of the sections that follow.

My research was limited by several factors, and the first was language. On any given day in Délıne a student researcher may find herself caught up in histories, stories and parables for countless units of time measured only by mugs of black tea – at home, in an office, by the lake. When English restructures the stories due to the presence of a monolingual researcher, the content of each conversation changes with its code. In two months, I only succeeded in learning the tiniest portion of North Slavey; my host family mostly remembers me as the girl who saw the fox, *noǰere*, and consistently mispronounced it as “No Gary”. Countless times during the fieldwork process, the people I was speaking with would stop and clarify that it was hard to explain their meaning when they could not speak in their own tongue.

While fluent adults would speak Sahtú Dene to each other in many settings (including the grocery store, social gatherings, in places of work) they would frequently switch to English when speaking with their monolingual children. Due to the prevalence of North Slavey in the community, many in the younger generations might say that they could understand but not speak Dene. Individuals most comfortable speaking English, therefore, were the younger generations (30 or under) who often had learned English as a first language, the occasional adult between approximately 30 and 60 years of age who had learned English as a first language, and bilingual administrators and negotiators. The latter were evidently very used to translating their thoughts for English speakers. To the best of my knowledge, all elders spoke Dene as a first language, some were monolingual. As will be discussed further later on in this thesis, English and Dene had somewhat different roles in the community and seemed to carry different content.

The second limitation involved my research questions. I proceeded with the correct consultation procedures outlined by the Aurora Research Institute for the Northwest Territories – in 2015, this meant faxing a research outline back and forth with all of Délı̄nę’s political organizations for comments and signatures – and received permission to do my work from the band council, the land corporation, the charter community, and the self-government transition team. Additionally, my host parents and many others in the community were very excited about self-government and its future, and pitched it as a timely research topic. In hindsight, there were topics that held more urgency for the entire community. A more comprehensive consultation would have allowed me to better understand and respond to the questions that all of Délı̄nę prioritizes. Currently I would characterize this research as interesting to many, but non-essential. For future ethnographic projects, I feel that I now have the knowledge and confidence to begin by holding in-depth consultation with my host community to find questions that are feasible, useful to them, and grounded in a more genuine collaboration. While the efforts to incorporate community feedback in the field and in writing (such as the blog, interviews, review, and conversation) were based on a collaborative ethnographic methodology, they could also be extended in the future to all aspects of project formation.²

At the end of September 2015 I returned to Edmonton with notes, photographs, and recordings, and reviewed them all several times using qualitative analysis and thematic coding (Bernard 2011; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). During this process, I sought to re-organize my fieldnotes with an eye for narrative; which as Goulet contends, “recognizes that the choice is not between writing an autobiography focusing on the Self

² From the *Chicago Guide to Collaborative Anthropology* “We might sum up collaborative ethnography as an approach to ethnography that deliberately and explicitly emphasizes collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process, without veiling it—from project conceptualization, to fieldwork, and, especially, through the writing process. Collaborative ethnography invites commentary from our consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops. In turn, this negotiation is reintegrated back into the fieldwork process itself. Importantly, the process yields texts that are co-conceived or co-written with local communities of collaborators and consider multiple audiences outside the confines of academic discourse, including local constituencies. These texts can—and often do—include multiple authors; but not exclusively so. Collaborative ethnography, then, is both a theoretical and a methodological approach for doing and writing ethnography” (Lassiter 2005: 16).

or producing a standard realist ethnography about the Other” (1998: xxxix). While much of my data came from conversations, there were two main types of these: first, explicit ‘teaching moments’ wherein someone I knew well would tell a story or explain a piece of history or a community decision. In these moments, I often asked permission to take notes while we were speaking and asked follow-up questions if I knew the speaker well enough to sense that it would not be disrespectful. All of the named individuals in this document were ones who would kindly take the time to engage in ‘teaching moments.’ The second type of conversational data comes from public forums, meetings, and gathering spaces. Here I have left participants largely unnamed, and pursued qualitative analysis to outline trends in interactions, consensus, disjuncture, and themes.

Both types of social data shape the body of my thesis, and Chapter Three in particular. Rather than looking for one ‘true’ version of what the future of self-government in Délı̄ne will be, I grouped emic analyses (perspectives from interlocutors) into related groups to create four different categories of stories that people tell about bureaucracy and culture. Bernard warns against the uncritical adoption of ‘folk’ explanations to answer research questions, but suggests their documentation as intracultural variation as one way of avoiding this potential pitfall (2011: 339). Each of the emic analyses of self-government in Chapter Three is derived from a combination of ‘teaching moments,’ or explicit theories, and public conversation and discourse analysis. Chapter One is also largely shaped by people in Délı̄ne. Historical periods and stories from the past were also amongst the numerous categories of data that emerged, and these have been incorporated into the regional history and literature review in order to highlight events and eras that seemed especially important to people in the Sahtú.

1.2 History and Literature Review: Shaping Text and Context

On my first day in Délı̄ne, my friend Morris told me one of ʔəhtséo Ayah’s 19th century prophetic sayings: “It is the people who don’t need to see to believe who will be helped the most.”

I wasn’t sure that Ayah’s prophecy boded well for me: I was an agnostic student, raised in an empirical tradition, in town to “see” for two months. For the literature review section of a thesis in particular, the requirements of a comprehensive regional review and history fit awkwardly with the community-given version (in both content and format). As

such, this chapter's small effort to emerge from people's words and actions rather than written texts alone has to do with how its topics were chosen. Histories of Indigenous peoples in Canada are often partitioned by eras defined by colonial acts: for example "epidemic," "mission," and "treaty" (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 140). While these are undoubtedly important, I have tried to craft the following sections with categories of importance from community historical narratives. The discussions of pre-contact Dene, Great Bear Lake, Dene Handgames and the Drum Dance, Tuberculosis (TB), Port Radium, and the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry (MVPI) are all very present in community dialogue. By shaping the regional history and literature review around Sahtúgot'ıne narrative, I hope to make the format of the thesis a little more suited to its content.

There are roughly four types of texts – albeit with blurred boundaries – that are incorporated into this chapter's conversation. I include oral narratives from fieldwork, as discussed above, but I also use several texts written in Déłıne or in collaboration with Sahtú Dene elders, linguists, and historians. Academic work, coming primarily from anthropologists, folklorists, linguists, and ethnohistorians, thus forms a tentative third group of texts that overlaps with both of the former (in that there are Dene scholars and interlocutors involved in many of them). Finally, non-academic, non-Dene individuals such as missionaries, explorers, lawyers, and prospectors also contribute to this dialogue. As one example of a source that transcends many of these boundaries, *The Sahtúot'ıne Long Ago* is curricular material that came out of work with elders and community linguists: it presents concepts and values that elders in the Sahtú region identified as universally Dene (Vandermeer et al. 1991: 1). In it, Sahtú Dene adapt their principles in dialogue with colonial systems (such as book-bound education) while continuing to reiterate their "inherent aboriginal right as the original inhabitants of this land" (Vandermeer et al. 1991: 2) to practice cultural heritage. One of its primary authors will sit on the first DGG council.

I primarily use oral histories in order to shape discussions that will be supplemented by other materials. Usually, if I have made the choice to include a piece of oral tradition it means that I have heard it many times from more than one person; the repetition leads me to conclude that it is important to people in Déłıne and that they want

it shared. Catherine McLellan identifies two types of oral histories: Long Ago stories and Histories (1970: 115-116)³. By the former, she means stories that have been passed down for a very long time and include legendary figures such as Yamoria. The latter may, in comparison, include oral accounts of Treaty negotiations. Both are usually thought to be equally true, but they may have different functions and roles (McLellan 1970: 118). Moore and Wheelock (1990) encountered similar categories in Dene communities of northern Alberta. They found that “stories are all classified as *wodih* ‘stories, lectures, news,’ a category which includes accounts of recent events, hunting stories, moral lectures, and prophecies as well as traditional stories,” (Moore and Wheelock 1990: xix). However, traditional stories form a subclass of *wodih* called *tonht’onh wodihé*, “stories of long ago,” (Moore and Wheelock 1990: xix) which include cultural hero stories, animal stories, and histories of people who have passed away. In her thesis, Délı̄ne scholar Fbbie Tatti suggests that some stories are personal and belong to the teller, and others “belong to the people” (2015: 7). An appropriate oral citation for shared stories is “it is said,” which identifies histories and legends that are validated by community knowledge (Tatti 2015: 7).

This literature review and regional history will begin with Dene history before the arrival of Europeans, systems of governance and social organization, and the region of Great Bear Lake itself. Historical accounts supplied by missionaries, fur traders, and explorers come next, followed by some discussion of hand games and the drum dance in Dene communities. I will frame this thesis’ thematic focus on self-government with a history of Treaty 11, the extractive resource industry in the Northwest Territories, and the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline or Berger Inquiry before moving on to a discussion of later 20th and 21st century legal histories in the next chapter. Each of these discussions contextualizes the variety of community perspectives on Délı̄ne’s Final Self Government Agreement. In spending so much time on history, I hope to work towards “an ethnography rounded and deepened by a fuller sense of the passage of time” (Rosaldo 1980: 109). Later, I will talk about reified ideas of what it means to be traditional and their impact on human life; however, this first chapter should demonstrate that ideas

³ McLellan provides some approximate translations of these terms within the Athapaskan language family, but does not discuss Sahtú Dene, North Slavey, directly.

about culture and history descend in part from the stories we tell about time's passage. Délıne is steeped in its own history: its people know their past well and have an acute awareness of change. How they navigate and talk about the future is informed by each of the topics listed here.

1.3 Time Immemorial: Long Ago Stories

Long ago, tıch'adıı were giants and they used to talk. They made their own ɤɤa. When Dene started to appear in their homelands, the tıch'adıı said to each other; 'Dene are coming to our home. We must learn to live with them. We must take care of them. We can be food for them, but in return, they must promise to respect us and take care of ne and tu so we will stay healthy.' (Kədə Nit'q Benats'adı, Remember the Promise 2014: 1-2)

It is said that Dene, or "the people" have traveled and lived in the region of Great Bear Lake since time immemorial. When the world was new, the landscape, humans, and animals were very different than they are today. Many Dene oral and written histories make reference to a time before animals and humans had a symbiotic relationship. It is said that animals were giants who could speak like the Dene and that the two-leggeds acted like animals, a time of imbalance where a great number of histories originate and tell the stories of local landmarks (Blondin 2006; Tatti 2015; Vandermeer et al., 1991).

In September 2015, traveling on Great Bear River by jet boat between Tulita and Délıne, some young Sahtúgot'ıne told me a story I had also heard from older generations. Bear Rock Mountain sits at the intersection of the Great Bear and Mackenzie rivers, Sahtú De and Dehcho. A distinctive pattern on the mountain's side is the model for today's Dene Nation logo and was created by Yamoria (a legendary figure from Dene oral history)⁴. He discovered that some large beavers were harming and upsetting hunters as they traveled on Sahtú, so chased them all the way down Great Bear River to where Bear Rock Mountain sits by today's Tulita. Yamoria killed the three giant beavers and staked their hides to dry on the mountain's face, thus creating the future symbol of Dene nationalism. The history that accounts for the strange marks on the mountainside has been told for a very long time; early traders and prospectors have similar accounts of their first lessons about Tulita (McGill 1974: 9-10).

⁴ George Blondin (1997) has written extensively about Yamoria. Additionally, many other Dene communities have cultural heroes who may or may not be the same figure, such as Yamanhdeya in Dene Tha' stories from northern Alberta (Moore and Wheelock 1990: 3).



Figure 1: *Yamoria's Three Pelts* seen from Tulita, photograph by author.

Early histories tell of similar unrest and conflict between giant creatures and Dene. The relationship between the people and the animals was resolved, it is said, by Yamoria ‘the lawmaker,’ as George Blondin calls him (I am told that the title was popularized by Blondin but not necessarily shared by other Dene), and also by consensus processes wherein the humans promised to take care of land and water in exchange for sustenance (Blondin 2006; Kədə Nit’q Benats’adí, *Remember the Promise* 2014: 1-2). Fibbie Tatti, a Délıne linguist and community member who recently published her thesis on Sahtúgot’ıne spirituality, calls this promise recognition of the reality that Dene have, throughout history, relied on animals and their environment for survival. She identifies the relationship between humans and animals as the cornerstone of Dene epistemology and morality (Tatti 2015:19). Indeed, the quotation that opens this section comes from a storybook that begins with tales from time immemorial and proceeds to an overview of

species at risk, environmental monitoring plans, and the contemporary organizations that help the people of Dǎlǎnǎ remember their promise to the animals (Kǎdǎ Nit'ǎ Benats' adǎ, Remember the Promise 2014). Dene histories provide foundational context for regional literature, but they are also part of a larger understanding in Dǎlǎnǎ that elders' knowledge, long ago stories, and histories make essential contributions to newer Dene institutions.

Along with detailed knowledge of and relationships with the species around them, Dene people also used medicine power to help them survive for millennia. For a very long time it was not acceptable to talk about medicine to non-Dene, and in the eyes of at least some elders that knowledge is still not meant to be shared. Other community members felt that it was important to make this part of Dene culture known. George Blondin recently wrote about Dene medicine power in great detail, and his work on the classes, manifestations, and meaning of medicine power are there for the curious in his 2006 work *Trail of the Spirit: The Mysteries of Medicine Power Revealed*. Some in Dǎlǎnǎ believe that medicine⁵ has all but disappeared from the Sahtǎ region, perhaps because they do not need it anymore.

Using the tools available to them for survival and moving across the continent, Dene people have inhabited North America for thousands of years both by their own accounts and by archeological findings. The latter continue to debate and extend the timelines for the first appearance of Dene ancestors in the region of what is now Alaska, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories before coming further south (Abel 2005: 7). A number of sites in the region around Great Bear Lake have painted an archeological picture of life 7000 years ago before the climate warmed enough to bring the boreal forest north: tools of stone, wood, quartzite, and bone were used to gather game, fish, and birds on the taiga-tundra (Abel 2005: 5). Given the vast scholarly debate on linguistic, archeological, and anthropological traces of Dene/Athapaskan origins and migration, this thesis will acknowledge but steer away from the quest to pinpoint the exact geographic history of Athapaskan peoples (Abel 2005; Cruikshank 1998: 13; Rice 2000; Rice and Saxon 2002).

⁵ Medicine power is regarded as distinct from traditional medicine and botanical knowledge, unless an individual's power is related to healing.

The Sahtúgot'ıne are the Bear Lake Dene; they have followed caribou herds nomadically, hunted moose around the shores of the lake, and gathered to fish for countless generations (Vandermeer et al. 1991). While the beginning of the Sahtúgot'ıne as a distinct cultural unit are described in many different ways, Dene peoples have been in the Sahtú region for a very long time. The mouth of Great Bear River, close to the location of Délıne today, has long been a key fishing area because the ice at its opening does not freeze as impenetrably as the rest of the lake during winter. The Sahtúgot'ıne have many neighbours, including the Gwich'in, the Mountain and Hare peoples, the Chipewyan or Akaitcho, the Tıchq or Dogrib Dene, and Inuit peoples to the North (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 15). However, many of the Dene groups that are unique sociopolitical units today travelled, intermarried, and did not necessarily create boundaries for their populations or for their territories during much of their history (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 15). The ethnographic record calls the Bear Lake Dene or Sahtúgot'ıne a comparatively recent, self-identified group composed of Hare, Dogrib, Slavey, Akaitcho, and Mountain peoples (Abel 2005: xxxviii; Gordon 2009: 62; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 16; Osgood 1931: 33). This being said, Sahtúgot'ıne themselves talk about a historically rich identity; in the oral tradition, in the landscape, and in the language, dating back to the era when humans and animals met in consensus (Vandermeer et al. 1991: 8).

1.4 Traditional Governance: Consensus and Experience

Much of the literature about Aboriginal legal orders reflects a general narrowness in thinking about customary law. Customary law is not an easily codified set of rule for what to do and not do... Rather, customary law inheres in each Aboriginal cultural system as a whole, forming legal orders that enable large groups of people to live together and to manage themselves accordingly. Failure to fully appreciate the complexities and intellectual processes involved with decision making, law making dispute resolution, and conflict management in Aboriginal legal orders can caricature Aboriginal societies as one-dimensional. (Napoleon 2010b: 45).

Structures of governance, law, and community organization have taken many different forms in Dene communities, especially over the past three centuries. This thesis, however, is contextualized by the knowledge that Dene people have been self-governing since time immemorial, suggesting that state-sanctioned agreements reinforce the Canadian legal apparatus' legitimacy where it does not have pre-existing jurisdiction.

Due to the nature of the terminology we are working with (and whether Government and Law are really the appropriate words to describe historical Dene social organization) this is a complicated argument. It parallels Nadasdy's point that usually, the person who asks whether or not Indigenous people really had concepts of Property is justifying colonial land or resource use (2003). To be clear, then, I do not intend to question whether or not there was ever such a thing as a Sahtú social organization, nor do I think colonial incursion could be justified by the absence of an institution as defined and recognized by Europeans. On the contrary, this section will present information about a pre-contact self-government system as reported by Dene and early ethnographers: a pre-existing system that was disrupted by European concepts of jurisdiction.

Over the last 300 years, many explorers and ethnographers in the Great Bear Lake region have contended that pre-contact and fur trade era Sahtú sociopolitical groups were transient, based around family units that could then join or split apart from larger communities for gatherings, hunting, and fishing (Franklin 1824 in Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 168; Helm and Leacock 1971: 364; Osgood 1931: 70; Rushforth 1984: 28-33; Rushforth and Chisholm 1991: 2). Leadership would be granted by experience and first hand knowledge. For example, a hunter with detailed knowledge of a particular region would be the authority in their realm of expertise only; not as a matter of entrenched status (Helm and Leacock 1971: 367; Osgood 1931: 74; Rushforth 1984: 38-39; 1994: 337; Rushforth and Chisholm 1991: 2). Overt leadership would normally be male, a tradition that has continued with the chief and council system and is now slowly changing as Dene women reinvent their roles. Simultaneously, Dene women also played a strong role in pre-contact kin group social organization, and their roles may have been changed or limited as Treaties introduced male chiefs to Dene communities (Giles 2004; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterett 2000). Compared to the chief and council system, Elders had a similar but larger presence in traditional governance and might provide knowledge or moral guidance that could assist with group and individual decisions. Each social unit would frequently discuss and make decisions unanimously. 20th century ethnographers who cover this territory apply language familiar to them in order to describe the apparent absence of hierarchy in political and economic Dene relationships; referring to “a very strong feeling of communism,” in Osgood's case (1931: 72); a conference, or consensus

process that replaces “any formal or legal mechanisms” (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterett 2000: 172); and an absence of “Official leadership [instead replaced by] unanimous consent” (Fumoleau 2004: 192).

Dene people who spoke with me about traditional governance included the emphasis on dialogue and consensus.⁶ In D  l  ne, community-oriented decision-making was portrayed as a sophisticated strategy, superior to the modes of decision-making offered by any contemporary bureaucracy. In later sections, this thesis will touch on meeting styles, primarily consensus-based and Robert’s Rules of Order, that were employed in the Saht   in 2015 and their perceived functionality. In *K  d   Nit’o Benats’adi, Remember the Promise* (2014), histories of Treaty negotiations, and other perspectives from within the Saht  , this importance of ongoing peace and friendship in constant renewal was also emphasized. Additionally, Dene people placed great emphasis on listening to elders, the landscape, and animals at any gathering. For one example from Saht   written literature, George Blondin records Yamoria’s speech to the Dene on traditional governance as follows:

You are people, human beings, and you should behave and conduct yourself like people all the time. I am going to establish a gathering place and I want everybody to go there to talk about any problems or concerns that you have. All the parents shall bring their children so they can listen as well. The Elders will go there to speak to the people. They will take turns speaking to the people. The Elders will be the main speakers at the gathering place... The Elders will talk about their past, from the beginning, about how the medicine power used to treat one another whether they were good or bad medicine power people. By talking amongst yourselves, you will prevent and avoid a lot of problems from occurring again in the future. Only good things will come from such a gathering wherever you go. In order to accomplish this task, you have to work together as human beings and behave as mature adults. This gathering will teach you to govern yourselves. In a group, choose a person with medicine power to be your leader and listen to him. If that person does not turn out to be a good leader, choose another one. With a good leader you will learn to govern yourselves. You could talk about all these things in the gathering place. (Blondin 2006: 25)

Consensus meetings are recorded as the method that both humans and animals used to negotiate peace (Blondin 2006; Tatti 2015: 13; Vandermeer et al. 1991). Overall, D  l  ne

⁶ The emphasis on community consensus decision-making has been carried on to self-government hopes and negotiations, as will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis. For example, plans in the 1980s for Dene self-government included direct democracy and discussion as a route to consensus-style decision-making (Asch 1984: 98).

portrays pre-contact governance as a series of negotiations based in mutual respect between humans, communities, animals, and the land. Pre-contact leadership, correspondingly, is conditional on extensive experience, knowledge, and the ability to recognize others' autonomy. Self-governance in 2016 has many of these same goals, but the degree to which Dene peoples can integrate their values uncompromised in state-sized institutions remains to be seen. Thus, we can frame this thesis' primary question with history in mind. We are not asking how people experience self-government as a brand new addition to their community; rather, we are asking how people intend to use a new set of tools in order to meet the objective of effective self-determination, a much longer standing goal.

1.5 Sahtú: Great Bear Lake

Some settings are the most compelling characters in the stories that happen around them. Great Bear Lake seems to seize human attention in such a way, a body of water that dwarfs human ambition and controls the ability to transport or feed oneself. My host family's window looked out over the shore, and Délı̨ne community members could glance outside and comment on the feasibility of lake travel on any given day. I might ask about going to check the nets, only to be met with raised eyebrows, an entertained smile, and a "*Sahtú K'awé*" – Great Bear Lake is the boss. Most people own a jacket, sweater, or baseball cap with the outline of the lake embroidered on it as the community logo.

This thesis's section on traditional governance raised the point that many ethnographers and explorers present the Sahtú Dene as a relatively recent distinctive group, formed in the past 200 years. *The Sahtúot'ine Long Ago*, drawing from Délı̨ne's elders, contends instead that "those who hunted and lived around Great Bear Lake have been known as the Sahtúot'ine since long ago, before the coming of the Whiteman" (Vandermeer et al. 1991: 4). Sahtú, the lake, has a powerful and frequently personified presence in everyday life in Délı̨ne. It provides sustenance, determines whether or not travel will occur, is to be protected, and is powerful enough to take lives, both in winter and in summer. It has become a symbol of environmentalism, the center of a UNESCO biosphere reserve, famous for its pure water, size, and its legendary beating Waterheart.

The only street art I saw in Délı̨ne was of the lake's distinctive shape – painted or stenciled onto garages, fences, and signs.

A strong connection with Sahtú is one of Délı̨ne's key identifying features, and the placenames, oral histories, and archaeology of the region make it clear that humans have lived around Great Bear Lake for thousands of years. European visitors such as Alexander Mackenzie, John Franklin, and Émile Petitot did not 'discover' self-identifying 'bearlakers' (Rushforth 1984; Osgood 1931; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette: 2000); the category *as applied in time by ethnographers* is not always meaningful to local Dene. Dene have been near Great Bear Lake for a very long time. There is a long, demonstrable history of Dene who identify strongly with Sahtú, and a long history of them visiting a place named Délı̨ne, which translates as *where the water flows*.⁷

While I was in Délı̨ne, one of the community members working on proposals for the new government's land policy was Walter Bayha of the Land Corporation (an institution responsible for administering the 1993 land claim agreement). He drafted a list of families based on their familiarity with different regions around the lake so that they could be approached for information on how to best take care of that region: for instance, *Nerégha Got'iné*, North Shore People, included Dene author George Blondin. Many of his categories matched up with Rushforth's 1984 designations of regional bands (kin based social groups) with some variation in spelling and selection. *Turı̨lı Got'iné*, Walter's designation for Johnny Hoe River Watershed kin groups, may be a parallel to Rushforth's "Tudiligot'iné ('People from where the water flows in' – people from Johnny Hoe River)," (1984: 9), as one example. While Rushforth did not go into greater detail in his designations, Walter has listed at least eight different kin groups in that one region.

At one point in the summer of 2015 we placed a map of Great Bear Lake in the lobby of the Délı̨ne Land Corporation, where many people would gather for the company,

⁷ In his 1928-1929 fieldwork, Cornelius Osgood recorded the historical place name for Délı̨ne with the following description: "de'lini (Head of the river). The name refers specifically to the place that Great Bear Lake empties into the Great Bear River, a locality famed for excellent fishing, especially in midwinter. In the fog it is a treacherous place because the area of the head of the river never freezes. The term has become applicable to the whole end of the bay from the site of Fort Franklin... to the head of the Great Bear River" (Osgood 1975: 526). Additionally, "The Bear Lake Indians have been distinguished from the Hare because they themselves deny that an inclusive grouping is correct... The name is the English translation of the term by which the Indians of this group speak of the themselves collectively and which they consider as mutually exclusive as the native terms for Hare and Dogrib" (Osgood 1936: 8).

coffee, and use of the foyer computer. Looking at each family group, individuals would sit and discuss where their ancestors had used trails and cabins, drawing dots and lines and gathering places around the cartographic representation of the region. Similar projects have been undertaken for the Délı̨nę Knowledge Project (organized by the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board) including a map of all the overlapping seasonal trails surrounding Great Bear Lake. Elders and intergenerational in-community mapping projects have created detailed records of placenames and histories; they have also begun to subsume and expand on explorers' documentation (Petitot's 19th century toponyms, for example) for curricular materials, policy, and governance. Great Bear Lake sits at the center of all of these ethnohistoric inquiries, and at the center of memory for so many of the elders still working on these reconstructions.

