

The Auntie Dialogues: *Volume Two*

EDITED BY

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AND LUKE WONNECK

Special Issue
Socialist Studies

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and Luke Wonneck

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For Chief

The ultimate Rez Dog

and Rez Dogs all over

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A Note on Formatting

Throughout these scripts, we will be using a decolonial stance of how we format certain terms. We will provide the English translation in *italics* prioritizing the Nêhiyawêwin, Four-Spirit language. Names of people and beings will not be italicized.

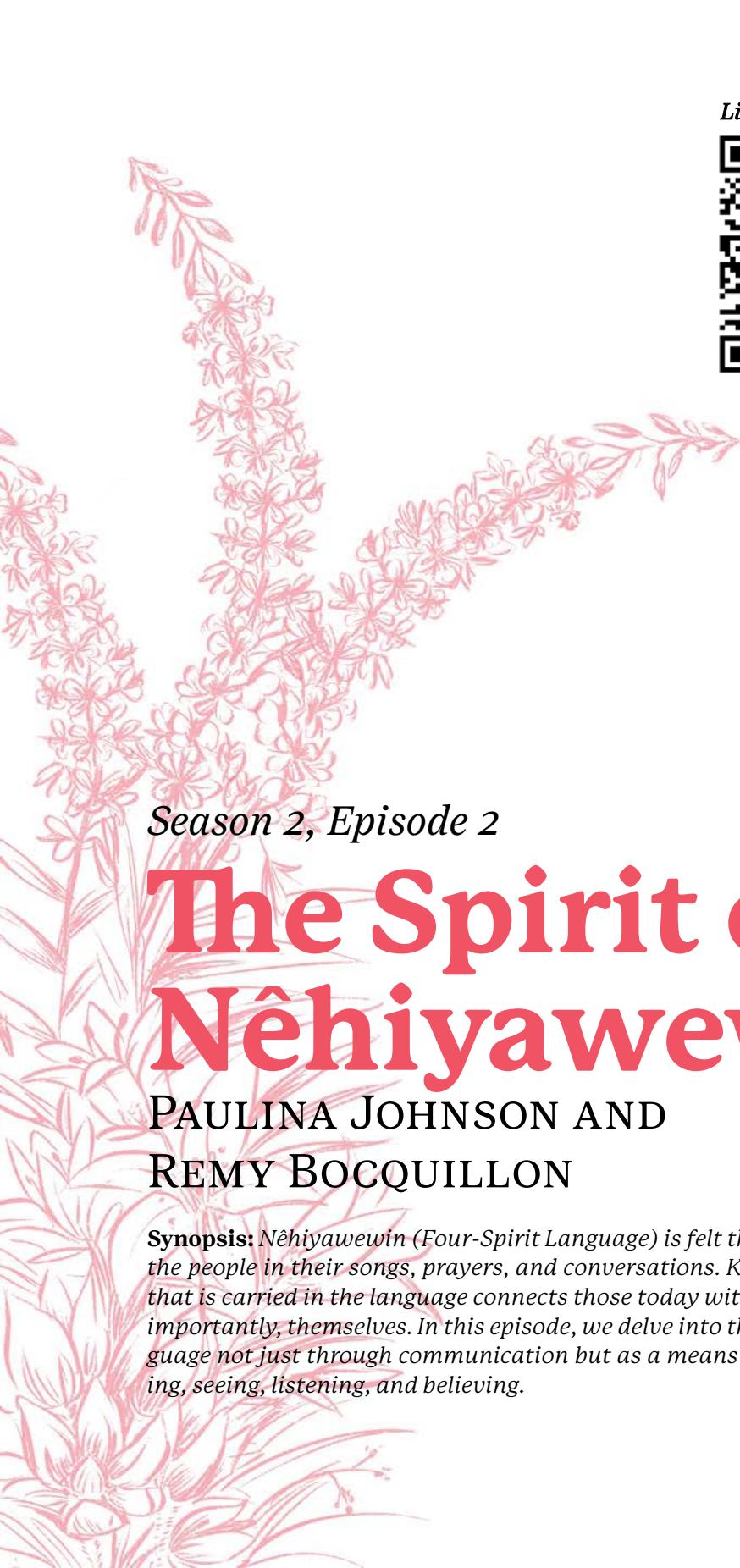
Further, each episode acknowledges the storyteller and/or ancestral knowledge shared to give reference to the information given. This is done so to give respect to the knowledge that helped build this podcast.

In addition, each podcast script offers readers and listeners to learn through different knowledge sharing styles, you may listen or read as you like. Since Dr. Johnson sometimes goes off script, we have also provided her unscripted points to add reference within the script and will read as below with the time stamp in each respective episode:

Example:

[15:20-15:54 Or, Indigenous women need to redefine what they actually represent rather than the representations given to them by settlers to legitimize harm, violence, abuse, and importantly, the acquisition of Indigenous territory which models and parallels the treatment to Indigenous women. So, we have to ask ourselves, why is