1.6 Traders, Missionaries, and Explorers: Learning to use Snow Shoes

Just as Délı̨nę makes use of the placename and kin group records of early explorers, missionaries, ethnographers, and fur traders, the stories and personalities of these men have by now been contextualized by a great deal of oral commentary passed down by those they met. Émile Petitot, a 19th century missionary in the Mackenzie region, once wrote with a tone of pleasant surprise that “the Dene are very well up on the geography of their country” (1893: 224). We may add history to that statement: many Dene people have read a plethora of journals from colonial explorers and missionaries (and indeed, kindly lent me books that would have been hard to access otherwise). Samuel Hearne, John Franklin, and Petitot were all brought up at different times by Délı̨nę community members – often because they had recorded some historical event of great interest, like Matonabee's attack on an Inuit camp (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 234). It is said that John Franklin carried away Dene women against their will, and he is therefore talked about with a degree of distaste. Petitot is regarded with some curiosity, a man who recorded a great deal of linguistic and geographic data but did not seek to understand the people he was trying to convert. His sensationalized tales of northern superstitions contained much flair but little empathy (see the bear dance in Petitot 1893: 232-233 for an example).

Even as today's Dene scholars comment on the personalities and characteristics of these visitors to their territory, a reader of explorer narratives soon finds that it is difficult

not to do the same. A number of young white men traveled up the Mackenzie Valley in the early years of colonization: for the Canadian Geological Survey, for missionizing, or for oil and uranium. Their stories survive them. Many of them were close to my age, writing about the difficulties of snowshoes and sled dog-discipline, how lonely they were, or simply boasting about the apparent ease with which all northern activities come to them. Some of the authors that are included in this literature review are difficult – either because they were likely underselling the abilities of their Indigenous friends and guides, or because they have been criticized for a variety of reasons by Dene communities.

Alexander Mackenzie and Samuel Hearne both traveled through the Mackenzie Valley (not yet so-named) in the 18th century, and were likely the first Europeans to meet northern Dene people on land that is now the Northwest Territories (Asch 1988: 9; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 234; McGill 1974). The fur trade was well underway by this point, and while direct interactions between European and Dene peoples likely began in the late 1600s further south and east, trade goods and diseases would have indirectly made their way north decades earlier (Abel 2005: 17). Disease maintained its presence in the North for centuries; Émile Petitot reports epidemics of “galloping consumption, typhoid fever, strangles, whooping cough, measles, influenza, and syphilis, a horrible parade of sickness that the Europeans drag everywhere they go... [leading to the name] Éwié-daet-tini, Those Who Drag Death Behind Them” (1893: 269).

As far north as Great Bear Lake, a North West Company trading fort was built in 1799 very near the site where Délı̨nę sits today, and it was operational until 1814 (Rushforth 1984:41); however, the fur trade’s real northern presence was catalyzed in 1821 by the amalgamation of the Hudson’s Bay and Northwest Companies (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 234). As a destination, Great Bear Lake was much further afield than many explorers wished to go. The North West Company trading fort near today’s Délı̨nę was abandoned in 1814 and rebuilt by John Franklin in 1825 “to spend the winter at the time of his second land expedition in search of the famous Northwest Passage” (Petitot 1893: 227). Today, all that is left of the trading post is a series of stone fireplaces. Petitot records himself sitting in the same building watching a Dene mourning ritual in the 1860s:

... I withdrew to Fort Franklin's ruins from where I could observe this scene of mourning... there broke out strange shouts mixed with songs, which constitute lamentation among the Redskins. I have never been able to hear these people cry without my whole being shivering. It is a funereal lament, interspersed with convulsive sobs that resemble the yelping of the coyote in the dismal groves, a pagan sorrow without solace. These are not the tears of Christians, gentle, silent, filled with hope and faith..." (1893: 280)

This is one of the most-quoted passages of Petitot's work in D l n . His observations describe a site where the people have their contemporary cemetery, and the remains buried there go back many generations.

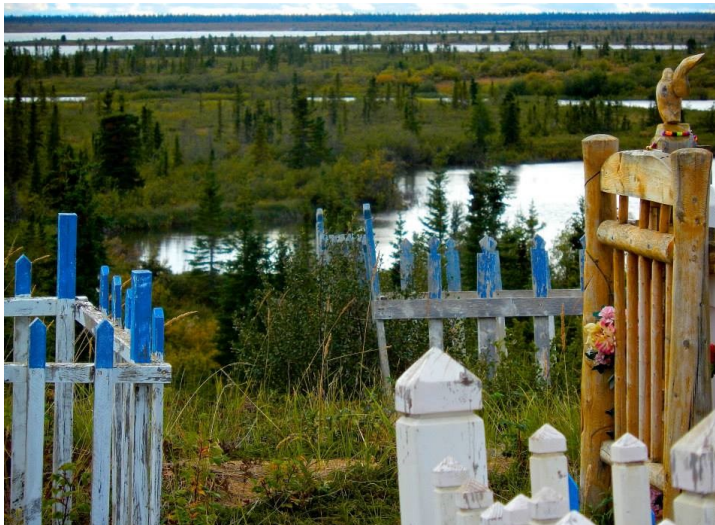


Figure 2: *Cemetery looking out on lake, photograph by author.*

The graves overlook Grey Goose Lake, a little inlet where John Franklin reports having seen the first ever game of ice hockey played by the Dene. "Birthplace of Hockey" is one of the phrases D l n  uses to market itself to tourists and corporate retreats, and a banner in the gym similarly cheers on the community's junior hockey teams. Today, a new hotel faces the lake, the cemetery, and the old fort. In 2015 it was D l n 's only restaurant, and a patron going there for brunch could look out the window and see the land where Franklin camped, Petitot hid to watch the mourners, and Dene ancestors buried their loved ones.

Numerous other changes came directly from the era of first contact, trade, exploration, and proselytization. In 1858, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate founded the

first lasting Christian Mission in what is now the Northwest Territories, and the impact of Émile Petitot and his colleagues are seen in Dene religious traditions today (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 158). The fur trade introduced “the cash-trade goods sector” (Asch 1979: 343) to Dene economies, but coexisted effectively with bush subsistence⁸ up until 1945 (Asch 1979: 344). Explorers like Alexander Mackenzie eventually brought extractive resource exploration to the Northwest Territories, and diseases came along with the Europeans in numerous waves. These last two points will be explored in more detail in further sections.

The role of Métis on the northern frontier is still missing from our brief history of first contact; Métis people both lived in communities and worked as traders. There is a significant Métis population in the Northwest Territories and around the Mackenzie River delta, and they have been living there for a very long time. While a detailed overview of Métis history parallel to Dene history is outside the scope of this thesis, I will be incorporating small moments of Métis history throughout. Additionally, there are many comprehensive accounts of Northern Métis population and life. Richard Slobodin (1966) in *Métis of the Mackenzie District* provides a mid-century overview of Métis communities around the Mackenzie, their role in the fur-trade, their legal struggles, and their social context.

1.7 Drums, Dances, and the Hand Games

Beginning with early explorers and continuing with anthropologists, politicians, negotiators, and journalists, Móla visitors have a lot to say about Dene tea dances, drum dances, and hand games. Their place in history is difficult to find or limit, because their accounts seem to be spread across most of the eras included in this section. I will place them at an identifiable transition so as to emphasize their shifting continuity as important parts of Sahtú Dene life. During my fieldwork elders used the shape of the drum to illustrate moral lessons, and dances and games punctuated every large community meeting or visit. In September 2015 I was present for a handgame tournament in Tulita.

⁸ The usefulness of the word ‘subsistence’ has recently been reevaluated, because it often does not adequately describe the variety of trade, barter, and surplus systems within different communities. Here, for example, the fur trade coexisted and interacted with community self-provisioning. I am told that Délı̄ne used to have communal freezers throughout the community, where hunters could leave meat for anyone to take, and though they no longer exist (due, I believe, to energy concerns) the principle of sharing rather than selling harvested foods has existed for a long time in the community and continues today.

The community arena was filled with people from northern Dene communities and lined with foldout tables covered with tea, coffee, and bannock, and a gathering of onlookers periodically wandered outside to grill caribou and moose meat that had been brought in to share by hunters.

For an ignorant audience member like myself, the rules are difficult to deduce without assistance. When I made the perennial error of asking too many direct questions, most people would respond with shrugs and “I don’t know how to explain it, just watch,” until my host father, Morris, took pity on me and elaborated. I suspect that he has taken care of enough graduate students over the years to understand our confusion. Two teams of seven (a regionally varying number) face each other, kneeling on the ground with the drummers sitting behind them. Each player has a small token they can hide easily in one hand or the other, and there are sticks (in this tournament, 21) in between the teams used to count score. A group of drummers gathered behind each team on foldout chairs to drum and sing in support, usually men from the team’s home community. This created a kind of home field advantage; all the people available to drum for Tulita could outnumber the visitors from other communities easily.

In this particular tournament, the organizers asked that teams incorporate some players less than sixteen years of age. From five-year-olds to elders, each team of men takes turns either tricking their opponents or guessing where their opposites’ tokens are. Dene drums are usually made of birch frames, with caribou hides stretched and held by sinew strands that create a buzzing sound when struck (Asch 1988: 59). Asch characterizes Dene drumming as a type of community catharsis and healing. During his fieldwork in Wrigley, he also suggested that drum songs represent a clear sign of maintained intergenerational transmission: young drummers would learn through experience and observation how to lead dances or play in the games (Asch 1988: 69). Drumming is a key part of socialization in northern Dene communities, particularly for young men (Abel 2005; Asch 1988; Dokis 2015: 29; Giles 2004; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000). Ethnographers as early as Cornelius Osgood record the participation of children in drumming events (1931: 68) and oral histories tell of dance and handgame

importance in sociopolitical negotiations, marriages, and trade. As such, the importance of the drum in Dene society, history, and politics makes its mention essential.⁹

Today people play for cash prizes. The first six teams (out of more than thirty teams entering the tournament from communities in the Sahtú, Dehcho, and Tłı̄chǫ regions) went home with prize money. In the past the games had different purposes, and they have been played for as long as people can remember. When bands traveled and met each other, ʔédzı (handgames) were a way to win necessary resources and establish power. Some players would use medicine powers to win, which is one reason why a team's reputation for strength could be made in a hand game competition. Morris Neyelle says that the top medicine person would always lead the group, because a win or loss would determine the strength of a people. The social event would also provide a way for bands to set up marriages with women from other communities, win furs, meat, and even gold. One player from Fort Good Hope told me a story about long lost hand game treasure, gold bags that were abandoned by the prizewinners when they had to travel home from Tulita and their sled dogs couldn't handle the load.

The drum dance at the tournament's conclusion pulled the whole room into a circle. Drummers may stop to address the hall if not enough people are taking part. Elders from both Tulita and Délı̄nǫ have talked about the healing power of dance and hand games: they are not just about the prizes, but about the strength of community. The drum that accompanies both activities can be heard in heaven. The act of dancing and playing is like prayer, and they say that the movement 'makes everything fall off of you.'

Drum dances and handgames are a part of everything that comes: so many of the stories about meetings and negotiations in this thesis would be incomplete if we did not know that they were followed by evenings of drumming. Dokis (2015) records a meeting in Délı̄nǫ wherein the chief told the NWT Premier they should muster their respective governments and "play a hand game for the land" (30) (whether or not he was joking is unclear). Nonetheless, many signed negotiations are seen to be properly concluded when the unsuspecting federal negotiator, co-management chair, lawyer, ethnographer, or priest, is invited to the community hall after the meetings and brought into the dance.

⁹ In terms of contemporary social organization, numerous communities are present at hand game tournaments, and it is a chance for people to see friends and family from throughout the Sahtú and the larger Dene Nation.

1.8 Treaty 11

The Treaty was signed when it was discovered that our land was more valuable than our friendship. – James Wah-Shee (in Fumoleau 2004: 200)

Dene peoples in the area that is now the Mackenzie Valley were aware of the presence of oil long before the Europeans – along with tree sap, they used it to waterproof canoes (Nuttall 2008: 619). In 1789, Alexander Mackenzie reportedly saw oil oozing out of the ground near Norman Wells, a contemporary settlement in the Sahtú region, on his way to the Arctic Ocean (Fumoleau 2004: 194; Nuttall 2008: 619). It remained untapped for more than a century, but in 1920 Imperial Oil struck the first ‘gusher’ near Fort Norman. Though northern Dene peoples had been requesting some form of negotiated treaty benefits for about twenty years previous, Treaty 11 negotiations only began in earnest with extractive resource potential at stake (Abel 2005: 183; Fumoleau 2004: 194; Gordon 2009; Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 13). From the Canadian state’s perspective, Treaty 11 would be similar to other negotiations in its goal: the Dene were to “cede, release, surrender, and yield up’ all claims to the lands of the Mackenzie Valley in return for the usual \$5 per person annuity, reserve lands (640 acres per family of five), and payment of teachers of salaries” (Abel 2005: 183). In other words, the primary concern of Canadian negotiators was to extinguish any underlying Aboriginal title to the land.

Almost immediately after the discovery of petroleum in the Mackenzie Valley, Canada sent Treaty Commissioner Conroy to Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, Fort Wrigley, Fort Norman, Fort Good Hope, Arctic Red River, Fort McPherson, and Fort Rae from July 5th to August 23rd, 1921; he traveled with Bishop Breynat, who administered a Catholic Mission in Fort Providence and was known and trusted by many in the region (Fumoleau 2004: 235). The Commissioner allegedly made oral promises to the people he visited above and beyond the paper version of the Treaty prepared by the Government of Canada. Indeed, Commissioner Conroy died in 1922 and was replaced by a new administrator who went to hand out treaty money the following year, but could not fulfill, comment on, or substantiate any of Conroy’s oral guarantees (Fumoleau 2004: 302). Treaty 11 peoples’ complaints were made clear and justified later in the century with the famous case *in re Paulette* – the questions around Treaty and underlying title to land lead eventually to the Comprehensive Land Claim Agreements negotiated in the NWT by the

Sahtú Dene and Métis and other groups. This thesis will discuss the ramifications of *Paulette* in more detail in a later chapter.

There are at least three important summary points to take from the history of Treaty 11: first, the signatory Dene peoples understood them as peace and friendship treaties, “whereby the government of Canada had promised that their economy would be protected against the pressures of outside settlers and trappers and that they would be assisted in times of hardship or sickness” (Abel 2005: 187). Second, the Dene neither knew that Canada would use the treaty as an instrument of secession, nor did they accept the offer of reserve lands, which they considered to be inappropriate for their social organization (Abel 2005: 187; Fumoleau 2004: 278). Third, treaties had to be signed by chiefs. Where chiefs did not exist beforehand, they were to be elected now (Fumoleau 2004: 281; Gordon 2009: 69). The Dene men who took part in treaty negotiations found themselves having to negotiate these new roles, both with the state and within their own social groups. Much later, in the 1970s testimony given to Justice Morrow during a case that would lead to land claims settlements, Dene witnesses who had been present for treaty negotiations concurred:

that up to the time of treaty the concept of chief was unknown to them, only that of leader, but the Government man was the one who introduced them to the concept of chief when he placed the medal over the Indian’s head after he had signed for his people (*Re Paulette and Registrar of Land Titles* 1973: 316).

As addressed in the section on traditional governance, the unilateral authority of a chief recognized as leader by the federal Department of Indian affairs was incompatible with pre-existing systems of social organization. This change was all part of the shifting pre-WWII socioeconomic landscape, complicated by the progressive incursion of disease, economic changes, church, and institutionalized education.

1.9 The Early 20th Century and Port Radium

World War Two is used as a time stamp for great change in northern Canada by ethnohistorical scholars, and the community of Délı̨ne is intertwined with the war’s history in surprising ways (Asch 1979; 1984; Abel 2005; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette: 2000; Rushforth 1984). This section will address events and themes leading up to the Second World War, selected simply because they were important enough to multiple people in Délı̨ne that I heard a lot about them while I was there. Prior to 1945, the Dene

fur trade was the primary mode of production in the North West Territories, characterized by hunting, trapping, and trading as local economies retained many aspects of communality despite the involvement of the cash-goods sector (Asch 1979: 341-2). While the non-Indigenous population of the Northwest Territories expanded from 137 in 1901 to 519 in 1911, these individuals were mostly trappers and traders and did not intervene significantly with Dene lifestyles and livelihoods (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 131).

The RCMP arrived in 1921 with Treaty 11. It was during these years that the residential school program peaked in the North, escalating from Treaty 11, to the mid 20th century (Gordon 2009: 75). The nation-wide residential school program began officially in 1842, when the Bagot Commission examined the efficiency of Aboriginal education and recommended that a change be made from day to residential schools. The federal government and Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches began entering into formal partnerships in the running of these schools in 1883 (Miller 1989). A parallel program of in-community day schools was also established and mandated: while in 1955, 15% or fewer of Northwest Territories children were had been enrolled in “any appreciable amount of formal education,” (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 137), 1967 saw 90% enrolment and the beginnings of Dene high school and college graduates coming home to their communities (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 137). Many of these individuals later became fervently involved in Dene Nation activism and land claims or self-government negotiations, simultaneously dealing with the symptoms of traumatic experiences in the infamous residential school system. This generation moved from sled dogs to skidoos, and now they fill positions of leadership in Délı̨ne.

While the charter community of Fort Franklin was officially established in 1945, many Délı̨ne community members lived seasonally in the same area before this point and recall regional events and trends. Generations of Dene were caught in a TB epidemic. It is said that doctors would arrive and take the sick away without consultation, and many never made it back home to their families. Dene patients often ended up in TB sanatoriums in nearby cities such as Fort Simpson. After 1946, they were sent to the infamous Charles Camsell Hospital in Edmonton. The building was named after a young explorer who had travelled with James Macintosh Bell as part of the Geological Survey

of Canada in the early 1900s (McGill 1974: 6). Today, some Dene know that their close ancestors are buried anonymously in the Edmonton region. They remember returning parents and grandparents coming home with long scars from lung biopsies, and cite failed attempts on behalf of family members to inquire after patients or have them released. From many of the stories people tell about the TB sanatoriums and the Charles Camsell Hospital, the medical system failed Dene patients with neglect, isolation, and bad food – some of the survival stories involve relatives sending miraculous care packages of dryfish and drymeat to the ailing.

A second history of health problems in the North comes from Port Radium. This mine on the shores of Great Bear Lake was built in the early 1930s by Eldorado Gold Mines Ltd: it predominantly mined radium at its outset, while uranium was dumped as waste into the lake (McGill 1974: 57; Gordon 2009: 167). Many who tell the story of prospectors in the region highlight the roles of Dene guides and workers: Indigenous peoples were instrumental in discovering pitchblende ore, establishing a mine site, and building a settlement (Gordon 2009; Watt 1980). Dene people also laboured as ore carriers; it is a lasting community concern that many of these same workers died of cancer as elders. In the early 1940s, the Government of Canada turned the site into a Crown corporation (McGill 1974: 58; Watt 1980: 228). Uranium harvesting began in earnest, and Canada sold some of this mine's resources to the Manhattan Project (Gordon 2009: 169; Watt 1980: 228).

Déłıne's people frequently discuss Port Radium's environmental impact, its implications for ore carriers, and the ethical tragedy of having been indirectly involved in the Manhattan project. I arrived in the community just days before the 70th anniversary of the WWII Hiroshima bombing. The Sahtú Secretariat Incorporated Annual General Meeting, a public assembly held in Déłıne that day, led a moment of silence for those victimized by the bomb: Dene, Japanese, and soldiers of all nationalities. The community's lasting engagement with this issue is just one of the many ways in which it involves itself in global events as an entity with responsibilities and power. Déłıne often embraces the notion that Dene values have far-reaching influence that can transform the people and systems around them. A reconciliatory visit to Japan, several documentaries, and a joint reclamation project with the Government of Canada have taken shape over the

past four decades. Additionally, playwright Marie Clements has produced “Burning Vision,” a script that highlights the connections between Dene miners, American military policy, the Canadian Government, and the Japanese bomb victims; it moves through time fluidly to express interconnected histories and their continued impact on the world (Clements 2003).

Gordon (2009) suggests that the process of cleaning up Port Radium and uranium waste parallels Délı̄ne’s progress in healing from colonization. Indeed, many people in the community bring up their continuing mistrust of federal inspectors who reassure locals that the radiation is not enough to do any damage to animals or the environment. Others say that even if uranium waste is no longer dangerous, the government has not paid sufficient attention to mental health and harm in Délı̄ne. The inaccessibility of expert knowledge perpetuates mistrust, as does the dismissal of complaints without genuine consideration. Community members reported that on occasion, reclamation waste has been transported and stored too close to people and the community; this is regarded as thoughtlessness.

This thesis’ larger topic of self-government and the impact of bureaucratic processes parallels many of these same complaints. At an institutional level, opaque expert knowledge and a commitment to procedure over people is likely unintentional. The people who feel disconnected from institutional procedure nevertheless have to cope with its effects; even if the federal government assesses reclamation waste as below safe levels of radiation, it has no procedure to account for the very real negative health impacts of anxiety and distress that the presence of said waste might induce. In this way, Port Radium continues to impact life on Sahtú more than half a century after the Second World War.

1.11 Skidoos and Pipelines: The Post-War Landscape

There is a story about a pre-WWII Dene man who bought a new ‘eight horse’ engine from the Hudson’s Bay Company and attached it to his canoe. After a single fishing trip, the man was seen carrying this motor back to the Hudson’s Bay store to return it. When the shopkeeper asked him what was wrong with it, he replied that he wanted a four-horse engine instead because this one moved too fast! When Morris

Neyelle tells this story, he jokes that they always used to use seagulls instead of horses to measure speed anyways, but that things aren't like that anymore.

Technological changes are often used in the North as a way to talk about how quickly times have changed. In community tellings of post-war history, the gradual shift from sled dogs to skidoos parallels the loss of medicine power and the move from nomadism to charter community. Michael Asch emphasizes this last point in his analysis of socioeconomics in transition, contending that it is not so much changing technology but rather the accompanying economic framework that causes transformation in communities (1979: 365). The decline of nomadism and the fur trade made a huge impact on socioeconomics in northern Canada (Asch 1979; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette: 2000). Dene communities could no longer reliably obtain trade goods and began transitioning to wage labour (Asch 1979; Rushforth 1984: 43). Délı̄ne (as Fort Franklin) became a Charter Community with a day school and church in the same era, and previously nomadic lifestyles slowly became sedentary. However, this region saw residents continuing to hunt, fish, and trap as a significant part (up to 40%, according to Rushforth) of their lifestyles up until the 1970s and 1980s (1994: 335). I am told it was not uncommon for young Dene children to have comments such as “missed too much school for trapping” scrawled in their elementary school report cards.

Thus, while socioeconomics shifted, winter roads came further north, and the Mackenzie Valley got its first telephone line, numerous subsistence methods were retained (Asch 1988: 9). These slow changes created the context for self-governance and land management today: Sahtú communities are exploring new approaches that will seek to incorporate more hunting and fishing alongside wage labour jobs with conversations about how to create the ideal economic “best of both worlds.”

Dene communities were not the only ones to experience rapid change: over the second half of the 20th century, the Canadian government shifted its policy towards Indigenous peoples numerous times in terms of both ideology and tactics. The first Trudeau government's 1969 White Paper, which June Helm aptly characterizes as “the Canadian reinvention of the square wheel” (2000: 251), advocated for gradual assimilation and devolution of federal responsibility for Indigenous peoples. Across

Canada, widespread protests from communities and Indigenous public figures such as Harold Cardinal famously called Canada's attention to problems with The White Paper:

It is time for concerned whites to reassess their involvement in a deep and honest manner so that their interest may become more meaningful to the native people. They must learn to accept criticism and even resentment of their actions as an attempt by those they would help to assure maximum return from their activities. (Cardinal 1969: 78)

The federal government backpedalled furiously: in doing so, they funded numerous new Indigenous political bodies including the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories (IB-NWT) (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 251). Now called the Dene Nation, this organization was incorporated in 1970 in order to “coordinate the land claims of the various regional groupings of Dene and to act on their behalf in negotiations with the Federal Government of Canada” (Asch 1979: 349). I talked with several community members in Délı̨nę who had been involved in the early days of the IB-NWT and all of them spoke of this era with an air of nostalgia. This institution appears to have fostered a generation of activism that carried the Dene Nation through the Supreme Court of Canada *Paulette* or caveat case, Comprehensive Land Claims, and Self-Government Negotiations. Members of the Dene Nation do not limit themselves to legal action, nor did they during its foundation: their projects also included food cooperatives, Dene language initiatives, and outreach organizations (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 16). One of the landmark accomplishments of this organization was an outline for Dene self-government. In 1975, the Dene Nation passed the Dene Declaration through consensus. The document “identified both Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories as illegitimate governments, imposed on the Dene without consent, and called for recognition of Dene self-determination” (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 16-17). At the time, it did not result in unified self-government across the Dene Nation (see Daniels 1987 for a consultant's perspective on the Dene Declaration) but it did lead to the establishment of regional land claims and self-government agreements.

The Dene Nation or IB-NWT was not the only major landmark in Dene activism during the 1970s. The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, or Berger Inquiry, is an essential prerequisite to understanding 21st century Dene governance and resource management. The Mackenzie Valley hearings were, according to Asch, one of the first

sizeable collective Dene efforts to block the “coercive influence” of external forces eroding traditional lifestyles (1979: 353).

Canadian Arctic Gas, together with Foothill Pipelines Ltd. began plans for a pipeline up the Mackenzie Valley in 1974 (Nuttall 2008: 619; Rushforth 1994: 338). In order to consult with Dene in the region, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development appointed Thomas R. Berger “to investigate the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed pipelines” (Rushforth 1994: 338). During visits to 35 different northern communities, Berger’s delegation visited Délı̨ne (then Fort Franklin) in June 1975 to gather testimony from Sahtúgot’ı̨ne participants (Berger 1977; Rushforth 1994: 338). Justice Berger made a name for himself in the Northwest Territories as a man who would listen to everyone and try to understand. It is said that while flying over the bush between hearing sites, he stopped his plane upon seeing a Dene man trapping to have tea and hear his thoughts (Dokis 2015: 4). His inquiry sought a level and detail of understanding that, in many ways, has been unparalleled by participatory management and consultation since (Dokis 2015). In Fort Franklin of 1975, Berger asked the community:

... to tell me what you would say to the government of Canada, if you could tell them what was on your minds. I want to hear from anyone who wishes to speak, because you have the right to speak, to tell me what you think this proposed pipeline will mean to you, to your family, and to your life. I am here to listen to you. (Berger in Dokis 2015: 4).

In response to Berger’s request, residents of Fort Franklin described their own experiences on the land, explained why it was important to their subsistence and spirituality, talked about why people without experience on the land should not make decisions about it, and only occasionally referred directly to pipeline construction (Berger 1977; Rushforth 1994: 339). Many of these same themes are echoed in archival footage of Inquiry interviews (see *The Inquiry Film: a report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline* (1977)) and again when I spoke with people in Délı̨ne about land management forty years later. How does a bureaucrat in Yellowknife, some would ask, know how to manage land they have never stepped foot on? Rhetorical questions such as this one refer not just to a wish that outsiders seek to understand Dene life and land better; on the contrary, there is a deeper message that we learn best by involving ourselves rather than asking detached

questions and remaining removed. Many argue that Dene epistemologies center on experiential learning (from the land, family, and elders) rather than direct questions or deduction (Goulet 1998: xxxiii). One is expected to learn by watching first, then doing (Asch 1988: 30; Rushforth and Chisholm 1991: 60). It took me an embarrassingly long time to figure this out, as I asked far too many direct questions and was quite incapable of learning to clean fish properly and quickly just by observing.

Accordingly, Dene speakers' emphasis on experiential knowledge in Berger Inquiry Testimony covered a wide range of topics and indeed generated some of the same sentiments that later drove self-government negotiations:

... whiteman's education, low rental houses, and, the worst of them all, alcohol and Welfare. You think the Dene beg on their knees for those programs? No way. The so-called Government threw it at us and we accepted their trick. . . . Mr. Berger, I am the social worker for this community. I started to work on March the 19th, 1974. . . . After I worked a year, let me tell you I have never seen anything like it. This program was made up in the whiteman's way. We Dene people have no say in it. Everything about social development is policy here, policy there, and the boss, the so-called whiteman or Government in Inuvik whom I am working for, I think expect they could give me orders. I ignore them because I am a Dene and I know the Dene problems. I have no intentions to hurt and destroy my people. They have been hurt too many times in the past and the present by the Government. I tell them, you are in Inuvik, you do your own thing, and I'll do mine. (MVPI-CH, 20:1939-43) (Mary Rose Drybone, mid thirties, speaks at the Berger Inquiry in Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000: 261).

In 1977, after the inquiry's completion, Justice Berger recommended that the Mackenzie pipeline be postponed for a minimum of ten years, a proposition that was accepted by the Government of Canada (Rushforth 1994: 347). He acknowledged numerous perspectives from different communities and individuals, as many Dene and Métis peoples did favour the pipeline for its economic benefits. His report, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland* (1977) was titled to emphasize the differences between and within Indigenous and industry perspectives, reminding southern Canada that there could be more of value in the nation's north than yet another extractives resource rush. While his report did view pipeline construction as likely, he recommended that NWT region land-claims be settled before its onset (Nuttall 2008: 619). At the time of this thesis' writing, the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline is still a proposal in negotiation, and the Dene people are now in a position to reap more of its benefits should they choose to move

forward with the project. Forty years later, the process facing the pipeline's approval has only grown more complex: if constructed, it "will pass through four Aboriginal land claim areas, cross five hundred bodies of water, use approximately 110 sites for acquiring granular material to use in construction, and potentially affect up to thirty-two communities in the Northwest Territories and northern Alberta" (Dokis 2015: 33).

The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry is still talked about with pride in D  l  ne today, and contemporary pipeline negotiations (recently followed by fracking proposals) continue to be contentious. In his contextualization of the Berger testimony in Fort Franklin, Rushforth contends that "by historically situating their personal narratives... Saht  ot'ine established that the events of their own lives were part of an extended tradition" (Rushforth 1994:339). Indeed, this continues to be the case as leaders in D  l  ne like Walter Bayha of the D  l  ne Land Corporation refer to the Mackenzie Pipeline testimony as the land making its desires known (and codified) through its people. The Berger Inquiry is just one moment in a history of Dene adaptation that shows itself in 21st century legal agreements.

Like Dene peoples and the Canadian government, the voting public also experienced ideological changes towards Indigenous rights during the 1960s and 1970s. While Thomas Berger was conducting his inquiry, the Canadian population (paralleled by international organizations like UNESCO)¹⁰ became more aware of Indigenous peoples and their rights to land, language, and cultural heritage (Dokis 2015; Nuttall 2008: 620; Patrick 2007: 35). Consequently, our colonial but democratic state was faced with a "legitimation crisis" (Dokis 2015: 6). The federal government agreed to comprehensive land claim agreements and resource co-management boards as half measures, negotiated at least in part to make Canadian citizens more comfortable with resource extraction on Indigenous lands (Dokis 2015: 7). The government is, of course, a complicated institution with a multiplicity of different agents and perspectives competing within it, as are Indigenous communities taking part in negotiations and doing with them what they can.

¹⁰ Donna Patrick traces international attention to Indigenous language endangerment to UNESCO's 1953 *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education* and subsequent development of numerous language documentation NGOs and nonprofits (2007: 35). She suggests also that greater awareness of language loss internationally co-occurred with increased recognition of struggles over traditional territory.

As such, while co-management and land claim agreements may well be conciliatory and symbolic, whether or not they function as such all the time is a different question.

The Dene Nation began negotiations for a comprehensive (and collective) Dene and Métis Land Claim not long after the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry concluded. It came very close to being signed in 1990, but a Dene National Assembly debated the extent to which Indigenous rights were being extinguished by the document. Canada did not agree to renegotiate the comprehensive Dene claim, and instead “announced it would negotiate individual land claim agreements with Dene regions wishing to enter talks on the basis of the unaltered 1990 agreement” (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 17). After the Gwich’in in 1992, the Sahtú Dene and Métis signed their agreement in 1993: both of these documents contained a commitment to negotiate self-government (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 17; Nuttall 2008: 622). The Sahtú agreement came into effect in 1994 and contained surface rights to 41 437 km² of land along with subsurface rights to 1813 km² (Nuttall 2008: 622). The Tłı̨chǫ, conversely, signed a joint land claim and self-government agreement in 2003 (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 17-18).

1.12 Regional History: Conclusion

In Canada’s pre-WWII years, Prime Minister St. Laurent remarked: “Apparently we have administered the vast Territories of the North in a continuous state of absence of mind” (qtd in Fumoleau 2004: xxvii). Looking at the history of the Canadian state from the 1880s to the 2010s, it is evident that oil, diamonds, uranium, and other extractive resources have been the main catalysts of presence of mind: federal involvement in the territories sometimes reads like one long series of legal reforms enabling resource rushes (and for the 21st century equivalent, see Tully 2010: 245). Nonetheless, the influence of Canada on northern Indigenous communities has not been unidirectional. The colonial state and settlers have also been changed by this relationship, from each explorer who learned Dene placenames to each time an Indigenous campaign effected change through the Berger Inquiry, the Supreme Court of Canada, or federal legislation (not to mention the continuous herd of anthropology students who troop north only to learn that they know nothing about fishing). Furthermore, much of this regional history demonstrates that neither acculturation nor resource exploitation is inevitable: oral histories from time immemorial are retold, communities are healing from the impacts of residential schools,

and legal agreements are still contentious but demonstrate increasing control by Dene. Chapters 2 and 3 will unpack this point, and explain the legal and bureaucratic changes in Dene and Canadian life in greater detail. In part, my goal for this thesis is to extend its analysis beyond the pervasive notion that “to the ethnohistorian attending to Indian-white contact, the ultimate goal is to comprehend the cultural and societal consequences for the native peoples” (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette: 2000: 105). “Contact” is not uni-directional. To imply that it invests cultural and political sway only in settlers and colonizers, when by now a great number of us have learned, through observation and experience, to drum dance. As the *Dene Kede Curriculum*, developed in collaboration with D el ne community linguists and elders, teaches young NWT children:

When the Dene dance with the drum, they dance separately but together in harmony.
To dance as one requires respectful relationships.
Yet they dance separately respecting the spirit of one another.
There is no desire to control or to have power over another.
The power comes from the voice of the drum.
(Northwest Territories Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment 1993: xvii)



Figure 3: *Drumming in the Cultural Centre*, photograph by author

Chapter Two Modernity, Colonialism, and Recent Legal History

2.0 Introduction: Indigenous bureaucracies.

Board meetings are common in the Sahtú, but rarely do they happen on the beach. At a public session for Saoyú-ʔehdacho National Heritage Site’s co-management board we sat on tree stumps in a circle, surrounded by the calming sounds of Great Bear Lake.¹¹ The team of Déłıne community members, Parks Canada representatives, and other non-Dene Saoyú-ʔehdacho board members talked about ways to plan for the future. Priorities differed for each person there – many of the Sahtú Dene members had immediate projects in mind, but either way, the team was going to have to create a ten-year management plan to meet Parks Canada’s institutional requirements. Déłıne’s half of the board appeared to care more about building structures in the heritage site and ensuring it was kept clean: these members added both their language and point of view to the conversation, comfortably and habitually, even if they seemed sure that they would compromise and create a document that did not seem particularly meaningful to many of them in the end.¹² Dene members of the board voiced concerns about the wisdom of creating a plan that could not be changed for a decade even if the community had different needs in five years, for example. While minor miscommunications about the purpose and usefulness of a ten-year plan ensued, the Dene man across from me memorably added, “we don’t make a strategic plan to kill a moose, that’s for sure.”

Dene subsistence methods, governance, and oral traditions now coexist with seemingly incompatible bureaucracies, wage-labour capitalism, and the Canadian and Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) legal systems. This is not a new situation: as illustrated by the previous chapter, Dene have been coping with foreign socioeconomic institutions for at least two centuries. One might say that the intensity of this partnership has increased steadily from 1945 onwards, and that it remains uneasy. How to navigate the tension between freedom and bureaucracy was a recurring topic of

¹¹ The Saoyú-ʔehdacho National Historic Site was created by a 2008 Agreement negotiated by the Déłıne Land Corporation, the Déłıne Renewable Resources Council, and Parks Canada. It protects the heritage site from extractive resource development and unites Sahtú Land Claim territory with Crown land under cooperative management, the Saoyú-ʔehdacho board.

¹² For an overview of the intent, structure, and best practices of consensus-based co-management for the Saoyú-ʔehdacho board, see Nesbitt (2016).

conversation during my stay in Délı̨ne, for Dene, bureaucrats, and Dene bureaucrats alike.

Few people question the inevitability of Canadian institutions, languages, and socioeconomic systems sharing space with Dene counterparts. Every new agreement with the Canadian state brings a handful of boards and reporting guidelines, not to mention a whole new generation of youth to be trained in Robert's Rules of Order along with driving a motor boat, setting a net, and beadwork. Within Délı̨ne and the Sahtú region there have been many attempts to try and achieve a balance wherein different cultures and systems can be mixed to produce an ideal combination. These attempts often explicitly reify a traditional culture and a modern culture and talk about mixing elements of the two. For example, there is a handbook called "Best of Both Worlds" commissioned by the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board that aims to combine a Dene and a capitalist economy:

The special kind of economy that has long sustained families and communities in the Sahtú, combining jobs and traditional activities, has come to be known as a "mixed economy". Understanding this economy as a whole can be a starting point for finding ways to keep it healthy in times of change. While a lot of information exists about the industrial economy, the role of the traditional economy is not as well understood (*Best of Both Worlds: Sahtú Gonę́né T'áadets'enı̨tq, Depending on the Land in the Sahtu Region* 2014: 1).

The term 'mixed economy' has been applied to Indigenous communities to mean that traditional modes of production (land-based hunting and gathering) continue "to contribute significantly to the diets and the social, cultural, and economic well-being of northern Aboriginal communities... in spite of predictions that [they] would be subsumed under capitalism" (Dokis 2015: 16). In other words, 'mixed economy' may connote pleasant surprise that Indigenous ways of life have not yet been completely eradicated.¹³ Such terminology tells us about the ideologies that underlie and permeate conversations about culture and cultural policy. In some ways, it can be seen as a way to cement and

¹³ 'Mixed economy' is also used as a persuasive tool, somewhat defensively, in anthropological writing attempting to demonstrate that communities show signs of cultural persistence. For example, "it would be wrong to conclude that [changes since WWII] indicate the demise of an economic formation that is distinctly Slavey. Rather, to be accurate one must describe contemporary Slavey economy as a mix of innovation and continuity that allows for the maintenance of traditional Slavey and values, as well as bush products" (Asch 1984: 20). I use some similarly defensive language in this thesis, and it is a challenge to come up with an alternative framework unless we uproot very familiar power dynamics to argue that it is a miracle that Indigenous economies haven't made market-capitalism entirely obsolete.

encourage the perceived status quo: that Indigenous and colonial systems coexist and fulfill complementary functions, as determined by what spaces colonial systems leave unfilled. For example, this kind of rhetoric may identify fishing as a supplemental, rather than primary, occupation and source of sustenance. Additionally, the aforementioned ten-year plan may include supplementary information on language and heritage, but is still intended to fit a federal institution's needs. Dene people have voiced concerns that wage labour may supersede the traditional economy for many years, during the MVPI, the Land Claim, and today (*Best of Both Worlds: Sahtú Gonéne T'áadets'enı̄to, Depending on the Land in the Sahtu Region* 2014: 25). Communities and initiatives now often use the language of establishing "economic opportunities *situated within the context of* Aboriginal cultural traditions" (Caine et al. 2007: 448, emphasis added) as an explicit reversal of predominant/supplementary economic roles.

We thus often see the idea of complimentary Indigenous and modern systems, with one filling in the other's gaps – be it with subsistence hunting, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous languages and education, or archaeology and oral history. Much of the language in these domains relies on a separation of the traditional and modern. In order for people of any heritage to talk about the current cultural context in the Sahtú (wherein the Dene do attend a vast number of meetings) we seem to find it sensible to speak of two distinctive cultures and communities mixing or blending. June Helm, one of the preeminent scholars on Dene ethnohistory, tellingly identifies the most recent 'stages' in contact between Indigenous peoples as moving from "Contact-Traditional" to the "Government-Commercial Era" (2000: 117). Both scholarship and practice portray bureaucracy and traditional culture as separate entities in tension. The phrase "Strong Like Two People" (borrowed from the Tłı̄chǫ) is often used with regard to self-government to imply that traditional culture and modern culture comprise two distinct skillsets that an individual may learn simultaneously. The reality is undoubtedly more complex: Dene and Mólá (not to mention Métis) have been interacting for centuries, and it would be far too simple to reduce that history to two culturally uniform teams playing tug of war to see if modernity or Indigeneity will come out on top. Nevertheless, our language connects thought and action iteratively, and this thesis will focus largely on the ways in which people talk and act in regards to self-government and

culture change. Thus, the first step in Chapter Two is to talk about the frames that are guiding discussions of ‘mixed’ economies, cultures, bureaucracies, and lifestyles. One predominant frame, emphasized by this thesis, is tradition, modernity, and the values attached to those categories.

While previous sections reviewed some of the relevant legal context, certain areas have not been developed fully. The Indian Act, for example, is an important part of legal history but was not a part of community discourse in Délı̨nę of 2015 (except to say that they were finally free of it). The Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, similarly, is mentioned but not fully explored. While these histories are significant, they would also eclipse this thesis’ other focuses if they were to be covered in depth. As such, this chapter will dedicate its second half to a pursuit ideological trends (again to do with modernity and tradition) within the Canadian legal system’s operations in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, but it is not intended to represent a full survey of Aboriginal Law¹⁴ in Canada. After laying out patterns in Canadian law and negotiations, Chapter Two will compare Délı̨nę’s FSGA to one signed more than two decades before, that of the Nisga’a in British Columbia. It will also provide a very brief history of how these agreements came to be, focusing on key Supreme Court of Canada cases in light of the aforementioned challenges our legal system faces with incorporating tradition and modernity. With regard to Indigenous and intercultural bureaucracies, Chapter Two identifies challenges where Chapter Three identifies ideas and solutions.

2.1 Modernity and Indigeneity: Terms in Action

The struggle of non-Western peoples to create their own cultural versions of modernity undermines the received Western dichotomy of tradition and change, custom and rationality – and most notably its twentieth century version of tradition and development. This tradition-change antithesis was already old by the time the philosophers of the Enlightenment took on the project of destroying entrenched superstition by progressive reason. (Sahlins 2005: 49)

As the previous and proceeding sections will demonstrate, the ways in which we frame interactions between communities in Canada is often guided and shaped by ideas of tradition and modernity. The implications of these words are difficult to pin down. I

¹⁴ “Aboriginal Law” here refers to the body of Canadian legislation and precedent that applies to Aboriginal peoples living in Canada, rather than to the laws of Aboriginal peoples and communities. This thesis does not attempt to comprehensively cover either of these categories.

used the word “modern” to refer to bureaucracy and capitalism above, and the term is nothing if not ambiguously loaded. To many, it implies progress, advancement, and civilization. Each of these notions often fails to detach itself from Eurocentrism and can be linked ideologically to 19th century cultural evolutionism (even though any of us who have ever sat on the executive of a board ought to have an inkling that bureaucracy rarely means progress). In all realms of scholarship the notion of modernity is copiously defined, referring variously to a historical era, a scientific paradigm, a tool for colonization, an epistemology, and a myth (Bhaba 1999; Foucault 1994; Latour 1993; McLean 2013; Sahlins 2005; Youngblood Henderson in Battiste 2000). In this thesis the meaning of ‘modernity’ or ‘modern’ borrows from many of these definitions and refers not to a clearly delineated era, but to an ideology based in the notion that ‘civilized’ humanity is fundamentally separate from nature. The idea of modernity, and its relationship with the idea of what it means to be Indigenous, Dene, or traditional, is relevant to this thesis because of the impact these categories have had on people throughout Canada.

In practice, modernity as a European ideology has historically lined up with industrial development, colonialism, and cultural evolutionism to pigeonhole Indigenous peoples as belonging to a pre-modern ‘state of nature.’ This in turn created a moral imperative for colonial expansion: the infamous white man’s burden (Youngblood Henderson in Battiste 2000). The same logic underpins many contemporary development practices: if we can replace subsistence farming with surplus and cash crops we are helping agriculture ‘evolve’ and become more modern (Waziyatiwin 2012). Numerous critiques of modernity have populated 20th century scholarship and founded the late 20th century post-modern identity crisis (including Bhaba 1999; Foucault 1994; Latour 1993). As Marshall Sahlins contends, many scholars who either adopt or criticize modernity create a story of “Western domination,” which, whether they support it or not, pretends that Indigenous and colonized societies have had no role in shaping history (2005: 44).

Chapter Two will sketch a pattern that takes inspiration from many of the abovementioned scholars, beginning with pieces of Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). Latour argues that the idea of modernity has been reified and put into practice by post-industrial colonizers. The ideology employs a “constitution” that

separates the natural and social worlds just as we may try to separate the executive and judiciary branches of government, and even though the two will necessarily be linked in innumerable unspoken ways, their division has an impact (Latour 1993: 13). Modernity draws a line between object/subject and nonhumans/humans, linking the traditions of empiricism and industrialization with the premise that humanity can control, observe, and alter the objective world outside of its subjectivity without consequence or connection (Latour 1993: 24). Latour traces the roots of modernity in practice to the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe (1993: 15). Industrial development paralleled periods of heightened exploration and settlement: then and today, those who adopt a modern ideology might also view Indigeneity as animistic and connected with nature (unable to conquer nature) and therefore pre-modern (1993: 39).

Latour points to a few contemporary phenomena, including genetic modification and climate change, that are beginning to erode the modern mindset and remind us of the inseparability of humans and nature (1993). From an Indigenous resurgence perspective, this can be framed in a different way: Indigenous community members, if they do view themselves as connected with nature, have been on the real track towards longevity all along by embracing sustainability. The colonizers have ‘never been modern,’ simply riding on a myth to justify their expansion (a similar argument from an Indigenous perspective can be found in Waziyatawin 2012; Youngblood Henderson in Battiste 2000). Interestingly, a similar reification of local/exterior has come from both Indigenous communities and academics seeking to fix modernist interventions, primarily linked with development initiatives, by emphasizing local knowledge and local decision-making (Caine et al. 2007: 464). Importantly, Caine et al. argue that the productive use of this binary relies on a certain amount of communication and solidarity between the insider/outsider roles: “from the standpoint of autonomy, the dialectical interpenetration of insider and outsider allows for the recognition of power, or of disempowerment, as it operates within and beyond the local” (2007: 464). I would add that this kind of productive engagement need not be limited to interactions between two different people or institutions. The intra-personal dialogues of many people with roles that straddle two worlds – Sahtú Dene administrators, for example, or ‘native anthropologists’ – produce

insights from a unique internal negotiation (see Perley 2011: 20-23, for an example and discussion of the same).

In Délı̨nę and in southern Canada, discussions that invoke modernity (as a separation between humanity and culture) arise in policy and public affairs frequently without being explicitly identified. Right before my visit to the community, David Suzuki, the famous environmentalist, was in the Sahtú for a water conference. People there told me proudly how impressed Suzuki was with their traditional systems and worldview: that they were far ahead of the south, which had gone off in the wrong direction entirely. Increasingly, environmentalists are echoing the perspective that Indigenous peoples' lifeways, framed by climate change crises, have been continuously more sustainable than that of their colonizers who damaged ecosystems with industrial development. In Délı̨nę, many agreed with this, while others shrugged and said that environmentalists like Suzuki only saw them at their most 'pure,' and that the moment he left the trucks and Styrofoam cups came back out of the woodwork.

While Suzuki's perspective appears to be that northern connections with nature are superior to southern separations from it, some in Délı̨nę concurred but cautioned that the processes of modernization (embodied in skidoos and Styrofoam) were taking their sustainable advantage away. Both of these perspectives embrace an Indigenous-natural, modern-artificial binary. Similarly, in the Berger Inquiry, testifying anthropologists speculated as to whether or not Indigenous peoples knew that they could have a "shopping list" of things from both the past (traditional land use) and the present (a pipeline and its economic benefits). Ironically, they used the same polarizing terminology to question whether Dene peoples realized that their choices were not polarized (*The Inquiry Film: A report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline*: 1977).

Modernity is also a culturally situated term, applied from a particular position, and its elucidation here is not intended to universalize it. A Sahtú elder during the SSI forum on Tuesday August 4th 2015 spoke in his language, but his words were translated (by an English/North Slavey bilingual translator present at the meeting) as: "Elders follow our youth, our legs are weak. Youth need to learn traditional life, they would rather live modern, it is not the Dene way." Even if I had a basic command of North Slavey, I am not certain that I would be able to grasp the differences in connotations

between his comment and the translation; however, when invoked in Délı̨ne the word often referred to foreign technology, food, bureaucracy, and media. As a substitute for ‘modern,’ Dene individuals might use ‘Móla,’ ‘English,’ ‘White,’ or ‘Southern,’ often with negative or humorous connotations attached. The framework established in this chapter will focus on European, legal, and/or colonial uses of the term. Dene speakers adopt the word ‘modern’ and use it similarly, but that it may not have a direct semantic corollary in North Slavey. In this chapter, colonial institutions conceptualize ‘traditional’ as behind, in the past, victimized, or inferior. Conversely, in Chapter Three, Dene speakers may conceptualize ‘modern’ as inferior, parasitic, or (at most) on equal footing with traditional values and lifestyles. The same rough binary is adopted in both, but its inversion creates different power relationships.

2.2 Traditional by Law: Legal Implications of Tradition and Modernity

Ideas about how culture and tradition must be preserved or upheld often generate interesting governmental measures, and the Canadian legal system juxtaposes modernity and tradition just as environmental movements do. This section will pull examples from the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC), demographic data management, and self-government agreements to highlight the ways in which culture is placed in a legal box. Gabrielle Slowey argues that negotiations with Indigenous peoples are often framed as giving communities a choice between “capitalism or traditionalism [and] assimilation or fossilization” (2009: 229). In practice, false dichotomies create situations wherein Indigenous negotiators and litigators may face consequences if they present themselves as anywhere between two extremes. If Indigeneity or traditionalism is frozen in time as an alternative to modernity, it removes the possibility that Indigenous agents may be alive, changing, and more complex: taking care of their lake with Styrofoam cups bundled with a thermos of tea on the back of the skidoo.

Language certainly impacts action and policy, and there are consequences for the Indigenous-Modern binary that eclipse rhetoric. James Tully contends that liberal philosophy and the institutions it underpins (including law, politics, the market, and education) adopt the following attitude towards Indigenous peoples:

...by means of Western education, they come to accept and embrace two foundational theses of “modernity”: the normative thesis that Western institutions embody the just form of organization for all of humanity and the causal thesis that

Western processes of development, modernization, and free trade that are spread around the world by imperial expansion bring this just form of global organization into being. (2010: 239).

In a country with explicitly multicultural rhetoric such as Canada, unambiguous assimilation is rarely a publicly acceptable option – instead, our legal system seeks to safeguard different traditions using its modern legal system. One legally entrenched example can be found in the Canadian Constitution Act (1982), which codifies Aboriginal rights: “The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed” (1982: Section 35 (1)). However, it does not concretely define or elaborate upon the contents and applications of Aboriginal rights. Instead, the process of precedent and case law has begun to shape these rights over the last thirty years, and the idea of what constitutes an Aboriginal right has been largely conceptualized as the opposite of modernity: that is, separate from a market economy and undue development.¹⁵ Examples of tradition and modernity shaping policy occur not just in the Supreme Court of Canada, but also throughout legislative history, in the way Canada categorizes and collects data about the peoples living within it, and in negotiated and signed FSGAs.

One such case, *R v Van der Peet* [1996] involved a Stó:lō Nation woman contending that Aboriginal rights include the ability to both catch and sell fish (without requiring a license). The Supreme Court of Canada decided against Dorothy Van der Peet, concluding that while she did have the right to fish for food and ceremony, she did not have the right to sell it. During its proceedings, *Van der Peet* generated a case law test for how codified Aboriginal rights should be defined in practice, centering on precedent from *Sparrow* [1990] suggesting “that [constitutionally guaranteed] aboriginal rights lie in the practices, customs and traditions integral to the distinctive cultures of aboriginal peoples” (*R. v. Van der Peet*, [1996] at para. 47). In a later case, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the *Van der Peet* test could also be applied to determine an Aboriginal group’s right to self-government (*R. v. Pamajewon* [1996]).¹⁶ The elements of the *Van*

¹⁵ For an overview of the stated federal position on Aboriginal rights immediately following the 1982 constitution, see Asch (1984: 55).

¹⁶ *R. v. Pamajewon* was also unique in that it was the first case of an appeal based around a First Nation’s inherent right to self-government. In it, the bands of Shawanaga and Eagle Lake passed gambling laws incompatible with Canadian laws and contested that their right to do so derived from their right to self-

der Peet test¹⁷ for whether or not a practice is Integral to a Distinctive Culture, and therefore admissible Aboriginal Rights, include:

3. In order to be integral a practice, custom or tradition must be of central significance to the aboriginal society in question;
4. The practices, customs and traditions which constitute aboriginal rights are those which have continuity with the practices, customs and traditions that existed prior to contact;
7. For a practice, custom or tradition to constitute an aboriginal right it must be of independent significance to the aboriginal culture in which it exists;
9. The influence of European culture will only be relevant to the inquiry if it is demonstrated that the practice, custom or tradition is only integral because of that influence;
10. Courts must take into account both the relationship of aboriginal peoples to the land and the distinctive societies and cultures of aboriginal peoples
(*R. v. Van der Peet*, [1996] at para. 49-73)

The case's decision rested on Dorothy Van der Peet's failure to prove that exchanging fish for *money* was an Aboriginal Right, because monetary currency did not exist pre-contact and was introduced by Europeans (see test 9). With this decision, the Supreme Court of Canada argued that an Aboriginal Right was only defensible if it could prove that it had withstood colonialism by existing beforehand and remaining the same despite European settler attempts to assimilate or eradicate Indigenous peoples and

government and ability to regulate their own economies. Their case was ultimately dismissed under the *Van der Peet* test.

¹⁷ The full *Van der Peet* test is as follows:

- “1. Courts must take into account the perspective of aboriginal peoples themselves;
2. Courts must identify precisely the nature of the claim being made in determining whether an aboriginal claimant has demonstrated the existence of an aboriginal right;
3. In order to be integral a practice, custom or tradition must be of central significance to the aboriginal society in question;
4. The practices, customs and traditions which constitute aboriginal rights are those which have continuity with the practices, customs and traditions that existed prior to contact;
5. Courts must approach the rules of evidence in light of the evidentiary difficulties inherent in adjudicating aboriginal claims;
6. Claims to aboriginal rights must be adjudicated on a specific rather than general basis;
7. For a practice, custom or tradition to constitute an aboriginal right it must be of independent significance to the aboriginal culture in which it exists;
8. The integral to a distinctive culture test requires that a practice, custom or tradition be distinctive; it does not require that that practice, custom or tradition be distinct;
9. The influence of European culture will only be relevant to the inquiry if it is demonstrated that the practice, custom or tradition is only integral because of that influence;
10. Courts must take into account both the relationship of aboriginal peoples to the land and the distinctive societies and cultures of aboriginal peoples”
(*R. v. Van der Peet* [1996], at para 49-73)

culture. Dorothy Van der Peet could not sell her fish under Aboriginal rights legislation because using currency in exchange for goods was determined to be too modern, and thus not a continuity of the original Indigenous practice (see test 4). In much of Canadian case law, “the judgment of the court can appear as if the Aboriginal person’s identity is exactly what is on trial” (Vermette 2008: 229).

The idea that Indigenous traditional practices, to be ratified as rights, must demonstrate timeless continuity (and often, an unbroken connection with nature) is the negative flip side of the environmentalist’s argument. Both the environmentalist’s call to arms and the case law definition of Aboriginal Rights may claim to celebrate the apparent interconnection between Indigeneity and nature; however, they also both rely on a notion of pure Indigeneity or pure traditional culture, for better or for worse. Alongside this is the parallel assumption that modernity is different: modern people are not interconnected with the natural world, and if an Indigenous person begins to slip too far into modernity their status falls into question. This line of reasoning is a natural descendant of the logic of the 1869 *Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians*, which compelled Indigenous peoples to give up their Indian status if they wished to obtain Canadian citizenship (and accompanying rights such as the ability to vote), providing each agent with the choice between institutionalized tradition and modernity with no in-between¹⁸. Like Dorothy Van der Peet, Indigenous peoples may still face concrete consequences if they do not fit the state’s definition of ‘traditional’ (Kulchyski 2010; Vermette 2008: 223; Youngblood Henderson 2000). Simultaneously, Indigenous peoples may also be disenfranchised if they (as a provincial court judge wrote in his decision on *Delgamuukw v. BC*) “‘failed to adapt’ to the modern world” (Ridington 1992: 15).

Another striking example of the Indigenous-modern binary in Canadian history comes from Métis peoples, who often find themselves caught right in the middle of such a false dichotomy. Métis living in Canada have struggled to obtain appropriate legal status for much of their history. In the Northwest Territories, for example, federal law did

¹⁸ The 1869 *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* was a post-confederation compliment to the 1857 *Act to encourage the gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in this Province, and to amend the Laws respecting Indians*. They both set up standards by which individuals could surrender Indian status if they so chose, but they also established guidelines by which any women who married a non-status Indian would involuntarily surrender her Indian status. Involuntary enfranchisement for women was in place until 1985 (Kulchyski 2010).

not recognize the existence of Métis people for many years. It was not until the 1982 Constitution Act that “Indian, Inuit and Métis” were used as separate categories on census forms (Statistics Canada: 2006). In the Territories, one 1960s Indian Affairs legal officer succinctly framed the absence of status as “There are no Métis” – a statement that would have been statistically accurate, since the then Dominion Bureau of Statistics did not record vital statistics or population data for Métis (Slobodin 1966: 8). Individuals could elect to fill out a census form and be grouped in one of the categories “Native Indian,” “Eskimo,” “White,” or “Other” depending on their residence (Slobodin 1966: 9). The awkward liminality of Métis populations was ignored, administratively and legally, as Métis people were pushed into one ill-fitting definition or another without being allowed to create their own legal self-categorization (Vermette 2008: 225).

At this writing, the Supreme Court of Canada has just delivered its decision on *Daniels v. Canada* (2016). The SCC has ruled that Métis and non-status Indians are “Indians” in the constitutional sense (under section 91(24) of the 1867 *Constitution Act*), which means that they come under federal purview and any provincial/territorial jurisdictional uncertainty can ideally be resolved. This case’s lengthy proceedings have resulted in Métis being legally categorized on one end of the Indigenous-modern spectrum. The mix of legal advantages and disadvantages for individuals is to be determined, but the agreement still has the strange effect of taking an array of cultural self-categorizations and grouping them into just two options. While the human judges are likely aware that individuals and their cultures cannot be so simply boxed up, they are working with inertia created by unwieldy, centuries-old legislation and case law.

Final Self Government negotiations are similarly influenced by an Indigenous-modern dichotomy. An FSGA may divide control along traditional and modern lines by allowing a community decision-making power over language, customs, and culture, but retain state authority over non-renewable resource exploration, legal jurisdiction, and a high level of political control (Dokis 2015; Gordon 2009; Slowey 2009: 236). While economy, land use, and legal system are of course a part of culture, the notion that the traditional can be neatly partitioned from the modern with no negative impact is unquestioned by many non-Indigenous federal negotiators.

Thus, in many ways Indigenous communities are forced to meet the colonial power on its own terms while remaining ‘authentically’ Indigenous: hire lawyers, speak English, navigate the legal system, but continue on with the rest of life as if Europeans had never arrived. In session, and following the rules of a court of law, everyone is wholly modern. Indigenous peoples are claimants in a national judicial system. In judgment, there are moderns and pre-moderns, each group on one side of colonial history with few signs of mixing or contact. Indigenous identities are placed on trial or written into the text of bills, as the categories of traditional and modern appear to preclude the point that “Aboriginal people do not cease to be Aboriginal by eating pizza,” (Ridington 1992: 17) selling fish, speaking English, or drinking from Styrofoam cups. ‘Authenticity’ appears to mean asking Indigenous populations to bear the burden of proving that colonization never happened.

The *Van der Peet* case law test for Aboriginal rights is echoed in land claim negotiations and Aboriginal title trials wherein groups may have to use modern evidentiary/testimonial frameworks to demonstrate, somehow, an Indigenous presence on land through time immemorial following an oral history (McLeod 1992; Palmer 2000; Tully 2010). Tully calls this the ‘hegemony problem’: “modern practices of consent through negotiation occur within and reproduce the colonization of indigenous people” (2010: 242). In order to approach the state in court for land claims and self-government, Indigenous communities have again had to approach a court of law on the colonizer’s terms. These negotiations often make compromises by using Indigenous groundwork and consultation (for example, working closely a council of elders) and then readopting conventional English legal terminology for the final text.

From the point of view of federal negotiators and those working on behalf of the federal government, individual intentions do not necessarily reflect general trends and are, as always, complex. Canadian institutions of governance, on the other hand, appear to burden even the most well-intentioned and self-aware employees with the task of fighting institutional inertia. When the ambiguous legal concept of the Aboriginal inherent right to self-government appeared in agreements starting in the 1990s, one federal negotiator from the Department of Indian affairs remarked: “The challenge that confronts the Minister, and those of us who work on his behalf, is to attempt to develop

constructive ways to work with a Department whose primary philosophy and attitude since its very creation has been derived from principles of colonialism and paternalism” (Morse 1995: 672). Irlbacher-Fox recounts a similar interview with a federal negotiator who voiced helplessness and shame when faced with the suffering of the Indigenous negotiators present, in part because she had no mandate to help her respond ethically (2009: 115). Canada, its cabinet, and the Supreme Court all have long and interesting ethnohistories of their own. While this thesis would be deviating a little too far from its Sahtú focus if it attempted to address and uncover all their strengths and foibles, the following section will briefly attend to the history of Canada’s recognition of Indigenous self-government using two precedent-setting Supreme Court cases as examples. As Dene political philosopher Glen Coulthard (2007) points out, the rhetoric of recognition constructs Indigenous community and self-determination as contingent on the government’s goodwill. Instead, I hope to frame the following section with the notion that what Canada chooses to recognize tells us a lot about Canada, as much or more than it tells us about Indigeneity.

2.3 Origins and Challenges of Indigenous Self-Government in Canada

How the world has changed. Two days ago and one hundred and eleven years after Smithe's rejection, I walked up the steps of this Legislature as the sound of Nisga'a drumming and singing filled the rotunda. To the Nisga'a people, it was a joyous sound, the sound of freedom. What does "freedom" mean? I looked it up in the dictionary. It means "the state or condition of being free, the condition of not being under another's control; the power to do, say, or think as one pleases.” (Gosnell 1998: 9)

Joseph Gosnell is a hereditary chief, fluent speaker of his Indigenous language (Nisga’a), chief negotiator of the *Nisga’a Final Agreement*, and the first President elected to the Nisga’a Lisims Government. His words above are from a speech to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly; they mark the signing of the Nisga’a Treaty. Nearly two decades later, Indigenous self-government agreements in Canada have continued to be signed by communities across the country. These agreements promise a change from historical assimilationist policies, and after decades of colonial efforts to eradicate traditional languages and practices it is appropriate that the public sound of drumming and singing evokes a feeling of freedom. Indigenous culture is no longer banned; it is invited to the Legislature’s steps. One can only speculate as to how many permits and

waivers were signed before performance and wonder when we will see the British Columbia Legislative Assembly demonstrate its rituals of costume and speech on the lawn in front of a Nisga'a feast hall.

While self-government is undoubtedly a tool for greater agency on the part of Indigenous communities, many critics already mentioned in this thesis argue that FSGAs reproduce colonial structures and change linguistic and cultural systems by codifying and bureaucratizing them (Coulthard 2007; Irlbacher-Fox 2009; Nadasdy 2003). Modern legal agreements can thus be framed as neocolonial tools or as mechanisms of resistance, depending on one's stance and selection of evidence. The history of these agreements is recent enough that many of their impacts are hard to ascertain at this time; the ramifications of FSGAs may not be seen for another half century or more. We can, however, begin to trace the history of their origins and logic before attending to stories about their future.

In the preceding regional history, I addressed Treaty 11, the Berger Inquiry, and made mention of the Supreme Court's role in self-government without going into further detail. The rest of that tale is filled in here, as the 1970s saw some of the first legal precedents in the story of FSGAs. The Nisga'a and the Dene both play a large role in this history. In 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada case *Calder v. Attorney-General of British Columbia* involved Nisga'a Chief Frank Calder and the question of whether or not the Nisga'a held unextinguished aboriginal title to their traditional territory (Allen 2004: 241; Asch 1984: 50; Gosnell 2003: 2; Sanders 1999: 107). "Extinguished," in this context, would imply that they had ceded their territory by treaty or lack of use (using a system of property law belonging to the state but not to the claimants). The Nisga'a and most Indigenous groups in British Columbia never signed 19th or 20th century numbered treaties, unlike communities in the territories and other provinces. While the claim was dismissed on a procedural technicality and no unanimous decision was reached on as to whether or not Nisga'a title had been extinguished, *Calder* nonetheless "affirmed that Aboriginal rights to land exist and are not solely dependent upon legislative enactments,

executive orders, or treaties for their existence but rather flow from Aboriginal peoples' traditional use and occupancy of lands" (Isaac 2012: 72).¹⁹

By turning Aboriginal Title (and the possibility that it was not extinguished by Crown Sovereignty) into a permissible debate, Chief Calder and the Nisga'a made legal room for land and self-government claims to follow in their footsteps (Allen 2004: 242; Gosnel 2003: 2; Laselva 1998: 48). *Calder* was one of the primary decisions that prompted the federal government to begin a policy of settling Aboriginal land claims where legal uncertainty still existed (Isaac 2012: 161; Tully 2010: 238). Godlewska and Webber argue that "non-Aboriginal governments have sought a high degree of 'certainty' so that the Indigenous interest is clarified once and for all. They have tried to achieve this by having treaties 'extinguish' Aboriginal rights, replacing those rights with specifically agreed positions" (2007: 26). The Canadian federal government's desire for certainty and resolution in regards to Aboriginal Title and land claims may be its largest incentive for pursuing modern treaties²⁰, and incontrovertible treaties (in the eyes of the Crown) require full consent (Isaac 2012: 172; Tully 2010: 238). In Délı̨nę's case, the 1993 Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement outlined the need for self-government in its text: the state's desire for certainty regarding land came in a different form due to the Sahtú region's participation in Treaty 11.

Accordingly, another important piece of this history is the *Paulette* or caveat case, which began in the Northwest Territories several months before *Calder*. Leaders and activists from the Dene nations still remember this as an important step in recognition of Aboriginal rights and title; one DGG council member brought it up with me during our first conversation, displaying evident pride in a history of successful Dene activism. *Paulette*, in the eyes of some Dene, constitutes an outstanding piece of legal advocacy that started the first real conversations between the Government of Canada and their

¹⁹ In the *Calder* decision of 1973, the court was split on whether or not Nisga'a Title to land "continued to exist in the face of colonial legislation" (Asch 1984: 50). However, the case did establish that Aboriginal Title (at least for the Nisga'a) "existed at the time of contact [and] were reconcilable with Canadian law" (Asch 1984: 51). Additionally, it may have helped sway the perspective of then Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, who after the case conceded that Aboriginal rights and title still existed (Allen 2004: 241).

²⁰ "Modern treaties" here refers to agreements following the numbered treaties, negotiated in the latter part of the 20th century through the 21st. This is a common usage not intended to reference Latour's earlier arguments.

communities about Aboriginal rights. Sixteen chiefs from Treaties 8 and 11 (including Chief Francois Paulette of Fort Smith) tried to register a caveat on lands in the territory that were earmarked for the Mackenzie Valley Gas Pipeline (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 15). They contended that Treaty 11 was understood by Indigenous signatories as a peace and friendship agreement rather than as land cessation. Recall, in histories of Treaty 11 recounted in our regional history, the treaty commissioner's undelivered oral promises and the process of creating chiefs to sign the paper where none existed before (Fumoloeau 2004).

Justice William Morrow of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories found that the Indigenous signatories did indeed have a different interpretation of the Treaty documents they had signed, and did *not* believe that their rights to the land had been extinguished.²¹ While the *Paulette* caveat was overturned by the Supreme Court of Canada, Justice Morrow's findings regarding Aboriginal rights to land stood. This case contributed directly to the comprehensive land claims process (Berger 1977; Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 15). Many community members in Délı̄nę as well as Stephen Iveson, who was involved in the formation of the National Indian Brotherhood in the 1960s, see a lineage of legal decisions and agreements from the Treaties to *Paulette* to the land claims to self-government, with each piece of legal history heralding the next (Author Interview Aug 27, 2015).

As it stands in Canada today, Crown sovereignty is assumed, underlying Aboriginal Title may exist and may be unextinguished (though this is deemed legally

²¹ "Those Indians who had either taken part in the treaty negotiations or who had been present while the negotiations were underway and heard parts or all of the conversation, seemed to be in general agreement that their leaders were concerned about what they were giving up, if anything, in exchange for the treaty money, *i.e.*, they were suspicious of something for nothing; that up to the time of treaty the concept of chief was unknown to them, only that of leader, but the Government man was the one who introduced them to the concept of chief when he placed the medal over the Indian's head after he had signed for his people; that they understood that by signing the treaty they would get a grubstake, money, and the promised protection of the Government from the expected intrusion of white settlers. It is also clear that the Indians for the most part did not understand English and certainly there is no evidence of any of the signatories to the treaties understanding English. Some signatures purport to be what one would call a signature, some are in syllabic form, but most are in the form of an "X". The Similarity of the "X"'s is suggestive that perhaps the Government party did not even take care to have each Indian make his own "X". Most witnesses were firm in their recollection that land was not to be surrendered, reserves were not mentioned, and the main concern and chief thrust of the discussions centred around the fear of losing their hunting and fishing rights, the Government officials always reassuring them with variations of the phrase that so long as the sun shall rise in the east and set in the west, and the rivers shall flow, their free right to hunt and fish would not be interfered with." (Re Paulette and Registrar of Land Titles 1973: 316 – 317)

uncertain), and many cases may follow on the recent *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia* decision. Modern treaties and land claims either have been negotiated or may be in the future.²² Self-government provisions may be included in modern treaties but are not considered outright (i.e. when negotiated, they do not reach the level of international agreements or a sovereignty parallel to Canada's) in part, it is posited, because of the failure of the 1992 Charlottetown Accord. These proposed amendments to Canada's constitution were agreed upon by all of Canada's premiers and territorial leaders, along with then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and four Aboriginal regional political organizations. The Charlottetown Accord included "an explicit recognition of the inherent right to self-government of the Indian, Inuit and peoples" (Morse 1995: 678) but did not acquire enough support in the national referendum to be successful. Had the 1992 vote passed, constitutionally entrenched Aboriginal self-government might have generated a different political landscape (Denis 2002; Dickason 2003; Isaac 2012: 50; Sanders 1999: 109). Regardless, this history can easily be framed as a stacked conflict between an unjustified Canadian state and a multitude of nations that do not wish to recognize the imposition of foreign legal and governmental institutions. First Nations that negotiate self-government agreements are not able to dictate freely what kind of power

²² The first modern treaty (treaty following the original numbered series) was the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) in 1975. Like the Sahtú Dene and Métis agreement, it was initiated by a resource development plan and its repercussions (in this case, the James Bay hydroelectric project) (Isaac 2012: 173). The JBNQA was followed by:

The Northeastern Quebec Agreement (1978)

The Inuvialuit Final Agreement (1984)

The Gwich'in Final Agreement (1992)

The Sahtú Dene and Métis Land Claim Agreement (1993)

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (1993) (also led to the formation of Nunavut Territory)

The Council for Yukon Indians Umbrella Final Agreement (1993)

The Nisga'a Final Agreement (1999)

The Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (2003)

The Tłı̨chǫ Agreement (2003)

The Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement (2008)

The Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement (2009)

The Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement (2011)

(Isaac 2012: 173-186).

The contemporary list includes many other agreements negotiated after 2012. Some of these treaties, such as the Nisga'a and Tłı̨chǫ agreements, include self-government provisions. These are differentiated from Délı̨nę's FSGA by the number of communities involved: both of the former include several separate settlements under one government, but Délı̨nę is unique for its one-community model.

Canada will codify, and as such these documents end up generating new negotiations between agency and neocolonialism even before the agreements have been signed.

The diversity of First Nations living in Canada means that each self-government negotiation must be unique in order to be effective (Denis 2002: 42). For a nation to initiate the negotiations process, it has to learn to use the Canadian legal system to its advantage, and invest time, energy, and money into the early consultations. It has to build an infrastructure that can work with government bureaucracies, hire community members to work in offices, and translate its goals into a language that government officials will recognize and respond to. In other words, “First Nations peoples have had to adopt Euro-Canadian political institutions as a pre-requisite for even engaging with Euro-Canadian lawyers and politicians in a dialogue” (Nadasdy 2003: 248).

The agency-bureaucracy debate has been raised previously and I will turn to it again soon in greater detail as it applies to D eljne First Nation. In their more optimistic and forward-looking conclusions (often following skeptical presentations of the recolonizing nature of legal agreements), many scholars (including Kelm 2004; Nadasdy 2003; Napoleon 2010a; Sanders 1999) target the idea that quality of life cannot be adequately measured by quantifiable indicators like economy, level of education, property, or democratic participation, all of which are used frequently to try to analyze the success of Indigenous self-government and land claims. Instead, they might say that self-determination succeeds when community members are able to take full control of “the fundamental human capacity for claiming meaning for our experiences. [Human] dignity resides in this meaning-making capacity, and it is in the denial and erasure of this capacity that ‘the force of empire depends’” (Napoleon 2010a: 10). This concept will form the crux of my presentation of perspectives I have documented within the Saht . Having addressed the legal precedents that created the environment for Indigenous self-government on a national level, I will now proceed to a brief discussion of the text of D eljne’s FSGA before Chapter Three addresses in-community perspectives.

2.4 D eljne’s Final Self-Government Agreement

We used self-government in the context prior to contact with the Europeans. We did everything ourselves, we had all our own medicines, we had all our own traditions, we had all our own laws... today under the current system, we’re losing all of that, we’re losing passing on our traditions and our customs and our

beliefs as Aboriginal people. We've also come to realize that we need to be stronger than the average person that is not an Aboriginal because we need to hold not only on to our customs and to our beliefs, but we also need to learn about the non-Aboriginal way of life and be able to participate in that world also. So, as the Tłı̨chǫ would say, "strong like two people"... [Self-government] is a structure. It's only a tool that will allow [us] to do that. (Danny Gaudet in *ourdeline* 2013: YouTube video)

As with any history, there are multiple ways to tell the story of self-determination in the North. Self-government as defined by the Canadian state is quite distinct from self-government as defined by community members in Délı̨nę and other Dene settlements. Simultaneously, community negotiators spend decades working on an agreement that works within constraints to best suit their needs and the needs of the territory or province and state. Each agreement, then, reflects input from all contributing parties, but its format and use of legalese often makes Dene input and consultation harder to see than its federal and territorial counterparts. Additionally, different parties often have different ideas about the purposes of a FGSA. Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, part of Délı̨nę's self government negotiating team, writes:

That self-government and self-determination are two distinct concepts is borne out by the way communities view self-government agreements in relation to their circumstances and futures. In the NWT, I have not encountered an Indigenous community or people that has defined in precise detail a static conceptualization of self-determination or self-government... Indigenous negotiators and elders have explained to me that agreements are viewed as one tool available among the many possibilities that may assist communities to achieve self-determination. (2009: 8-9)

Most Délı̨nę community members were not acquainted with the textual details of the FSGA unless they had worked on the phrasing of the agreement and were fluent in English. Monolingual (or North Slavey and French speaking) elders, for instance, were consulted with great care during the agreement's development and had detailed knowledge of the content that went into its conception, but the final rendering of the text into English legalese appeared to narrow the community's textual experts down to younger bilinguals.

The Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government will become effective on September 1st, 2016. One of its prime directives is to unify the authority and bureaucracy of the Charter Community of Délı̨nę (the town government), the First Nation (the Indian Act

government) and the Délı̨nę Land Corporation (the Land Claim government), helping streamline the procedures of what many community leaders refer to as a very over-governed town. People in Délı̨nę knew that I was studying self-government and may have talked more (or less) about it around me, but the following questions came up in conversation frequently: what challenges do colonial bureaucratic systems pose to communities like Délı̨nę? How are Délı̨nę community members responding to these challenges in different ways?

From one summer participating in community life, it seems that the separation between the FSGA document in practice and the FSGA document in people's minds may actually lay groundwork for greater agency. Many individuals have aspirations that can be actualized in policy and practice regardless of the original agreement itself. Nonetheless, examples from the rest of Canada have demonstrated that these agreements do indeed have an impact on communities over time. As such, I would like to draw again from the Nisga'a final self-government agreement, as an example of decisions that are now unfolding in practice. The Nisga'a Treaty of 1998 was the first modern treaty negotiated in British Columbia (Hoffman and Robinson 2010: 387). It is a lengthy and detailed document with many key provisions. First, the Nisga'a gain fee simple ownership rights to 1,992 square kilometers of land (8% of their traditional territory) including both surface and subsurface rights (Sanders 1999: 110-1). Hunting rights stretch throughout most of their traditional territory, fishing rights are present but capped, and certain geographical features will be given Nisga'a placenames by British Columbia (Sanders 1999; Allen 2004: 235).

The Nisga'a Lisims Government is established as the central governing body, with four village governments, a council of elders, and a constitution (Hoffman and Robinson 2010: 397). This government has jurisdiction and the ability to make laws to manage "lands, language, culture, education, health, child protection, traditional healing practices, fisheries, wildlife, forestry, environmental protection, and policing" (Allen 2004: 235) though in some of those areas, federal and provincial laws prevail in cases of conflict (Baade 1997: 47). Importantly, the Nisga'a Treaty removes *Indian Act* jurisdiction over the Nisga'a and gives the Nisga'a Lisims government jurisdiction over citizenship (Sanders 1999: 110). The Nisga'a forfeit any tax exemptions, and the

Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Royal British Columbia Museum agree to repatriate significant Nisga'a artefacts (Sanders 1999: 125).

There is a striking double bind in many of the Nisga'a Treaty provisions. One of its rationales is cultural preservation, yet its allowances for the survival of Nisga'a systems have been translated into colonial equivalents. The governance structure does not resemble the Nisga'a hereditary model, fee simple title is a Euro-Canadian concept, law-making becomes written instead of spoken, social services need to meet particular provincial standards, the economy is assumed to work within industrial capitalism, and the list continues.

The Nisga'a, like the Dene and other Indigenous communities in Canada, were self-governing prior to European contact. The traditional system, Yukw (Feast or Potlatch) involved hereditary chiefs and matriarchs (Simgigat and Sigidimhanaks) keeping laws, histories, and traditions of different house groups orally (Hoffman and Robinson 2010). Like Treaty 11's 1920 introduction of Chiefs in the Northwest Territories, the 19th century imposition of the band system by Canada's Department of Indian Affairs eroded traditional governments in British Columbia. While it nominally gave communities more autonomy, it is now recognized as an explicitly assimilationist tactic (Kelm 2004: 338, Hoffman and Robinson 2010: 390, Mason 2014: 64). The effects of the chief and council system vary across Canada, but in many locations bands have both hereditary and elected chiefs. In the case of the Nisga'a, they have historically undermined imposed structures by electing hereditary chiefs within the band council system (Kelm 2004: 338, Hoffman and Robinson 2010: 390). In Délı̨ne, the FSGA leaves space for governance methods like community assembly and voting, but still subscribes roughly to a chief and council model (Stephen Iveson, Author Interview August 27, 2015).

The Nisga'a Agreement revokes the power of the *Indian Act* and thus the organizing principles of band and chief, but it also imposes a constitution and a new system for electing a government that does not conform to traditional processes. The Nisga'a have continued to respond to this by electing hereditary chiefs (Hoffman and Robinson 2010: 388-9). Joseph Gosnell, quoted in this thesis, is one notable example. At the same time, the Nisga'a Treaty reinforces that the newly created government is subject

to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Sanders 1999: 123). Similarly, the Nisga'a may set up a court that reflects cultural values, but the judges will need to be appointed by the Nisga'a Lisims government and the court's decisions may be appealed through the external Canadian court system (Sanders 1999: 124). All of the structures are familiar and involve provincial or federal oversight.

The Nisga'a Lisims government includes an appointed Council of Elders (which may also include hereditary chiefs and matriarchs) to give guidance to the government (Gosnell 2003: 4). While the system has removed much of the authority of traditional house groups and does not reflect traditional Nisga'a language and culture, Nisga'a people continue to practice their traditions to the best of their abilities within it (Hoffman and Robinson 2010: 388-9).

Délıne's document has some things in common with the Nisga'a agreement; here, I will highlight some important clauses:

3.1.2 [The FSGA] does not directly or indirectly imply recognition by Canada or the GNWT of any Jurisdictions and Authorities of the DGG having a source outside the FSGA. (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2015: 24)

By making it clear that there is no source for self-governing authority outside of, or predating, the negotiated FSGA, Canada and the GNWT reinforce that self-government provisions may be included in modern treaties but are not considered inherent or outright (i.e. when negotiated, they do not reach the level of international agreements or a sovereignty parallel to Canada's). The implication in this is that Délıne has earned the right to self govern by negotiating its FSGA, but had no claim to self-government before it was given one by the state. Rhetoric implying that Indigenous peoples had no governance or social organization (or right to territory) positions Dene communities as chaotic and in need of the state's recognition and assistance. This parallels other ideas about alcoholism, childcare, suicide, and social health, that are framed as innate dysfunction with the federal government as saviour (Irlbacher Fox 2009: 31). In this way, Canada is still seeking certainty by codifying justifications for its own existence.

The Délıne Got'ıne Government (DGG) will include a chief, a council, an elder's council, a land claim board, and a justice council.²³ In some ways this is similar to the

²³ 3.4.1- The DGG consists of:

Nisga'a agreement: Délı̨nę has a new government that is reminiscent of the chief and council system but incorporates some traditional elements. The elders' council is a significant addition – in Délı̨nę there is a widespread worry that the community is losing its elders. The status implies not just age, but story keeping and knowledge keeping; some people joke that you don't become an elder as soon as you get your pension. A loss of elders, then, can easily coexist with increasing numbers of retirees.

The presence of elders on a governing body adds an element that is quite unique from the administrative-mediator roles that will be described later in this thesis. Elders keep many of their traditions, speak their language, and often grew up on the land. It was their children that really bore the brunt of the transition from nomadism to settlement, huskies to skidoos, as young adults. The amount of respect that individuals in Délı̨nę still hold for their elders is striking, but the space for them to continue to pass on knowledge is growing smaller as their interactions with younger generations become limited. Everyone appears hold their elders in high esteem and families often visit elders who are kin; however, it seems that other avenues for intergenerational knowledge transfer that in the past were a part of daily life and survival have shrunk, and are now mostly taking the form of heritage events and special occasions (Gordon 2014). I was present for one day in

-
- a) the ʔekw'ahtı̨dé [high honest leader/chief] who:
 - i) is the leader of the DGG,
 - ii) shall be selected by DFN Citizens for a term not exceeding four (4) years, and
 - iii) shall preside over and be a voting member of the Délı̨nê K'aowædó Kœ and the Executive Committee
 - b) the Délı̨nê K'aowædó Kœ:
 - i) that is the legislative branch of the DGG,
 - ii) that shall have eight (8) to twelve (12) members, including the ʔekw'ahtı̨dé and the ʔôhda Representative,
 - iii) that shall have overall responsibility for the administration of the DGG,
 - iv) whose members, with the exception of the ʔekw'ahtı̨dé and the ʔôhda Representative, shall be elected for a term not exceeding four (4) years, and
 - v) that may appoint an Executive Committee;
 - c) the Délı̨nê ʔôhda K'áowæ Kœ that:
 - i) may provide advice on any matter to the Délı̨nê K'aowædó Kœ, the Executive Committee, the Dene K'a Dats'eredi Kœ and the Dene Gha Gok'ə réhkwi, and
 - ii) shall appoint one of its members who is a Participant as an ʔôhda Representative to sit on the Délı̨nê K'aowædó Kœ as a voting member; and
 - d) the Dene K'a Dats'eredi Kœ that shall:
 - i) be composed of at least three (3) and no more than five (5) members appointed by the Délı̨nê K'aowædó Kœ for a term not exceeding four (4) years, and
 - ii) exercise the duties and functions assigned to it under DGG Law. (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2015: 26-7)

Dél̨n̨ where an elder had been hired to go to the cultural centre and tell stories to youth, an event that was advertised for a full week beforehand, and no-one attended. Elders were often listened to at drum dances, hand games, and spaces wherein youth were already gathered. An intrepid few young people actively sought out Elders who were not members of their family to learn traditional skills, and one or two elders organized weekly events like sewing/beading nights to pass on their knowledge and advice. As such, creating a new institutionalized space for elders to communicate with younger generations in a way that impacts the community meaningfully may open up new avenues for intergenerational knowledge transfer.

One question I often had for people in Dél̨n̨ was whether or not they would write their laws in their language. People responded this in many different ways, from resounding affirmation to uncertainty about standardized spelling systems and how appropriate or not it was to translate English words like “computer” and “committee” into North Slavey. Issues of translation will be discussed in more detail later, but the text of the FSGA provides some guidance on this topic:

3.7.1 – The DGG shall:

- a) maintain a public registry of the Dél̨n̨ Got’̨n̨ Æeæadó and of all DGG Laws including amendments:
 - i) in the English language, which shall be the authoritative version, and
 - ii) at the discretion of the DGG, in the North Slavey language
- (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2015: 29)

Laws in the Sahtú Dene language would provide one way for North-Slavey speaking community members to obtain direct access to legislation and administrative information without requiring a mediator.

In governing authority and structure, the new government in Dél̨n̨ is faced with the same challenge as the Nisga’a: to make the best of a document with a combination of restrictions and opportunities. While in Dél̨n̨, the effects of its FSGA are yet to be seen, people have already begun to formulate many ideas about how the future will unfold. The following section will turn to stories about the future and the meaning-making in Dél̨n̨ that remains largely distinct from the FSGA’s text. The meaning people in Dél̨n̨ make of what they are given supersedes any legal document, and the limits of the imagination may not be bound by even the most airtight clause.

Chapter Two has presented a framework for thinking about intercultural bureaucracies in terms of a mix or blend of traditional and modern systems, working with the idea that if these terms are often used as a ‘best fit’ for what is actually occurring, we can examine their ramifications. While it has focused primarily on challenges caused by the legislation of what it means to be traditional or Indigenous, it does not provide alternatives for the current system. The apparent inevitability and inertia of contemporary Canadian legal interactions with Indigenous communities is identified here, rather than transformed. Chapter Three, conversely, will outline ideas about transformation coming primarily from D  l  n   First Nation.

Interlude: First Snow

September 25, 2015 marked my last week in D  l  n   and I wrote a small blog post as one way to say goodbye. It ended up being shared by more people than usual, and I felt that it had resonated with readers in the region more than anything else I had tried to write. The short post features the past’s contextualization of future uncertainties, and as such is an appropriate transition between this thesis’ two thematic halves: first, on history and context, and second, on the varying potentials of self-government. It appears here unchanged from the original post, and as such reflects a specific time and position during the fieldwork process.

“First Snow”

D  line is grey and cold today, as wet flakes of snow are appearing for the first time this year. An elder just died. I met her only once or twice; when I first arrived she was strong and healthy enough to be tanning moose hide. She had a warm smile, which I was fortunate enough to see now and again even though I did not speak her language. She was the mother and grandmother of a large, kind family, and her children went on to be teachers, trappers, and land claim negotiators.

People here tell me how important it is to celebrate a person’s life, but they also say with sadness that an elder’s passing means the loss of knowledge, traditions, and stories.

Déline used to have the name “Village of Widows” for its generation of men – previously Uranium ore carriers – lost to cancer. People still tell stories about these elders, their abilities, their jokes, and their families. Their children will be Déline’s next group of elders, but they will also be the last generation with members who grew up in the bush, and the last ones who remember what it was like to have a dog team instead of a skidoo. Each of these individuals has lived through great change.

This morning I walked to the prophet house at the edge of town, wrapped in a gigantic parka to shield myself from the sleet. There are no sled dogs anymore, but one golden retriever named Spike followed me through the streets to keep me company. The small log building sits by the lake, built in the place where the Dene prophet zehtséó Ayah had his original home, near the trading post of Fort Franklin. The 19th century man was a spiritual leader, well loved for his moral lessons and the prophecies that still guide Déline today. The house is kept unlocked and heated, so anyone who wishes may go inside to think, pray, or ask for help.

Inside on the wall are the photographs of those who have passed away. Too many of these deaths came early: alcohol and violence took their tolls on this town like so many other isolated Indigenous communities with a history of colonial abuse and residential school.

The house is kept clean and is respected, a sacred space that even the kids don’t intrude upon. The power of the dead is palpable here. People make policy decisions with reference to their grandfathers, maps with reference to family histories. The graveyard is also a place of respect – one day we found a fox digging a burrow underneath one of the burial sites, which the elders say is an unnatural thing for an animal to do. The fox’s interference with the dead’s resting place caused worry for some in the community, and before long the hole was stopped up and a trap was placed for the animal should it decide to come back. The graves and memories of the dead are important to this place and should not be disturbed.

Sahtu K’awé: The lake is the boss. I learned this phrase last week, along with n̄ts̄ k’awé (wind boss) when a whitefish trip I was on got turned around by unsafe weather on Great Bear Lake. Two of the elders with us looked at a satellite weather forecast and made the call to turn back around to Déline, the waves were too dangerous to continue.

The past sits over this community like heavy mist, but the future can rarely be forecasted. Weather, politics, and health are ever unpredictable, and the best we can do is prepare for them together and respond as best we can. Even the prophecies of the four Sahtu Dene prophets aren't fixed in time – while they talk about the world's last fresh water disappearing and the end of humanity, no-one knows when this will come to pass. Preparations like strong language, culture, governance, and environmental protections are nonetheless underway.

Every time there is a tragedy in the community, the affected family members are immediately surrounded by friends and relatives who come over to make tea, cook, and take their mind off of events. My grandmother passed away several weeks ago. She was an intelligent, beautiful woman, a former history teacher who could tell the stories of our family generations back. When I found out that she had died, the people I was here with cooked me breakfast, took me to community gatherings, and were hesitant to leave me alone for the rest of the day. The level of support, coming even from people who had just met me, will remain one of my strongest memories of my first fieldwork experience. I have immense gratitude for this northern town, and faith that its people will come together to prepare for the turbulence of the future. Death can always be alienating, but is also a powerful reminder that any differences between you and the person next to you are fundamentally temporary.



Figure 4: *Skies Over Saoyú-?ehdacho*, photograph by author.

Chapter Three: Picturing Self-Government in Délı̨ne First Nation

3.0 Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, both anthropology and history face challenges about the relevance of their concepts and categories to varieties of cultural experience. Selection of categories is never neutral, and recent scholarly narratives are more conscious of struggles underlying systems of classification and periodization that may subsequently be presented as self-evident, especially those categories designating ownership or membership... Ideas about belonging provide particular insight into how local meanings are asserted in response to externally imposed classification systems. (Cruikshank 1998: 3)

As inculcator and enforcer of whiteman values, morals, and standards, government in its multiple aspects as lawmaker, educator, and welfare dispenser has come to usurp and enlarge the role once filled by the mission as the self-appointed caretaker of the Indian. In legal terms, the details of the government's relationship with Indians have of course varied according to national and subnational political divisions and have altered through time. But from the Indian perspective, "Government" has been a monolithic, if inscrutable and uncontrollable, entity (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000:117).

What Helm et al. once contended would certainly be hard to defend in 2015: Indigenous peoples have a multiplicity of acute ideas about what state government is, what colonization is, and what bureaucracy is, and no longer are all of these things unilaterally uncontrollable. In a way, Chapters Two and Three can be seen as beginning from "a pragmatic inquiry into *conceptual disjunctures*" (Da Col and Graeber 2011: vii). Ideas of what it means to be Dene and what it means to be Mólá may in some ways parallel the framework Chapter Two established of tradition and modernity, and may even use many of the same words. However, the ways in which this framework is applied signal conceptual distinctions between its use as an exploitative or recolonizing device (in law, as in Chapter Two) and its use in Délı̨ne. Thus, while the traditional-modern juxtaposition has been thoroughly interrogated as a colonial tool, people in Délı̨ne have played with the balance of power in these words in order to make them very much their own, in many distinctive ways. Chapter Three will draw from fieldwork to outline ways in which reified ideas of the traditional and the modern (or Dene and Mólá) are transformed in Délı̨ne to embody social forces that differ from what Latour (1993) and others suggest. As Sahlins proposes in work with Indigenous communities in Melanesia,

local organizations of world diversity (after Ulf Hannerz) are seen in active appropriations of formally colonial tools (such as notions of development, governance, or modernity) (Sahlins 2005: 48).²⁴

Without prescriptivism, I would like to discuss perspectives about self-government in Délı̨ne and its implications for Indigenous or intercultural bureaucracies. I will outline four of the ways individuals encountered in fieldwork (both Dene and non-Dene) frame the future of self-government. They include (1) bureaucracies as rapidly shrinking bubbles for culture to occur within, (2) intercultural institutions like self-government as opportunities for Dene values to transform Canada, (3) being Dene and being a bureaucrat as two different skills to be mastered, and (4) self-government as foretold by prophecy. Now that this thesis has explored some of the history and context of self-government, the barriers in place in Canadian legal systems, and the challenges or opportunities that may be created by the text of the FSGA itself, we can turn to the meaning that is made because of and despite Délı̨ne's history, context, and FSGA negotiations.

In Délı̨ne First Nation there is a large amount of optimism about the outcome of the FSGA, not to mention many individuals who may never familiarize themselves with the text of the agreement (and thus may eternally feel freed rather than bound by it). As I was in Délı̨ne during the year of transition into self-government, the models used in this chapter reflect stories, fears, and hopes about different paths the future of self-determination may take; they do not attempt to posit the impact of a legal agreement not yet fully implemented. Additionally, each of the frames for self-government elucidated here is fluid in that individuals may alternately express any one of them. No person I encountered espouses any one of these four perspectives continuously and exclusively: rather, they are discursive patterns that can be used interchangeably or interrupted and replaced. Exhaustion and cynicism, common emotions from Indigenous activists, could be easily shaken up by laughter and hope.

²⁴ The tendency to simply project theoretical categories onto communities 'being researched' has been problematized for a long time, perhaps most famously by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). By laying out a framework of Dene transformations of colonial categories I have tried to consciously refrain from relying solely on social theory. However, a project that explores independent categories (e.g. does 'traditional' have a Dene corollary or is it something very different?) coming from a Sahtú Dene perspective could go one step further.

The four approaches to mapping self-determination's future in Délı̨ne are outlined as follows, and pursued in more detail in their respective order:

(1) The theme that colonial bureaucracy requires you to sacrifice your life in order to protect your culture and those who uphold it: I will call this the “soap bubble” story.

(2) The theme that colonial history and values can and will be replaced by superior, Dene versions. If we integrate Dene languages and values into bureaucracy we can change the way that it works rather than vice-versa.

(3) The theme that invokes a commitment to excel both as Dene and as bureaucrats in order to beat the colonists at their own game, but to simultaneously keep Dene values separate. This is to be “strong like two people.”

(4) The theme of prophetic power; having faith in Délı̨ne's spiritual strength to withstand exterior pressures and even convert those who visit.

An example from the Sahtú Secretariat Incorporated (SSI) 2015 annual general meeting will help to illustrate the ways in which these approaches work in practice. The SSI was created as a part of the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement in 1993, and representatives from all communities in the Sahtú region attend the annual meeting. The delegates at this gathering speak in both North Slavey and English, and everything is translated into the other language in real time (albeit in the translator's dialect) and sent to the audience through wireless headphones. Every day at lunch, the group goes outdoors to eat trout and moose cooked on the grills set up outside the hall by community members. Returning each afternoon, lawyers and elders often take turns sharing the floor; in this case, of the gymnasium in Délı̨ne fitted out like the UN with tables and microphones for each community.

During a SSI discussion period, a group of delegates from one Sahtú community wanted to open voting up to all land claim beneficiaries in attendance, not just the board of directors. The lawyer and the chair quickly stepped in to say that under SSI's bylaws of incorporation, this kind of procedure would not create legal and valid resolutions. The conversation went back and forth with moderate heat. One side wanted to be as inclusive as possible and open up the voting regardless of status, while the other side wanted to establish that the rules were the rules and had to be followed before they could be

changed. There were many different board members who took varying positions in this discussion, and in the end, the lawyer and chair concluded that the correct procedures would need to be followed.

When I first arrived, I thought of this as a demonstration that the structures imposed by the state (Robert's Rules of Order and Bylaws of Incorporation) were changing the procedures that community members really wanted to follow. But while I was sitting there thinking about acculturation, over the three days of the meeting all delegates listened when elders spoke, the meeting was bilingual and consistently translated, it ran on northern time (i.e. unpredictably) and it was punctuated by jokes and decisions that made it quite clear that Dene values were holding their own, both intentionally and reflexively. One representative paused to say that he had been speaking in English the whole time because of the setting but didn't know why, and then switched to Dene and began immediately to speak about language revitalization. Another speaker gave an informational presentation about a joint project with Parks Canada; she sparked laughter in the gymnasium when she commented on how long it had taken due to the federal government's insistence on meeting fire codes and installing an alarm system. After the meeting was over, one SSI member told me that they achieved their main goal regardless of voting structure, which was to give everyone involved a chance to communicate.

Layers of hope, disillusionment, empowerment, anger, loss, and hilarity seemed to co-exist each day at these meetings, often within the same individual. Isolating different aspects of these reactions does not make any of them mutually exclusive. As such, the imposition of a foreign and 'unbendable' set of rules, such as a set of Bylaws, can be responded to in many different ways. SSI delegates reflected feeling trapped by the need to forfeit their lifestyles to learn these rules, or feeling powerful, like the speakers were affecting real change. Some seemed to feel quite comfortable in the setting, able to navigate it as skilfully as they could speak with the elder next to them, and in the next moment they might feel free to step outside the institutional hegemony and question the proceedings. Laughter was one of the easiest ways for a mood to change, a quality that I am told Délıne and the Bearlake region are famous for. Mutability within and between

individuals and their ideologies of choice should be kept in mind throughout the following sections.

3.1 The Bubble: Gatekeeping or Sacrifice

See the way people make decisions when a group goes hunting. They sit around in the evening and drink tea and talk about everything. They talk about the weather, they talk about where the moose might be, they talk about times they've hunted in the past. Everybody talks, everybody listens to everybody else. You never tell anybody that they're "out of order." ... A true Government would be people themselves deciding what they want and then helping each other get what they want. . . . If we go through a whole Dene movement and we end up with native people just giving orders to their own people, we're not better off than now, when white people order us around. (Native Press, October 22, 1975, 12) from "Indian Dependency and Self-Determination," (Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette: 2000: 267)

It is said that one of Délı̄ne's most respected elders went out hunting during the land claim negotiations. He heard all his community members talking about going out to protect the land to save it from Canada, yet knew that something wasn't right when he was on the land at night and his was the only campfire for hundreds of miles around. If no-one was using the land to hunt because they were all going to speak English in Ottawa, a successful land claim was only part of the community's battle.

While reserves, land claims, and Aboriginal Title and Rights may be portrayed by Canada as silos for traditional culture to occur within, this perspective is not shared by all. Canadian multicultural policy and rhetoric sometimes follows the Heritage Festival model (to use an Edmontonian's metaphor), each nation with its own tent of food and art where visitors can happily wander from Ukraine to Uganda to the Cree nation in a few clearly segmented yards. A national analogy might instead be the famed Canadian mosaic: clearly demarcated squares keeping their boundaries in order to form an elegant picture in totality. Many of the people I spoke to in the North painted a similar image (clearly demarcated ethnicities, each in their own bubbles) but did not see the Canadian legal apparatus as protecting them – rather, they felt that some of their own people would have to give up their own lifestyles in order to shelter everyone else. Indigenous people studying law, working in the band council, acting as land claim administrators and defenders would make up the soap film of the bubble protecting the culture they had given up the right to be a part of.

I was first introduced to this perspective at the aforementioned three-day SSI Annual General Meeting, hosted by Délı̄ne in August 2015 immediately after my arrival. One delegate introduced himself during the lunch hour, wanting to know if I was a member of the accounting team or perhaps a law student. When I explained my interests, he proposed a metaphor: that introducing a new idea into a bureaucracy was just like when Genghis Khan considered conquering Europe – he sent his spies out and saw that all of the serfs and kingdoms were already fighting and it would take more resources to control the territory than it would produce. In other words, it takes so much time and energy to participate in bureaucracy that there is no chance of it producing anything much worthwhile.²⁵ This perspective cropped up frequently, even in individuals with strong faith in self-government and legal approaches to Indigenous resurgence. A kind of exhaustion would sometimes set in when people mentioned that they barely had time to hunt or gather with how many meetings they attended. Some even voiced the opinion that they were sacrificing themselves in order to keep up with the colonial apparatus and ensure that their friends and family could continue on normally.

For Móla and Dene administrators or representatives involved in intercultural bureaucracies, it may seem that their role is to insulate others so that culture can carry on unimpeded within the bubble they create. By intercultural bureaucracy, I mean an organization or institution that is conceptually positioned with some degree of liminality between reified cultural groups. For example, the SSI seems to be regarded in the Sahtú region as a Dene institution (coming from a Dene land claim) that is nonetheless required to use English procedures. The Saoyú-?ehdacho co-management board mentioned in Chapter Two is both structurally liminal (involving both consensus processes and federal government procedures) and has participants both from Délı̄ne and from Canadian public administrations. While my description of these invokes the idea that there are traditional and colonial elements mixing heterogeneously in these organizations, people in Délı̄ne talk about them in many different ways. I use the word ‘liminal’ purposefully because the ‘place’ where intercultural institutions sit has manifold interpretations, grouped, as I perceive them, into the four trends in this chapter. With regard to the new DGG in

²⁵ From my limited understanding of this history, it was Genghis Khan’s grandsons who eventually had more success in furthering the Mongol Invasion of Europe. A lesson in intergenerational transmission, perhaps, or a metaphor stretched too far.

particular, its ultimate position is still to be determined and is the subject of much discussion.

For the time being, many employees currently operating intercultural institutions find themselves adopting the role of translator and/or gatekeeper to assist community members who find administrative-institutional processes understandably opaque. In Délı̄ne, individuals in administrative positions seemed to be especially aware of the awkwardness that Indigenous/bureaucrat liminality can imply. In part because of their jobs (and training, if they have left to undertake post-secondary in the south) Dene bureaucrats may begin to acquire the qualities of an outsider, qualities identifiable because they “do not and cannot stem from the insider group” (Caine et al. 2007: 451). Nonetheless, their Sahtú origins can be returned to as a defensible position of legitimacy. At the SSI AGM, a Dene speaker in a position of authority was trying to defend a policy that appeared pointless to the assembly. The language she used called attention to the underlying source of authority for her statement, insisting that on paper the policies may “look very English talk... but it’s things that actually happen!” It seemed Dene administrators’ periodic exhaustion occasionally stemmed from trying to maintain their responsibility to their community while fulfilling their tasks, needing to demonstrate that they were still good Dene. The English or Móla quality of writing seemed simultaneously inconsequential and threatening – while endless legal jargon is meaningless to many of us who read it, the people in Délı̄ne have had enough experience with treaties and land claims to know by now that it can cause serious damage. As such, the Dene people who specialize in that jargon themselves end up taking on a mediator role wherein they work to protect the community from state legalese, but sometimes must also justify their actions and differences to community members.

All the Dene administrators I met were highly skilled (by numerous metrics) and respected, even though their communities would sometimes question them. Their presence, defending the edges of the soap bubble, was simultaneously appreciated and suspect; they were frequently questioned and required to prove that they were still Dene. Community members would joke explicitly about those with government jobs making too much money for just doing things with paper, to the evident frustration of the people about whom these remarks were being made. Those working on projects like self-

government sometimes expressed how difficult it was to make everyone else understand what they were doing.

The language used to challenge liminal figures, those with Dene heritage and bureaucratic roles, is only one layer of a very complex rhetoric. When the Sahtúgot'ıne invoked the soap bubble model, they would simultaneously acknowledge those Dene people on the front lines. Often, they paired this recognition of service with pessimism and paralysis. The implication was that the bubble would pop or eventually shrink to leave the entire population unprotected. Those who already felt that they spent far more time attending meetings than going on the land would forecast an even more paper-laden future when adopting this perspective.

While many Dene bureaucrats clearly feel the strain of conflicting roles, so too do non-Dene bureaucrats in the position of facilitator. I became aware of Délıne's FSGA in exactly this way, as a coordinator for CILLDI, the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute, an Indigenous language revitalization organization that recruits language activists and educators and runs professional development classes through the University of Alberta. My kind Dene host mother, Bernice Neyelle, met me at this program and pitched Délıne's self-government transition as a research topic. Over the four years I have held this position, one of my chief tasks has been to act as a 'fixer' for Indigenous applicants, helping them find funding, enrol in the University system, register successfully in classes, apply for housing, and navigate any other administrative hurdles.

This position first introduced me to the idea that accessibility means taking care of as much of the bureaucratic process as possible for applicants who are unfamiliar with the university system. One common example is as follows: if a student has filled out only part of their admissions form, I know that its incomplete submission will force them to take an English Language Proficiency (ELP) exam. I then call them, ask how many years of English language education they have taken (inevitably 10 or more, due to the aforementioned residential school program and the average age of our students), and complete the form fully in order to make sure that they will not be asked to surmount an unnecessary and costly barrier. It is easy to say to the student "the University needs me to ask, it will be simpler this way." Why a Cree student coming to take classes in Cree

language revitalization needs to demonstrate ELP is a good question, and an easy one to avoid when I pass moral responsibility on to an intangible bureaucracy. In turn, I end up positioning myself as a helpful gatekeeper, making student status more permeable to individuals who otherwise might encounter a wall of inaccessible paperwork, unfamiliar or impractical demands, and digitization.

Many Dene and non-Dene administrators working in organizations in and around the Sahtú also inhabit the role of bureaucratic gatekeeper. As a ‘fixer,’ the duty to manage paperwork (so that others may avoid it) creates a self-image of a helpful facilitator, defending the fringes of the soap bubble. In adopting this role, we may simultaneously forfeit the responsibility to change the institutions we work in when we turn ourselves into professional navigators of them. I direct this thought *particularly* at self-styled settler-allies, a group I include myself within in. In other words, ought I to help the native Cree speaker successfully navigate the English Proficiency Requirement, or challenge the appropriateness of that requirement for an Indigenous Languages Program? In this I see the danger that giant bureaucracies generate a sense of immobility for those of us participating on the edges of them. Like the SSI delegate who compared the task of changing a bureaucracy to Genghis Khan’s advance on Europe, we may find ourselves paralyzed by the apparent complexity and permanence of these institutions. Our adoption of the ‘soap bubble surrounding culture’ model does not effectively employ our insider-outsider roles: rather than engaging in a productive dialectic, we work within our separate institutions. Caine et al. (2007) contend that “a dialectical approach to participation, research and development activities must include individuals and organizations that are able to challenge, [and] question current processes” (466).

As discussed in section 1.11 of this thesis, intercultural inquiry, consultation, and co-management in the Mackenzie Valley saw a high point with the Berger Inquiry of the 1970s, which famously adopted an intercultural consultation method that remains unmatched (even though the duty to consult was not yet enshrined and did not arrive in Canadian legislation until *R v. Sparrow* (1990)). Since the MVPI, processes of co-management, collaboration, and consultation have become increasingly standardized, bureaucratized, and sterile, removed from their participants and appropriating their points of view into a Euro-Canadian framework (Dokis 2015: 5).

To use a previously mentioned meeting for a new example, I will return to the Saoyú-?ehdacho National Heritage Site co-management board meeting in early August 2015. The Dene half of the assembly was intent on safety, making sure a cabin site on the land could be found by boat from the lake, even in bad weather, and kept clean of refuse and pollution. The non-Dene members, conversely, were quite focused on a ten-year management plan that they needed to deliver to their administration. This resulted in a certain degree of misunderstanding on both sides; most individuals seemed to be sure that their own priorities deserved more time and did not understand the other group's insistence. Berger's success may have been engineered in part by his personal approach – one man in a community hall dropping by for tea – and by those standards, this August 2015 Heritage Site meeting was doing well. The meeting took place in a campground, quite casually, and the biggest sign of difference in the non-Dene board members was merely that they used plastic rather than canvas tents.

While some guests and representatives appeared to be frustrated by the slow pace of the meeting, the non-Dene co-chair began to use language intended to make the process as accessible for the Indigenous members as possible; going through the management plan “gently” and “slowly,” and asking everyone to contribute where possible. An elder who was sitting in on the proceeds spoke in North Slavey to another Dene participant sitting next to him. After a short conversation, the second man jumped in to explain that the elder was “way ahead of us” in the conversation and was asking about the impact of changing governing systems, both in Délı̄ne and nationally (as August 2015 was just prior to a Canadian federal election). The two of them appeared to be gently reminding the non-Dene representatives of the capacity and intelligence of the Délı̄ne members of the board, and throughout the rest of the conversation the Sahtú individuals more familiar with bureaucracy's needs mediated any potential miscommunications.

In this situation, the non-Dene board members were genuinely trying to make their administrative duties as accessible as possible for all audience members, and in doing so they began to sacrifice any question about changing their institution's purview in order to get their job done, make the paperwork happen, and act as mediators between their Dene colleagues and the federal government. The Dene administrators' roles were

more complex, and they often ended up translating ideas like ‘ten year strategic plan’ into something more relatable for the other Dene participants, board members, and elders. Despite this, the Dene board members made it clear with several comments that they needed the management plan to feel more like it was “theirs,” that they were isolating themselves from the rest of the community by meeting in an out of the way location, and that real consultation with everyone as very important.

Part way through the meeting, one board member from Délı̨ne observed that the rest of the camp had moved away to let them speak privately even though the meeting was nominally an open, public session. In response, one non-Dene member of the Saoyú-ʔehdacho board asked her to act as a mediator and reassure the community that everyone would have a say. All of these remarks were very similar to those that happened in the Sahtú Secretariat Incorporated AGM, when the group of community representatives wanted their decisions made by consensus rather than by voting members. Indeed, the SSI lawyer often stepped back to allow the Indigenous Chair to speak on behalf of the bylaws, and the two appeared to rely on each other for different tasks: the lawyer was the voice of authority, and the Chair would attempt to make it accessible for the assembly while defending her own position as mediator or translator. As we will see in a later section, the role of intercultural (not necessarily interlingual) translator is an interesting one that does, in some ways, have the opportunity to enhance the decision-making abilities of the community as a whole. In our soap bubble story, nonetheless, outsourcing communication to a Dene mediator has the capacity to be a crutch for non-Dene intercultural bureaucrats.

As such, one of the real tensions in these interchanges seemed to be how genuinely the entire community was involved. For many of the Saoyú-ʔehdacho non-Dene board members, the consensus-based board was enough – however, many from Délı̨ne voiced a wish to have involvement from everyone there. Similarly, the SSI bylaws used voting board members to represent the decisions of their communities, but this level of representation was evidently dissatisfying to many of the delegations. Thus, while the bureaucratic soap bubble story was frequently invoked or participated in by numerous individuals, it was rarely viewed as sustainable. One of the following futures was forecasted for this model: the bubble might pop, involving everyone in external

bureaucracies (assimilation), or it might collapse due to an absence of real consensus and community participation (incompatibility with traditional governance styles).

Alternatively, the bureaucrats making up the soap-bubble film might slowly begin to use their position to transform external bureaucracies with Dene values, and this perspective is the second ideology discussed in the next section.

The soap bubble model is also relevant to visions of self-government, largely by informing what people are trying to avoid. Co-management boards, SSI, and all of the structures imposed throughout history (through the creation of a charter community, a land claim, a band under the *Indian Act*) reinforce the notion of a mediating body of Dene administrators working to interpret and enforce state policy. This notion, that a safe administrative bubble can be created for culture to occur within, is an over-simple model that may result in a lack of genuine consultation with entire communities, even when they are asking for more involvement. It also places Dene administrators in a liminal role where they must defend their position both as a good Dene and as a skilful bureaucrat in different contexts for different audiences: it appears to be difficult to try to sit on the fence between these identities.

Throughout history, similarly awkward liminality has been created on purpose. The chief and council band model originating in the Canadian 1876 *Indian Act* demonstrates that throughout colonization this kind of state-Indigenous mediator has been used to foster corruption and make it easier for Indian Agents to control populations (Kelm 2004: 338, Hoffman and Robinson 2010: 390, Mason 2014: 64). Regardless of good intentions, the systemic inertia found in legal apparatuses continues to create governance models that not all community members are comfortable with. When people in Délı̨ne talk about self-government, they emphasize how much they do not want to replicate existing structures. Rather, the ideal might be something streamlined that does not create an accessibility barrier for real community participation and therefore does not require a group of Dene and non-Dene gatekeepers making up a bubble. If Délı̨ne's new government can indeed combine and streamline the charter community, land claim, and band, and begin using Dene models of consultation and decision-making, they have a chance to avoid so many of the problems delineated here and create a model that is sustainable.

3.2 Dene Transformations of Colonial Institutions

The soap bubble model of traditional and modern or Dene and M'ólá interactions has much in common with Chapter Two in that it invests power in the encroaching colonial apparatus; however, it also emphasizes the sacrifices of Indigenous peoples operating as part of intercultural bureaucracies. Secondly, it does not attach many positive connotations to modernity. Instead, traditional lifestyles are viewed as both valuable and under threat. It is used by both Indigenous peoples and settler-allies to portray an unsustainable relationship between bureaucracy on the one hand, culture on the other, and all the people caught shuffling paper between the two. Now, however, this thesis will turn to a different way of approaching the unstable liminality of intercultural bureaucracies. Dene have defied predictions of assimilation for years, and the second map of the future of self-government addresses the possibility that Dene peoples might, in turn, begin to transform the systems around them rather than being transformed. One example from an academic position is the idea of local but disparate communities uniting through social media and other means to create powerful networks. Some refer to these as “glocalities”, that is, cultural and spatial configurations that connect places with each other to create regional spaces and regional worlds” (Escobar 2001: 166). While Escobar largely focuses on social movements, Wendel and Heinrich (2012) propose a model for language preservation and diversity that includes “glocalizing” language ecologies. A language ecology is the totality of ties between speakers, regions, economies, environment, and their language (Wendel and Heinrich 2012: 147). These authors suggest that “glocalizing ecologies” include Indigenous languages and have adapted communication technologies, infrastructures, and wide digital networks to create language spread, maintenance, and revival (Wendel and Heinrich 2012: 148).

Academic, policy-oriented, and environmentalist stories about Indigenous transformations of modern life are a bit different than many of their Dene counterparts. While both portray Indigenous practices as superior to their colonial parallels (if they have parallels), the increasing literature on Indigenous resource management and environmental policy ends up, ironically, hoping that Indigenous peoples will fix problems created by colonial states (Cruikshank 1998: 51). Furthermore, they seem to ask for a piecemeal approach that believes that colonial states can get what they need from

Indigenous knowledge without having to change fundamentally. Dǎlǎnǎ does not make it sound quite so easy. To return to the Dene parallel, the key notion is that Dene values have been superior to Mólá values all along; now that modern structures exist (such as self-government, the internet, etc) the best thing to do is fill them with Dene content (such as self-determination, North Slavey, etc) and watch them transform and adapt to favour Dene principles. An alternative version of this involves translation. If the DGG is framed for the community first on Dǎlǎnǎ's own terms, the ways in which the FSGA is implemented may look like a very Dene interpretation or translation of the original text. Similarly, if the DGG has the ability to write its laws first in language accessible to the community (and/or North Slavey) before translating it into an English legal version, the nature of its new legislation may be very different. In an intercultural bureaucracy such as the DGG, the tension between modernity and tradition can thus be mediated by the latter transforming the former.

3.2a: Dene transformations of Ecology, Environmental Policy, and Property

Earlier, this thesis mentioned the environmental movement's use of traditional and modern as ideas to hold up Indigenous communities as more sustainable. This section is more interested in how similar themes are talked about in Dǎlǎnǎ. In Canada and globally, some trends can easily be framed by the notion that Indigeneity is finally transforming modernity. Climate change is the prime example: neoliberalism and development are now publicly fallible, as the discussion around carbon footprints of countries that have already developed and those that have not yet 'had the chance to' unfolds. International changes have ramifications for individual nation states as they defend their actions on climate, trade, resource development, and sustainable economies to their citizens. Accordingly, in North America, Indigenous traditional ecological practices have begun to be held up by environmentalists, scientists, Indigenous peoples, and politicians as inspiring sustainable alternatives (Cruikshank 2012; Tully 2010: 250; Waziyatawin 2012). Indeed, some ecologists have begun to include "TEK" (Traditional Ecological Knowledge, perhaps made more scientifically palatable by using an acronym) in their research on Indigenous lands (Berkes and Berkes 2009; Cruikshank 1998: 53; Cruikshank 2012: 243; Nadasdy 2003: 123). Some scientists have treated TEK as an easy thing to understand quickly, "that indigenous knowledge is essentially uncomplicated,

that acquiring it is primarily a technocratic classification exercise” (Cruikshank 1998: 53). Dene speakers may think very differently: not a single person used the acronym or phrase for TEK orally, though references to Traditional Knowledge were common and invoked a numerous array of stories, knowledge of the Sahtú region, and language. Thus, the idea that Dene peoples and tradition can transform state or settler environmental perspectives does not entail a simple shift of knowledge from one domain to another (if such a thing could occur). Rather, Móla may begin to learn the value of experiential knowledge, as opposed to easily boxed up TEK.



Figure 5: *The Prophet House*, photograph by author.

As mentioned earlier, David Suzuki’s time in Délı̨ne was often remarked upon during my visit. Dr. Suzuki, the famous environmentalist and scientist, was in town for the July 2015 Tudze or Water Heart conference, organized by the Délı̨ne Land Corporation and named after a legend that features Great Bear Lake’s living heart. I am told that when he was present, the elders took him to the prophet house on the end of town: a small log building, kept heated for visitors, built in the place where ʔehtséo Ayah lived with his wife. It features a shrine to ʔehtséo Ayah and shelves with portraits of Délı̨ne community members who have passed away.

Elders spoke with Dr. Suzuki for several hours about Ayah’s prophecies, especially those that concern fresh water and climate change, as well as many histories

and legends. He listened well and at the end replied that hearing their stories made him feel very small: this comment earned him a great deal of respect, for in his time in Délı̄nę he made it clear that he believed that Indigenous systems of interaction with the environment were far ahead of their colonial counterparts, a point of view he has voiced elsewhere.²⁶ His ability to listen may have set him apart from others in the environmental movement, as northern Indigenous communities historically have had shaky relationships with southern activist groups such as Greenpeace (Dokis 2015: 24) or animal rights organizations.

David Suzuki echoed what many people in Délı̄nę already espouse: their own systems are best for their own land, and other governments could stand to take notes. He also earned respect by listening and learning well. This grows into a complicated discourse. The idea that Indigenous cultural and environmental practices are more sustainable than colonial versions is quite attractive, and can be easily oversimplified (turned into TEK) and/or romanticized. In terms of pre-contact governance, for example, we don't want to paint (probably with all the colours of the wind) a picture of complacent egalitarian simplicity and consensus supplanted by violent and irrational colonial bureaucracy. Similarly, an idea of perfect pre-contact ecological practices, animistic, 'one with nature,' is also loaded with romanticized ideas from the colonial gaze imagining what it means to be Indigenous. Daniels identifies this perspective in southern consultants to the Dene Nation in its early years, contending that the "dream-like vision of what the Dene should be" (1987: 102) leads policy advisors to ignore the hardships suffered by Dene people without jobs, as one example.

²⁶ "Remember when battles were fought over drilling in Hecate Strait, supertankers down the coast from Alaska, the dam at Site C, drilling for oil in ANWR, the dam to be built at Altamire in Brazil? I was involved in small and big ways in these battles, which we thought we won 30 to 35 years ago. But as you know, they are back on the agenda today. So our victories were illusions because we didn't change the perspective through which we saw the issues. That's what I say environmentalists have failed to do, to use the battles to get people to change their perspectives, and that's why I have chosen to work with First Nations because in most cases, they are fighting through the value lenses of their culture. The challenge is to gain a perspective on our place in nature... So long as we continue to let the economy and political priorities shape the discussion, we will fail in our efforts to find a sustainable future. I have been trying to tell business folk and politicians that, in the battle over the Northern Gateway, what First Nations are trying to tell us is that their opposition is because there are things more important than money." (David Suzuki on June 8, 2015 in Vancouver Sun "David Suzuki: Aboriginal people, not environmentalists, are our best bet for protecting the planet.")

With these caveats in mind, it is still clear that much authority in D l n  often derives from personal primary experiences rather than books or qualifications. A 1975 Saht got' n  collaborator in Scott Rushforth's study voiced a lasting perspective, "White people who talk today tell us how to use the land. They should back up what they say with stories of their travels on the land. Then we would believe them. They sit in their land and through reading books about us, they talk..." (Rushforth 1975 in Rushforth 1994: 341).

The value of experiential knowledge perspective persists in D l n  forty years later, and has blossomed into a discourse that includes contemporary concerns about poor colonial land management on both a global and a local scale. Frequently, Dene people in D l n  with concerns about the land link its health with language and suggest that speaking more North Slavey may help us know what the land wants. For example, many elders linked climate change and a downward trajectory in local health with language loss, and argued that speaking the language (along with maintaining other traditions) was one way to protect both land and health. Similarly, the Saht  community-generated caribou management plan intended to protect the endangered species so important to Dene life is based on traditional hunting practices. It uses a group of elders to enforce community participation that limits hunting, encourages the use of traditional hunting tools and transportation, and requests that hunters make use of the entirety of each hunted caribou.²⁷ The GNWT's department of Environment and Natural Resources has a parallel plan that it has also proposed, and the two are in hearings as of Spring 2016 to decide which will be adopted.

As always, a management plan and what happens on the ground are two different things, both for land management and for self-government plans. Some community members wonder if, regardless of state-imposed plans for conservation, governance, or language, they can submit to the letter of the law but continue implementing their own ideas regardless of state involvement (and eventually, have the political capital to change the nature of that state involvement). As such, in some ways, the belief that Dene laws,

²⁷ For readers interested in the futures of caribou management: while the community documents for this initiative were not yet to be shared at the time of my fieldwork, there is a CBC article describing the two competing management plans. "Deline, N.W.T., caribou management draws on traditional knowledge," published January 27, 2016, by The Trailbreaker, retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/deline-caribou-management-plan-1.3422110>

language, and values are superior to their colonial counterparts leads naturally to an ideology that specifically aims to transform colonial systems.

Environment and government come together in some ways to form an idea of property – a much-discussed category for Indigenous peoples. While it is often portrayed as a culturally specific concept thrust upon Indigenous people by colonizers, property is also an idea that is in line for transformation by the DGG. With regard to both government and land use, Canadian legal systems are taught as derivations of British law. What if legal history in Délı̨ne is replaced by Dene stories about Sahtú that can act as the body and intention of law, behind the legal mechanism of a lease? The papers one has to fill out and file to lease land may not be changeable, but the reasons for giving the lease and the tenets for taking care of that land are much more flexible.

In the case of private property, its presence or absence in Indigenous cultures has been variously used to disenfranchise Indigenous peoples or legitimize non-European social relations (Nadasdy 2003: 223). Paul Nadasdy traces this history and points out that the question of who does or does not have property is far less interesting than the reasons for using that language: why and how people play with the definition of property to suit their political interests (2003: 231). Nadasdy contends that whether or not Indigenous populations ‘had’ property pre-contact, the term as it is used by the courts is not an adequate representation of Indigenous relationships and obligations to land and animals (2003: 223). As such, “to translate the ways that Aboriginal peoples relate to one another and to the land into the language of property is, in essence, a tacit agreement to play by the rules of the game as set out by the state” (Nadasdy 2003: 232). Again, some in Délı̨ne such as Walter Bayha add to this: if failing to adopt a mechanism such as a lease may result in unnecessary state involvement and trouble, then instead of changing the lease, the language behind property and why it is being used may be changed. Self-government can be seen in this way as an agreement to play, nominally, by the rules of the state in the hopes that Dene involvement will change those rules in turn.

In Délı̨ne, many different people and projects have recorded place names, done mapping, tracked family history, and created records detailing how different kin groups and individuals used the land they frequented in each season. These records are in the process of being adapted for Land Policy use in the new Délı̨ne Got’ı̨ne Government.

Walter Bayha described these family histories, place names, and land based stories as “the land telling us how it wants to be managed.” Similarly, he identified histories such as *re Paulette* and the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Berger inquiries as an important way to record Dene knowledge as a part of history. The more knowledge from Dene communities and the land speaking through them that gets communicated and institutionalized, the more it has the potential to change the Canadian systems. Fibbie Tattie, a Sahtúgot’ı̨̨ community linguist from Délı̨̨ recently wrote that while ceremonies such as feeding the land, the lake, and the fire are still practiced, much of the knowledge and history that goes with such practices is disappearing with language use and the oral tradition (2015: 13). Revitalization of language, even in all the new forms of governance and policy, could keep Délı̨̨ ahead of the South and begin to supplant colonial values with Dene, slowly, creating a better language and climate.

A second way to frame Dene transformations of land policy comes from ideas of Indigenous relationships with place (as opposed to, perhaps, a colonial approach to conquer ‘space’). In the often used and little-considered definitions of these terms, space is taken to mean a universal, objective, quantifiable reality that has not been invested with meaning, and place is what space becomes once it has experiences and identities tied to it (Whitridge 2004: 214). To a certain extent, the concept of ‘space,’ is based on a separation between culture and nature, whereas ‘place’ depends on interaction between the two. These definitions have been questioned by many, but have nonetheless spread throughout academic and public discourse. In anthropology and other disciplines, there has been a tendency to associate Indigenous peoples and the ‘other’ with emplacement while deterritorializing settlers and academics (Lovell 1998: 4). Nadia Lovell points towards a change in contemporary anthropology, a realization that to place the ethnographic subject closer to nature than the ethnographer creates a culturally hierarchical continuum (1998: 8). In this chapter, though, we continually ask: how is that hierarchy interpreted and represented differently by different communities? Do Dene peoples place themselves closer to nature, and if yes, does this afford them power? The emphasis on experiential knowledge of land in the Sahtú is one example of difference from, for example, the scientist who wants to acquire and isolate TEK. Similarly,

language revitalization advocates in D el ne continuously call for on the land programs as more effective immersion teaching than can be found in a classroom.

Despite the appearance of separation in state land management and environmental science, no one is truly detached from their environment. Many scholars adopt the phenomenological argument that humans and their environment are inseparable, that identities are always and continuously constructed of surroundings (Lovell 1993: 9). In terms of the space/place dichotomy, this means that place is actually the predecessor of space and the condition of existence, for humans are always making meaning and interpreting (Casey 1996; Seamon 2000; Whitridge 2004: 213). As such, space is a construct, just one particular meaningful interpretation of place that happens to be associated with objectivity, modernity, science, and power (Casey 1996; Seamon 2000; Whitridge 2004: 215). In order to keep these narratives in perspective, it is important to remember that “neither science nor storytelling escapes from the network of its own production” (Whitridge 2004: 217). Some societies and individuals may nonetheless employ *constructed* divisions between nature and culture to a far greater extent than others, and such constructions have their own role in action and policy (Escobar 2004: 151).

In D el ne, Saht  and the land around it is most certainly constructed as place – filled with histories and human participation. It seems that the Dene relationship with Great Bear Lake is both spiritual and sensible, in that it fundamentally regards humans as a part of a complex ecology with responsibilities as a part of that network. Cruikshank elucidates the crux of this issue well:

Some consistent principles sharply differentiate scientific practices from indigenous oral traditions. First, scientific studies monitoring environmental change (like climate change) attempt to disentangle natural cycles from anthropogenic causes, whereas oral traditions from this region merge natural histories of landscape with local social histories. Second, [as an example,] geophysical scientists studying what makes glaciers surge focus on physical forcing mechanisms—causes external to the glacier system. In oral traditions, by contrast, materiality is subordinated to interpretations that centre on reciprocity among humans and glaciers, and on more-than-human forces intrinsic to the glacier. Third, indigenous elders formerly created new knowledge about such events by focusing on relationships and transactions among human and non-human persons. Sometimes these transactions succeed and sometimes they fail,

but failures are also incorporated into stories, whereas unsuccessful experiments are more likely to drop from the scientific record. (Cruikshank 2012: 243)

To move the conversation full circle and return to the discussion on environment and language with which this section began: If an elder in a meeting links North Slavey loss with climate change, how are we to interpret this? Those of us who do not speak Dene will never understand the full content and background of such a statement. However, the second of Chapter Three's four stories about intercultural bureaucracy – the transformative potential of Dene values – interprets the elder at face value. Dene are traditionally reliant upon the land, the land tells them how it needs to be taken care of and is interpretable through traditional language and culture, and traditional language and culture appears to be the best way to combat climate change. While the latter point is still dangerous in that settlers may begin to desire Indigenous knowledge for its utility rather than for its role in socializing new Dene peoples, the Dene conversation on this subject includes broader education in its mandate. If the Mólá perspective, broadly speaking, has constructed itself as separate from the natural world, the Dene perspective (again, broadly speaking) may see the land as a teacher, a historian, and an integral part of day-to-day life. In other words, while settler scientists may wish to extract the TEK, Dene peoples may insist on socializing them at the same time.

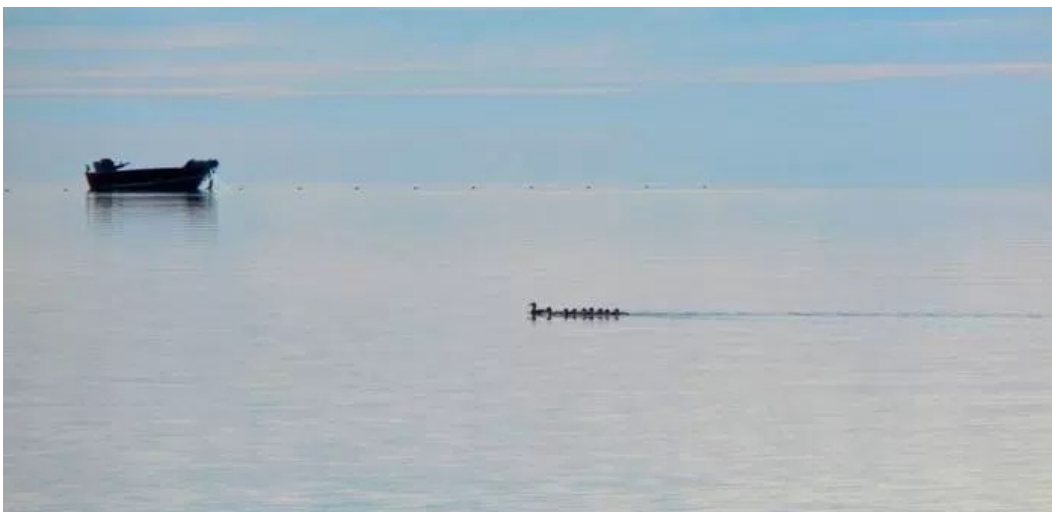


Figure 6: *Fishing on Sahtú*, photograph by author.

3.2b: Dene transformations of Governance, Language and Laws

Indigenous resurgence and self-determination are seen as distinct from self-government agreements in both literature and conversation. The latter is a colonial structure that will impose its own system and values on Indigenous peoples, and the former entails a more radical freedom (Coulthard 2007; Irlbacher-Fox 2009). We can add to this, because the two concepts sometimes have a complimentary relationship: many people in Délı̨nę might argue that they too are capable of imposing their own systems and values on the state, again with Dene content changing the Dene-Canadian negotiated legal structure. In this framework, Indigenous self-determination is hoped to slowly *change* self-government apparatuses to make them real steps towards revitalization and resurgence. This asks of the acculturating force of bureaucracy: why should assimilation be inevitable when we've already lasted this long? Furthermore, need culture change be unidirectional? Like the claim that Dene environmental practices are superior to state land management and resource exploitation, this perspective conceives of a traditional governance ethos that can transform the constraints that a FSGA document imposes.

Both in community meetings and in transition plans, leaders in Délı̨nę often espoused the point of view that the FSGA was a tool to be used as they wished, and that Dene culture and language would eventually transform the state-negotiated system. In a very tangible way, this philosophy was put into practice during the self-government negotiations. The team would often hold “on-the-land” meetings with federal negotiators, have them speak with elders, learn about ʔəhtséo Ayah, and hear about “the community’s vision of self-determination... For at least one government negotiator, a similar initiation and ongoing education and experience changed him in what he regards as profound and personal ways” (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 20-21). By transforming relationships with negotiators and other visitors, Délı̨nę has the potential to gradually influence the organizations that these people form (even if the burden to educate federal officials likely ought not to fall on Indigenous communities). A second example of Dene experiences and lands transforming powerful visitors comes from the aforementioned Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. Justice Thomas Berger ended up making recommendations not just to stall the pipeline, but also to bolster the Dene traditional economy, all based on his interactions with the Dene people giving testimony in 1975 – 1977. Rushforth (1994)

asserts that “at the community hearing, Sahtúot’ine expected Justice Berger to hear their testimony, experience for himself life in the north, and use his newly assimilated knowledge to guide later decisions and actions” (342). If this was the case, the transformation was apparently quite effective – this landmark process blocked a large oil and gas project with powerful interests pushing for its completion, as was detailed in Chapter One (Asch 1988; Helm, Oestreich, and Carterette 2000; Rushforth 1994). Like the aforementioned emphasis on experiential knowledge in environmental policy and land management, Dene approaches to the Berger inquiry and self-governmental knowledge focus on socializing better allies, rather than just delivering Dene information.

Alongside visiting negotiators, the FSGA itself has also undergone transformations. Its written words were co-negotiated, and mattered quite a lot to the people who invested years of their time and energy into them; however, this team also worked hard to translate the document orally for other community members, in workshops, meetings, and friendly conversation. During the examples of this that I saw, the FSGA team would largely leave behind the denotative meaning of the legal text in order to pluck it from its context as Canadian Law and instead focus on its associative meanings for people in Délı̨ne. At a Self-Government workshop in September 2015, for example, the transition team allayed concerns about increased office time by framing the FSGA as a document that might allow government employees to work from the bush.

In workshops like this FSGA assembly, a verbatim rendition of the agreement’s text would likely not be useful or interesting for listeners. Communications like this are acts of translation: the document that was appropriate for a group of lawyers and politicians does not carry the same meaning for a community audience, and as such changes have been made in its oral explanation in order to make its associative values appropriate to its new audience (Nida 1993: 127). In this way, the Self Government team focused on the text’s autonomous social life in the Sahtú “in the sense that every literary text has a life of its own... and its interpretation need not be related to the setting out of which it arose. This approach means that interpretation depends totally upon what the reader of such a text reads into it” (Nida 1993: 160).

As a second example of the transition team’s translation-like process, I found that the majority of community members in Délı̨ne referred to self-government as a point in

time when things would improve – there would be more available funds, more control over language, education, and health policy. Many people raised hopes that the school would be able to teach in North Slavey, have on the land programs, and that there would be more done for culture and language, when they ‘got’ self-government. I would hypothesize that the idea of self-government as a stage of unprecedented freedom (since community resettlement in the 1940s) stems at least in part from advertising within the Délı̄ne leading up to the local SG vote in March 2014. For example, *Our Délı̄ne*, the website dedicated to Délı̄ne Self-Government communication and outreach states on its ‘agreement overview’ page:

Self-government and the creation of the DGG will not only benefit people who live in Délı̄ne. These changes will provide the DGG with important tools to support and serve all Délı̄ne First Nation members and land claim beneficiaries, particularly in preserving their culture, language, spiritual practices, customs and traditions.

Self-government will be the start of a new and more equal relationship for Délı̄ne with the territorial and federal governments. They will work together as governments and Délı̄ne will have more power to make decisions for the community and *more ability to influence decisions made by other governments*. (“Délı̄ne Self-Government: Our People, Our Future, Our Délı̄ne” <http://www.ourdeline.ca/agreement-overview>, emphasis added)

Délı̄ne’s leadership translates associative meanings to adjust them for context in practice frequently, but they also aspire to linguistic translation. Many community members and leaders speak adamantly about the need to operate their own government and processes in their language. In 2015 this was not yet occurring in a written form, but bilingualism and translation in meetings was very common. Walter Bayha of the Délı̄ne Land Corporation, a community leader who will likely be involved in the lands office of the new government, maintained that if laws and policies were written in North Slavey they would change the nature of the law/policy content. Indeed, in each meeting when an individual spoke in North Slavey (in circumstances when a translation made their words accessible to me) the content of their speech changed significantly. It often involved a personal story, a speech about community wellbeing, and avoided legalese. Many English words such as ‘lawyer,’ ‘board,’ or ‘trust fund,’ were untranslatable and strung awkwardly into the narrative when they did occur.

For most of the people I talked with in Délı̨ne, the Sahtú Dene language was an important piece of self-determination. However, individual choice was also highly valued – while many would publicly question fluent Dene parents teaching children English (usually in general, not directed at a specific family) the idea of making the language somehow mandatory in the home was not on the table.²⁸ Thus, while Sahtú Dene was held up as a way to maintain Dene values in government, the mechanics of how to implement language use were still in development. Many voiced hopes that immersion teaching and on-the-land programs would be a priority for the new government, and indeed, political leadership openly encouraged the use of Dene both in rhetoric and in practice. All chiefs in the region gave public statements in both English and Dene, for example.²⁹

To return to the earlier concept of language ecologies, North Slavey is part of a network of land, speakers, and economy, and its addition or removal from the Sahtú will shape local ecology as much as its ecology has shaped it (Wendel and Heinrich 2012: 158). North Slavey is ideologically positioned in Délı̨ne as a powerful language: as mentioned earlier, in board meeting contexts people would begin speaking their language as a conscious interruption of conversations that were too “English-talk.” Délı̨ne’s idea of Dene language highlights its power to change the course of a meeting or conversation. As Barb Meek argues, the contexts and domains that a language is spoken in influence the success of Indigenous language revitalization initiatives (2010: xi). North Slavey’s disruptive potential currently only seems to be true for the generations of Sahtú Dene over the age of 30, however, and the language’s shift may be hard to reverse if Sahtú communities do not begin to socialize new Indigenous language speakers (Meek 2010: 48).

The decline in young North Slavey speakers is very recent: fifty years ago, even most of those who went away to residential school still came home speaking their language during the summer (Steven Iveson, Author Interview Aug 27, 2015). One elder

²⁸ For an ethnographic description of the importance of autonomy and choice in the Sahtú and its persistence over time, see Rushforth and Chisholm (1991).

²⁹ In addition, the Délı̨ne FSGA states that the DGG has Jurisdiction over “the language and culture of the Sahtu Dene and Metis of Délı̨ne, including their preservation, development and promotion,” and education and certification of individuals involved in this process (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2015: 64).

shared with me a story of returning from residential school in her teens: even though the school administrators had not allowed her to go home during the summers, as soon as she got back her grandmother would not allow her to speak English and in this way helped her regain her lost language. As such, the use of English over Slavey co-occurred not with the residential school program in the Sahtú (though this is a generalization), but rather, with the land claims process leading up to 1993. This is correlation only, any establishment of causation would require a much longer study directed specifically at language use.

Déłıne has trained language teachers, Dene linguists, and some of the most skilful translators in the region. Its current school program teaches North Slavey with each class of students rotating through and spending one block of their class time on the language. While Déłıne has not yet adopted more aggressive language education methods (language nests, full time immersion, and other such measures) the community and the Sahtú region is the home of numerous trained individuals who could implement such programs. Already, North Slavey speakers have worked hard on creating standardized orthography for their language along with curriculum resources, including *The Sahtuotine Long Ago* (Vandermeer et al. 1991) and the NWT-wide *Dene Kede* Curriculum (Northwest Territories Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment: 1993). The number of community experts in North Slavey help circumvent the problems that can come with that linguistic knowledge being held only with outsider-academics, and provide Déłıne with the means to harness language use and education to its own ends (Hill 2002; Meek 2010; Shulist 2013).

While the future remains uncertain, most of the current generation of Sahtú leadership can speak their language and are continuing to implement it in the context of meetings and governance. Over the past 500 years in Canada, Indigenous speakers and their messages have frequently been forced into English or French settings and changed through the process. The Canadian numbered treaties are some of the most famous examples of Indigenous perspectives being lost (purposefully or no) in translation. However, there are many recent parallels. In Canadian courts of law, for instance, Indigenous sovereignty has been examined and interpreted by a colonial audience with power and jurisdiction.

One of the precedent setting cases for Aboriginal Title in Canada, *Delgamuukw v. B.C.*, is an excellent example of courts mistranslating Indigenous speech. In 1997, Indigenous Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en claimants affirmed their land rights using oral histories and the use of a chiefly name (a practice that invoked kinship and property rights implicitly). Oral histories and the name *Delgamuukw* were misinterpreted by the arbitrating judge and became legal evidence (tested by the same standards as written evidence) and a simple denotative proper noun (Palmer 2000: 1042; Ridington 1992). While the court case did result in precedent for Aboriginal Title and instructions that oral history could be admitted as testimony in a land claims case, it became evident that the skills needed to interpret oral history and give it the same weight as written historical evidence were not yet in place (McLeod 1992; Napoleon 2010b: 60; Palmer 2000: 1041; Ridington 1992).

By continually failing to fully comprehend the implications of oral history turned testimony for Indigenous populations, the courts have undervalued oral history with their preference for written or archeological evidence (Palmer 2000: 1046). We saw echoes of the same interpretative problem in Chapter Two's discussion of *Van der Peet*, wherein Indigenous traditions were frozen as part of an incommensurable case law evidentiary test. Speech and written evidence are far from isomorphic, and the legal analysis that approaches oral history as a text simply read aloud will fail to appreciate the important differences in communicative styles (Hymes 1996: 38; Bauman and Briggs 1990; 1992: 148). Historically, colonial legal proceedings have altered Indigenous messages and codified them with lasting effect. Cases such as *Paulette*, outlined previously, began the process of clearing the way for Indigenous interlocutors to make themselves heard. However, the question of genre still remains: an Indigenous plaintiff may bring their case forward but has no guarantee that the judge will not mishear their land claim, assertion of authority, or similar messages as hearsay. As Bauman & Briggs (1990) contend, the "illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects of courtroom testimony are highly dependent... on evidentiary rules and broader semiotic frames that specify admissible types of relations to other bodies of written and oral discourse" (64). In other words, the degree of intercultural awareness required to interpret a case such as *Delgamuukw* would demand a transformation of evidentiary standards far beyond a simple commitment to

hear oral history. For a Canadian court to hear a statement of sovereignty in an Indigenous chief's name, it would have to cede the authority it currently holds, authority which allows the court to assert its own genre while stripping the statement of its original illocutionary power.

In this way, a future that comes close to a true reversal of roles might entail the DGG operating in North Slavey, transforming English legalese and history into Dene concepts, and operating using its own framework incommensurable with English-talk. While scholars and linguists advocating for Indigenous language support often end up marketing revitalization to funders as a quickly vanishing resource (language revitalization theorists may call this 'hyperbolic valorization'), many would claim that the real value of language preservation comes from socializing new speakers in a particular histories, priorities, and values (Hill 2002: 120; Meek 2010: 143–145; Shulist 2013). If Délıne succeeded in socializing youth to be self-identifying Dene speakers *and* in creating a governing apparatus that works in North Slavey, the community could continue to produce new laws, stories, policies, and oral literature that come from Dene values. Like the FSGA transition team's translation of legal text, these ideas would transform the DGG into something far removed from the agreement's original form.

This vision of the future is a beautiful path that people in Délıne sometimes point to, and like the other three perspectives in Chapter Three, elements of it may or may not be reflected in future realities. Nonetheless, it ought not to be dismissed as mere optimism for several reasons. First, as addressed earlier, North Slavey is endangered but its speakers have the potential to change this status (armed with trained community educators, linguists, and activists to pair with political capital). Délıne's FSGA gives the DGG jurisdiction over early childhood, primary, secondary, and adult education, for example, as long as its in-school programs work with GNWT curriculum. Second, there are contemporary and historical examples that can be framed as Indigenous transformations of colonial institutions. Indigenous language use itself provides an excellent example: Barbra Meek (2009) has demonstrated that the dialogic collaboration between Indigenous language activists and institutions in the Yukon has created a unique, counter-hegemonic, First Nation-directed territory-wide language policy. The political structures of the territories as opposed to the provinces are also good cases of Indigenous

transformations of settler institutions. In the Northwest Territories, the government's legislative assembly does not use party politics but instead "has encouraged a decision-making process that is something of a compromise between southern models and Indigenous consensus politics" (Abel 2005: 259). Nunavut is similarly consensus based, marrying Inuit traditions with Canadian governmental requirements. John Ralston Saul has recently written "A Fair Country" (2009), a book that dedicates itself to tracing Indigenous impact on Canadian history, politics, economics, and legislation. He contends that Canadian multicultural policy, "a philosophy of minorities," (2009: 79) is globally unique and stems from three pillars of influence (French, British, and Indigenous), though two parts of Canada pretend that the Indigenous pillar is inconsequential in order to make sense of the colonial process (2009: 121).

Ralston Saul's history is a hopeful one, and my point with this chapter is not to say that these perspectives are infallibly true. Rather, I think that many Canadians too often frame cultural processes as inevitably colonial and assimilative, and perhaps in doing so we limit the actions we will take to make changes. If ideology lives in policy, greater optimism and the notion that Indigenous communities can indeed transform the systems around them for the better may simply be a useful way to think. At the very least, for the current moment Délne is transforming the space around it by providing a model. At one point in the self-government transition workshop, Danny Gaudet asserted: "No other community in the NWT or Canada has done what we are doing; everyone will be watching, and many will be inspired by what we do."

3.3 We are becoming "Strong Like Two [Different] People."

The two previous sections sketched ways in which Sahtú Dene sometimes conceptualize intercultural bureaucracies and places where Dene and Móla systems meet. Our first perspective is that traditional culture exists in a bubble created by bureaucracy with modernity on the outside, that Dene and non-Dene facilitators guard the edges of this bubble, and that it is fundamentally unsustainable. Our second perspective sketches an ideological trend that sees Dene values transforming colonial structures: where self-government is an avenue not only for greater community agency, but also should allow the community to begin changing its surrounding land, language, governance structure, and property system. In turn, this section will outline the third perspective: a variation on

the second that can be loosely described as a heterogeneous meeting of Dene and Mólá characteristics.

In the heterogeneous view, it is necessary to be a good Dene and a good lawyer (or just whiteman): the latter, because it will let you get things done. Nadasdy (2005), Dokis (2015: 48) and others have argued that increasingly, Indigenous initiatives in governance and management are only successful if they can adopt white terminology and procedure. Ideas about having twin skillsets may both accept this warn against blending a bureaucratic skill set with Dene knowledge. For example, the previous perspective suggested using Dene language to write land policy, which would retain the integrity of traditional uses and transform the English parochial fee-simple system. In contrast, the perspective I call “Strong Like Two Different People” arose in Délı̨ne when people voiced concerns about what codifying Dene traditions would mean. The fear is that if Dene values are written down in policy, the act of preserving them will make them lose everything ‘behind’ them: their oral history included. “Tradition is not the opposite of change,” (Sahlins 2005: 51), as people in Délı̨ne know well, but some suspect that bureaucracy might be.

The Sahtú Dene prioritize tradition in part because of intergenerational transmission, a point raised earlier with regard to language revitalization and socialization. The continuing quest is to maintain and renew Dene values in Délı̨ne, to socialize new Dene people, and reproduce a locality. The ‘soap bubble’ discourse maintains that locality and identity production happen in a silo and are likely destined to be overwhelmed by the outside world. ‘Transform Mólá values with Dene values’ sees Dene policies, ecologies, and languages as superior to modern counterparts; as such, their reproduction will likely spread and transform inferior alternatives. Conversely, this third perspective cautions that the reproduction of locality and identity is not so simple; writing down a Dene decision regarding land use, for example, will neglect all of the unique decision making strategies and reasoning that led to it. All throughout this thesis, I have contended that reified cultural differences are present in human thought and make a difference in how we act. Reified differences make the four perspectives listed here meaningful. However, they also pose the risk of freezing traditions: and while we have talked about what happens when a court of law does so, we have not yet talked about how

people see and portray the same risk in a Dene community. The corresponding piece of anthropological theory comes from Appadurai:

Much that has been considered local knowledge is actually knowledge of how to produce and reproduce locality under conditions of anxiety and entropy, social wear and flux, ecological uncertainty and cosmic volatility, and the always present quiriness of kinsmen, enemies, spirits, and quarks of all sorts. (Appadurai 1996: 181)

The achievement of community cohesion, of a strong sense of identity, shared meanings, language, and history, is both impressive and fragile. We reproduce locality by maintaining the flow of an interdependent system of knowledge from one generation to the next. As such, the removal of one element from this knowledge system has the potential to change a myriad of social practices with which it is inextricably interconnected. Canada's historical policy of disrupting the teaching of Indigenous languages, for instance, did not just replace first languages with English but has also resulted in the "replacement of sociocultural practices and everyday interactions... the disintegration of the speech community or social networks that sustained the previous [linguistic] code" (Meek 2010: 4). Intergenerational knowledge (oral, experiential, or otherwise) is such a fundamental force behind cultural cohesion that elder status in many communities holds high regard less because of age and more because it entails the ability to pass on knowledge, stories, and histories (Meek 2010: 32). Many Indigenous communities have begun to protect intergenerational knowledge by institutionalizing it *and* by protecting it from unauthorized use. The insider-outsider dynamic occurs again with the recent move in some places to treat language and other cultural practices as intellectual property – often a response to academics attempting to characterize language and culture as a part of human diversity and thus universally owned (Hill 2002: 123). Délı̄ne predominantly seems to be in favour of socializing outsiders to learn Dene ways, but there are some types of knowledge that still may not be shared.

By institutionalizing cultural sovereignty, communities gain the control they need within a colonial system to *mandate* the revitalization and preservation of the intergenerational knowledge that was threatened by colonial forces in the first place. However, there are a number of caveats and side effects tied to embedding knowledge of any kind in institutional policy. Audrey Giles, for instance, argues that once a tradition is

institutionalized and rules are formed around it, it runs the risk of becoming static, ahistorical, and only permitted to be practiced in one way: it faces “a suffocation and dissolution of difference” (2004: 31). Preserving tradition using legislation or policy may generate the security and permanence needed to ensure the protection of traditional knowledge, but it may also protect that knowledge so effectively that it ceases to accept and involve different perspectives within a community. As such, a tool that is useful for guarding locality and local knowledge may in some circumstances end up causing internal tension.

Many different opportunities for institutionalized or bureaucratic tool use contain this paradox: the structure both preserves and polices cultural content. To give another regional example, language policy in Canadian territorial governments has unusually generous provisions for minority language preservation; at the same time, language programs that emphasize written components are more likely to be funded than oral education environments. In a region of languages that are traditionally oral, language pedagogy and the socialization that comes with it are being changed by the focus on literacy, while, simultaneously, taking advantage of a preservation opportunity that they might not otherwise have access to (Meek 2010; Perley 2011). The written codification of a previously oral language can be a great asset to a community of learners and language teachers, but it also certainly entails a change in the way that the language is used in lived experience. Perley refers to this process as “domestication of language” (2011: 64) that places language in public, institutional settings but does not encourage its use in the home and day-to-day speech. Keren Rice and Leslie Saxon detail the obstacles they met when attempting to standardize Slavey and Tłıchǫ at the request of the territorial government (2002: 126). Not only did they encounter problems trying to capture varying pronunciations, it also made it quite a herculean task to deal with regional varieties, of which Slavey has many (2002: 138). Rice and Saxon recommend that dictionary efforts worry less about standardized spelling where precise standardization may actually be an obstacle to literacy (2002: 153).

Oral and written language is the most obvious example of freezing a thing that was once alive, but the same debate can be applied to land, economy, governance, and all other aspects of community life. Danny Gaudet, the Délı̨nę FGSA chief negotiator, spoke

about commodifying parts of Délı̨ne’s culture. The new self-government agreement gives the community greater jurisdiction over medicine and health care. Things like traditional medicines, according to Danny, could be harvested, standardized, researched, and put on the shelf at the health care centre to make them available to people who wanted to choose between traditional and modern medicines (Author interview August 24). He later clarified that this was not intended to remove Dene practices from the equation. On the contrary, monetizing it kept traditional harvesting methods and knowledge alive. For somebody to purchase spruce gum in the Délı̨ne health centre, they will still know that a harvester knew the correct conditions for finding and preserving this medicine. The danger with mixing bureaucracy and policy with Slavey language and culture, on the other hand, was that new generations might not realize all the oral traditions that came before. There is no prerequisite labour assumed behind a written word. Once you write a thing down, people forget that there is much more knowledge behind it.

In Délı̨ne, when concerns along this vein were raised one particular alternative was often presented: coded in straight rhetoric, jokes, or implication. This was that Délı̨ne could keep colonial and traditional practices strong but separate. One might joke about learning how to be both a white man and a Dene man (implied: and never both at once). As Danny Gaudet was quoted at the beginning of section 2.4 of this thesis, “We’ve also come to realize that we need to be stronger than the average person that is not an Aboriginal because we need to hold not only on to our customs and to our beliefs, but we also need to learn about the non-Aboriginal way of life and be able to participate in that world also. So, as the Tłı̨chǫ would say, “strong like two people”... [Self-government] is a structure. It’s only a tool that will allow [us] to do that” (Danny Gaudet in ourdeline 2013: YouTube video).

Often the notion of strong-but-separate was reinforced linguistically: colonial institutions might be tagged with the word ‘Móla,’ white man: white man college, white man law, etc. The concern with knowing exactly what was Dene and exactly what was white was primarily reserved for governmental or bureaucratic processes and did not extend to things like religion, where complementary elements from settler institutions like Catholicism were adopted and now, for all intensive purposes, belong to Délı̨ne. People described using their old syllabic bible translations in the same way as they would

some oral legends, as parables for moral instruction to help you throughout life. Indeed, bible stories were often included in elder's speeches with Dene imagery (like the drum, for example) incorporated. Goulet describes a similar process in a Dene Tha community:

The schoolteachers, the R.C.M.P. officers, the nurse, and the doctors all expect Dene Tha to accept Euro-North American standards of life. These professionals, however, have not eradicated or rendered obsolete Dene ways of teaching, of avoiding open conflict when sober, and of healing. Rather, Dene Tha draw on Western institutions to complement their own practices in the areas of education, social control, and health. A similar form of adaptation can be seen in the Dene Tha response to the presence of missionaries among them. (Goulet 1998: 193)

Similarly, skidoos are now a Dene way to travel.³⁰ The Sahtú Renewable Resources booklet on mixed economies adopted heterogeneous language in a similar way, and rephrased the same sentiment as Strong Like Two People with the title phrase, *Best of Both Worlds* (*Best of Both Worlds: Sahtú Gonéné T'áadets'enı̄t̄o, Depending on the Land in the Sahtu Region* 2014). On the other hand, there are institutions that have not yet been selectively adopted for their complementary elements, and these make up the 'second person' that a Dene negotiator must learn to be: bureaucrat, policy maker, and lawyer. Remember again the Dene administrator reminding the assembly that what she was saying sounded like "English talk" but was a real and relevant thing: the boundaries between Indigenous and colonial are blurred, in many real ways, but many people make an effort still to maintain them.

Sarah Gordon has outlined one potential manifestation of keeping the strength of two people in her 2009 dissertation. Bush skills, elders' teachings, hunting, sewing, and many other easily categorized "mainstays" of Dene culture have been added back into life through heritage events. While it is unlikely that another generation of children will grow up in the bush, they can attend school camps, Parks Canada ceremonies, or family trips meant to recreate that setting. The long-term efficacy of separate heritage events remains

³⁰ Colin Scott similarly identifies snowmobiles as a Cree way to travel, in a way that has actually contributed to egalitarianism and generosity with hunted food (1984: 77 in Sahlins 2005: 51). Many aspects of so-called modern culture have been thoroughly appropriated and are rarely regarded as insidious or stifling, unless people are expressing nostalgia. For example, some Sahtú Dene would voice regret that unlike sled dogs, skidoos were not smart enough to warn you when there was thin or broken ice on the lake. Thus, the observation of that people prefer to keep tradition separate from white man things applies primarily to bureaucratic processes in this section, as a generalization.

to be seen, but in the meanwhile Gordon identifies it as an important part of community healing in the wake of a traumatic interruption caused by colonization (Gordon 2009: 96).

When I was in Délı̨nę, most heritage-type functions were created in part with impetus or funds from an external bureaucracy. Sarah Gordon also notes the tendency for ‘outsider frameworks’ to be employed in these events (2009: 156). An on-the-land trip, for instance, could be initiated by a group of elders who wanted to go fishing. A federal agency or non-governmental body might identify this trip as an opportunity to conduct research in the natural or social sciences, and allocate funds thusly. At this point, while the fishers will still go collect food for the community, they will also be included in paid community meetings that outline research questions and interests, do interviews on the land, and facilitate the travel of one or more Móla bureaucrats and/or scholars.

I took part in events like these, and Délı̨nę is far away enough from any colonial government centre that it may gently hijack the research, corporate, and/or government project. The community can use the funds (supplied by corporate philanthropy, federal research, or another source) to harvest food, visit sites around Sahtú that they have not accessed in too long, and bring youth on the land to learn a new skillset. Sitting through one or two hour-long meetings was a small price to pay. This kind of event could easily be framed in numerous ways, just like the points of view outlined so far:

- (1) See how many meetings we attend? This is assimilation.
- (2) See how well we have transformed the colonial project’s mandate? This is the Dene way superseding and changing the outside world.
- (3) See how well we keep our heritage intact while navigating the demands of research, reporting, and bookkeeping? This is the strength of two people.

Before moving on to a discussion of our fourth perspective, I want to raise a quick point about humour on Great Bear Lake. Even when Dene leaders are extremely adept in both worlds, both Dene and White, they often complicate their identities with jokes to remind the bureaucrat in the room that they are Dene first. In a colonial setting, this is different than reminding Dene colleagues of their shared origins by recounting heritage. Danny Gaudet, for instance, has a well-loved story about the negotiation process wherein he tricked the negotiators into thinking that he wanted to legalize polygamy in Délı̨nę. For several years they thought he was just barely holding back the community’s real

intention to legalize multiple marriages.³¹ With this kind of joke, settlers are tested to see what they will believe or not about Dene culture. As a guest in the community (and a young, female, gullible one at that) I was often approached with jokes – “you know, you can’t go into this meeting with your hair uncovered. You have to either put on a scarf or chop it all off!” etc.

In hindsight, I suspect that these kinds of comments test the settler’s willingness to believe in fake, funny, ‘primitive’ traditions – in part, to challenge our notions that (a) we are the same, (b) we are any better, (c) we really know anything about them at all. Intentionally or no, jokes “are effective as subversive tools because they can be used to violate codes of normal speech behaviour in a nonthreatening manner” (Bunten 2008: 389). Bunten (2008) works with Tlingit tour guides, forced to develop a ‘commodified persona’ as a traditional, Indigenous, cultural gatekeeper. One way in which Bunten’s collaborators subverted expectations, presented themselves on their own terms, and put patronizing customers in their place was to joke about their ‘traditional’ identities; for instance, by laughing that they got most of their tour information from the discovery channel. In Délı̨ne, individuals in highly bureaucratized settings would often do the inverse – laugh about their traditionalism in order to complicate their place in a colonial setting. Similarly, Dokis contends that Sahtú Dene use humour to mark “hearing spaces as their own,” (2015: 60) such as when a chief in Tulit’a stood up in an early 2000s pipeline hearing and proclaimed “I think I won” (Dokis 2015: 61).

By invoking Dene status through laughter, heritage, or language, people in Délı̨ne managed to position themselves as ‘traditonal’ and ‘modern’ in diverse settings. Even though being strong like two different people seemed easily navigable on the surface for many people, constant complication of each identity occurred. Humour was one of the most common ways to test boundaries and deflate tensions, and Dene scholars like Fibbie Tatti can tell us why:

A person who holds dló wháréh̄ʔ, ‘laughter in his or her mouth’ is highly valued. Laughter has always been so essential for healing and dealing with hardship for our people. During my uncle’s last days, he told me he had missed the

³¹ Incidentally, the Délı̨ne FSGA’s text on this subject reads: “Following the tenth anniversary of the Effective Date and at a time agreed to by the Parties, the Parties shall address the subject of marriage” (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2015: 66). Evidently this topic was somehow more of a sticking point than education, health care, lands, taxes, or justice.

Sahtúgot'ıne people since he moved from Délıne because they are so good at dló gerehtsı, 'creating laughter for each other.' (Tatti 2015: 78)

The fourth perspective to be identified has to do with place and prophecy, and it is slightly different than the others in that it seems to lay underneath all of the perspectives already identified for many people in Délıne. It is also the perspective I feel the least qualified or able (especially using an academic format) to speak on, as it dwarfs any conversation about legal documents and minute periods of history in the same way that our first history section on Time Immemorial did. As such, in the coming section I will do my best to rely on the words of others more than my own interpretations, though they are of course undeniably present.

3.4 Prophecy and Authority

Délıne's citizens invoke their history, spirituality, and pride when they create meaningful interpretations of self-government. Their community is often referred to as one of the North's special places. While it has suffered from colonial trauma, manifesting itself in alcohol abuse and violence, the community seems to be healing. My hosts would sometimes tell tragic stories from recent and distant history and then qualify: "but you don't have to worry about that. This is a safe place now." While troubles are still undeniably present, Délıne is loved and well taken care of by the people who live there – efforts like community-mandated alcohol import and sale limits are slowly making an impact. While working on this thesis, I have read numerous works from scholars visiting Délıne and almost all of them take a moment to pause and reflect on the community's healing process, their own positive experience with Délıne's people, and the consensus that "Délıne, somehow or other, has developed a level of comfort and stability to which most other communities greatly aspire" (Gordon 2009: 52).

The "somehow or other" is key: nearly everyone will speculate with no great certainty as to why Délıne has withstood a tumultuous history so well. It could be the lack of highway access, which makes alcohol limits easier to enforce. It could also be Sahtú, the lake that bolsters physical and emotional health in Délıne. Likely, many factors such of these are combined with a greater degree of political capital than some other northern communities have access to. This applies with regard to both the written and the oral

lives of self-government. For the latter, the spirit and implications of self-government give real hope to the community – in part because of prophecy.³²

Délıne has four prophets it celebrates and keeps the traditions of, and Prophet Ayah is the most revered of the four. ʔəhtséó Louis Ayah lived from 1857 to 1940. He was a Dene spiritual leader and prophet, illiterate but miraculously possessing a page-by-page knowledge of the bible. It is said that he built a small house near the present day settlement of Délıne and knew both the Dene people and missionaries very well: his house has been rebuilt as a contemporary space for prayer and healing. While there have been many prophets throughout Dene history, both before and after meeting Europeans, ʔəhtséó Ayah was known as a particularly powerful prophet and teacher across much of Dene territory (Goulet 1998: 206-7).

Many 19th and 20th century Dene prophets worked within a worldview that blended Dene and Christian lessons (Abel 1986: 220; Helm and Leacock 369; Moore and Wheelock 1990). The two systems might be viewed as complimentary; for example, “heaven was merged with the aboriginal concept of a place where spirits dwelt, so that the Christian idea of an afterlife was enriched by the Dene belief that some people could visit the unseen world while still alive” (Abel 1986: 220). Ayah’s prophecies as recounted today include the discovery of diamonds in the region, the negative effects of alcohol in the community, the end of the world, and self-government. Importantly, he foresaw uranium mining and its negative consequences, which, as discussed in chapter one, continue to have a significant impact on life in Délıne. Ayah also cautioned the people not to discuss or communicate his prophecies unless they understood them very well and had been told them at least three times. I cannot claim this level of knowledge and will leave their details and any deep interpretation, respectfully, to those who can. The words about climate change and self-government were explored frequently while I

³² For a brief historical treatment of Dene prophecy in the Northwest Territories, see Kerry Abel (1986); in “Prophets, Priests and Preachers: Dene Shamans and Christian Missions in the Nineteenth Century,” Abel discusses the possible origins and manifestations of Dene prophecy. Prophecy’s connections to medicine, the spirit world, and soul travel are discussed in her article. Abel contends that prophecy existed long prior to meeting Europeans, but that its content changed to include Christian themes after missionaries arrived. Moore and Wheelock (1990) have also edited a detailed book about Dene prophecy in Northern Alberta. In comparison to Abel’s work, Moore and Wheelock include numerous histories from Dene peoples themselves.

was in Délıne and merit some description, even though I will not attempt to communicate their full weight.

Morris Neyelle and others in the community tell me that self-government was prophesied by Ayah when he said that Délıne would eventually get power over everything around it. Everything would come to the Délıne Got'ıne. Ayah's words had great meaning for nearly everyone in Délıne. Some expressed vehement faith, some philosophical interest, and those more prone to rationalization could find sound reasons to see utility in the prophecies. The thread of faith through self-government arrangements appears to be one reason why the community persevered through the long negotiation process and succeeded, eventually, in passing an agreement. People often expressed satisfaction at the way in which everything came together for the FSGA's passing, especially in the federal government and the Canadian senate. Senate scandals had been plaguing Ottawa in the spring of 2015. Délıne's agreement lined up with quite a bit of bad press for Canada, and while the 2015 federal government was not known for its positive relationships with Indigenous peoples, many in the community felt that its agreement had been passed as a public relations move. The speed of the legislation's passage and of each successful reading reinforced the idea that fate, rather than simple skill and luck, was on Délıne's side. Indeed, when I asked Danny Gaudet in passing about oil and gas exploration in the Great Bear Lake region, he responded that he was not concerned because it was not foretold.

While degrees of faith vary from individual to individual, even many sceptics saw Ayah's words reinforced in his discussion of the end of the world and climate change. He foretold that Délıne would be the stewards of the world's last fresh water, and that the world would congregate on Great Bear Lake to try to inhabit it. Human actions could speed or slow the end, however, and specific prophecies about climate change impacts, caribou, and the changing land matched up well with words of climate scientists such as the aforementioned Suzuki, present in Délıne this summer. As such, the community's response to climate change was quite different than one might expect. Like many Indigenous communities, Délıne has reason to fear climate change, but it is said that the rest of the world is likely to be destroyed first and come to Délıne for aid. This belief flips the colonial-Indigenous power dynamic. Glen Coulthard has (with many others) pointed

to Indigenous dependence on the state as a factor that undermines real reciprocity on behalf of the Canadian government (2007). While this is the case in so many ways (education, health care, infrastructure, to name a few problems that currently exist) those who believe that Délı̄nę will have the world's last fresh water know that they are the keepers of a precious resource and must prepare to take care of it; thus, their perspective affords them unique power. The postcolonial theory that Coulthard draws from emphasizes the difference between constructing oneself in relation to colonial powers as opposed to constructing oneself as free, independent, and self-determining (2007: 454). Morris, my host father, recently told me (only half joking, I think) that it was important to keep in touch because I would need them when the world started to end.

Prophecies thus provide an interesting underlayer to the other ideologies outlined in Chapter Three – while in the short term, leaders are happy to negotiate in different ways, blending western/Indigenous values to transform the colonizer or becoming proficient at both games, in the long term many suspect that it all won't matter much (but that they should probably prepare). Additionally, there is no certainty as to when the end will come. ʔəhtséo Ayah said that no one but God will know when it is coming, and elders do not add any specific timeline to the end of the world and/or climate change, just that if nothing is done it will be sooner than it ought to be.

In her work in the Yukon territory, Julie Cruikshank also encountered prophecy in oral narratives (1994). Her collaborators, mostly women, told her about prophets with a striking parallel to Ayah – their foreknowledge was focused on changes that would come due to European contact. While many European accounts of Indigenous prophecy focus on the religious influences of colonial missionaries in the formation of these narratives, the oral literature coming from each community flips that relationship around by claiming an authoritative voice on a future unknown to settlers. As Cruikshank argues, many prophets have foreseen not failure, but advantage: “successful engagement with change and detailed foreknowledge of events” (1994: 119). Accordingly, the prophetic words of Ayah imbue Délı̄nę with a power and authority unavailable to colonizers. One may attempt to situate prophecy in an academic sociological context or simply accept that in many cases, it is a narrative that contests the academic perspective by claiming a more fundamental situating authority (Cruikshank 1994).

Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox took part in many of D  l  n  's self-government negotiations, and she reports that Ayah's prophecies were included in meetings and consultations through the presence of knowledgeable elders (2009: 94). The prophecy that Saht   will have the last clean water in the world, for example, was used to emphasize the ethical necessity of good environmental policy. Ayah also spoke of strength in unity, and the DGG's consolidation of the Charter Community, the Land Corporation, and the First Nation will bring all these institutions together to improve both efficiency and solidarity (Irlbacher-Fox 2009: 94-5). In this way, self-government was not only foretold, but also shaped by Dene prophecy.   hts  o Ayah's lessons for a post-colonial legal arrangement are examples that evidence powerful agency and undermine notions of modern ideologies encroaching upon D  l  n  . His words are still powerful today: Carly Dokis records the following anecdote from a D  l  n   friend following a pipeline petition:

You know, Prophet Ayah said that people from the South would come to the Saht   and ask us for our land. He told us that we should tell them yes. He said, 'Always tell them yes, but also tell them that if they want the land, they will have to take it with them when they go.' (2015: 58-9).

3.5 Chapter Three: Concluding Thoughts

Having outlined four perspectives on the future of D  l  n   and its relationship with intercultural bureaucracies, the question that remains is: how might these impact actions, thoughts, and policies, within and between people and communities? Most particularly, how will these ideas apply to the DGG? One answer we have already talked about is role negotiation, how a person caught in the middle of the insider-outsider traditional-modern binary may explicitly position themselves as Dene, ally, mediator, or outsider, depending on the circumstances and their aims. Another answer is in policy and goals: Chapter Three's four perspectives highlight different strategies for preserving Dene values and/or using them to transform others, including translation, socialization, and North Slavey language use. Similarly, academics and those of us positioned as outsider-allies may need to interrogate our own ideas about the permanence of our institutions; we can consider whether our responsibility is to facilitate access to them or to transform them so that gatekeepers are less necessary. We may be socialized to be better Dene allies when we visit, participate, and listen.

Another tangible example I want to suggest has to do with language and North Slavey in particular, since it played a large role in this chapter. As an administrator at CILLDI, I am not a linguist but have participated in the social dynamics of language revitalization programs and activism for four years. The topic is of enduring interest, even if it is not the primary focus of my thesis. As Kroskrity (2008: 71) argues, language renewal and revitalization can be verbally and explicitly supported within any community; however, the actions that people take to speak, record, and teach their language nonetheless involve ideological struggles that may not be on the surface of community discourse. Thus, the four ideas about tradition and modernity are in some ways reflected in language ideologies about North Slavey, since the language seems to be largely regarded as a key piece of Dene socialization and identity as well as a connection to the land and Sahtú. Sahtú Dene's use/lack thereof was often implicit/explicit information in any interaction or meeting. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the active choice to include the Sahtú Dene language in institutional settings sometimes served as a mark of resilience – a conscious choice to transform the English-talk with Dene.

I suggest (rather than contend, as a theoretical application of a framework) that since the four perspectives outlined in Chapter Three seem to coexist within most individuals, they may also contribute to differing responses to language revitalization. Kroskrity argues that there is a “*multiplicity of ideologies* that routinely collide within and across communities during acts of language renewal,” (2008: 73; emphasis added) and as ideologies are contributed to by sociopolitical contexts, the four perspectives about Dene traditions and bureaucracies contribute to them and in turn influence language use. I will quickly compare Délı̨ne with a different example within Canada to illustrate what I mean.

In *Defying Maliseet Language Death* (2011), Bernard Perley of Tobique First Nation talks about the Maliseet language classroom's adoption of colonial, essentialized models of what it means to be traditional: “acquiescence to colonial hegemony and its concomitant depreciation of indigenous languages, cultures, and peoples” (86). In contrast, some of Délı̨ne's reinventions of what it means to be traditional (i.e. transformative, powerful) lead it to bring Sahtú Dene into territorial curriculum, board meetings, digital mapping, and its FSGA text wherever feasible. Simultaneously, however, the desire to transform English policy using Dene texts and translations runs

into the exhaustion of Sahtú’s administrators, the people who may identify themselves as on the fringes of traditional and modern culture. The speaker in the SSI forum who pauses to wonder aloud why he is not speaking his language moves from a space of exhaustion to one of resistance, and begins to insist on transforming the conversation around him with Slavey. Office workers voicing concern about the strange Dene translations of words like “information technology” on doors and labels reflect the desire to stay strong like two different people, while elders pair prophet songs and stories with reminders to keep the language strong for Dene resilience. All of the stories or ideologies sketched in Chapter Three may be useful frames for language work in the Sahtú.

Again, the analogy of Sahtú language ideologies in practice is intended to be more of a tool for thought than an assertion: a suggestion that narratives about the past, present, and future may impact social life in many domains. Additionally, as Délı̨ne’s new government moves forward in time over the next few decades, it will likely need to struggle with choices surrounding language use and maintenance. The value of identifying and clarifying possible ideological struggles is that it identifies problems and gives us the tools we need to solve them. If I do not know *why* I refrain from speaking a language it is hard to change my behaviour should I wish to do so. Similarly, as an administrator in an intercultural bureaucracy I see value in unpacking the various ideologies I may hold – both within myself and in comparison to the people I interact with – in order to clarify which courses of action are intentional, intuitive, or responsible, and why.



Figure 7: *Reflections on Sahtú*, photograph by author.

Conclusion

Her words echo the sound of our land and water, maybe a very small beginning and yet a beginning to listen to our land through her language. Not many have an opportunity to write about our people, with a view to understand them, their visions and aspirations and certainly our history brought forward for a glimpse of a self-governing First Nations that have always occupied Sahtu, our homeland. The Dene are only following a template, so to speak, made from the visions of all our grandfathers. Our grandfathers all are part of what Deline has accomplished to date. We are like small steps in a true path they made for us. As George Blondin (1995) once said to me “ We are facing a White Culture like the tsunami, where do we go from here?”. I can say, “today we have a tool called Self Government”. (Walter Bayha 2016, correspondence to author).

When I talk to people in Edmonton about self-government in Délı̄ne, many of them express that they have never heard about such a thing before and are pleasantly surprised to hear about an Indigenous community “doing so well.” In the south of Canada, we are inundated with negative media portrayals of Aboriginal communities and reserves: we hear about suicide, diabetes, and domestic abuse, rarely about self-determination. The messages that do pertain to Indigenous governance are often themselves quite negative partial truths. CBC News published a story called “21 Northern First Nations face Funding Freeze,” on September 02, 2015 (while I was in Délı̄ne) listing groups that had purportedly refrained from publishing their financial information publicly by the First Nations Financial Transparency Act (FNFTA) deadline. Délı̄ne was included in this article, but the community had indeed released their records long before the deadline – Aboriginal Affairs had simply not processed it yet.³³ CBC released a long list of nations, some of which were making a purposeful statement in not complying, many of which simply had their financial information waiting in bureaucratic limbo. The comments section was filled with venom and outright racism: this was before CBC made the decision to remove the online comment section in Aboriginal News stories due to a “disproportionate number of comments that cross the line and violate our guidelines... some comments are clearly hateful and vitriolic, some are simply ignorant. And some appear to be hate disguised as ignorance” (Office of the CBC GM and Editor in Chief: 2015).

³³ CBC later revised the article to include this caveat: see final version at Muzyka: Sept 03, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/21-northern-first-nations-face-funding-freeze-1.3213899>

Ignorance is fueled or changed by the stories we tell and those we choose not to. I have spent a great deal of this thesis talking about how complicated the stories contained in it are: and while I stand by that estimation, I also think that there are some very simple, relatable threads that flow through them that influence human interactions and institutions. If we remained lost in the complexity they would not be as powerful as they are. Concepts of what is traditional and what is modern, for example, are so compelling that they have a place in Canada's constitution. These ideas are certainly more intricate than they appear. If, however, they are so engrained as to make their use inevitable, why not at least change the stories told about them? What if CBC published the same article and named it "Aboriginal Affairs faces criticism for bureaucratic inefficiency: First Nations break federal system with detailed financial reports"? It may take a while before our newspapers boast "Canada's prophesied collapse begins with federal bureaucracy," but they could consider beginning with small steps.

In Canada there remains a prevailing hegemony that tells children how our history really begins with European exploration and map making. It goes on to tell us how Canadians bought the land fairly with Treaties, or negotiated new agreements where the Treaties were not fair. Our constitution and laws become hegemonic – used with an eye only to internal consistency – where oral legal traditions are hearsay instead of parallel institutions in their own right. Within the totalizing Euro-Canadian picture of the world, self-government and intercultural institutions appear only as recolonizing tools: one more piece of Canada legislating its own legitimacy.

I think it is possible to step outside of the hegemony problem by doing what many of the Dene perspectives here have done: inverting and complicating the old traditional-modern power dynamic, using familiar ideas and relationships in different ways. Those of us in settler or intercultural institutions can try to contextualize Canadian history in Indigenous history rather than vice-versa, and continue to be critical of the Canadian legal system using a mindset that invokes parallel or pre-existing legal institutions instead of just an internal critique of state law. Researchers and writers can think and talk about communities like Délı̨nę not as if they are just fighting colonization, but transforming the world around them. Administrators and bureaucrats can think about ways to help

intercultural bureaucracies transform, rather than accepting their apparent permanence and inertia.

Better stories can indicate the way through these slow and labyrinthine steps towards reconciliation. In Délı̄ne, many people will say that they can only speak what they know: they will not force a decision on anyone else or tell them what to do. When I say that Dene people are good at socializing better allies, I mean that they are good at telling the kinds of stories that we remember, that suggest changing our frames for thought and action without telling us flatly what is correct. I am not always so good at this; I often find myself accidentally telling people what to do. Perhaps it is the settler in me. By telling a long history and context in Chapter One, I have tried to set up Délı̄ne's story on its own terms as best as I am able. Similarly, tracing ideological trends in Canada's legal system in Chapter Two is a useful frame for future action, but not necessarily an imperative. Finally, sketching four non-exclusive visions of the future in Délı̄ne is my effort to be true to the flexible belief that Sahtú k'awé: the lake is the boss. In a place where Great Bear Lake is not just a lake but a livelihood, means of transportation, living thing, and fridge (or deep freeze, as ice-fishers joke), I believe this statement has immense implications. The future is not for us to know or force, but we can speak of it and what we will do to prepare for different seasons, storms, and ice conditions.

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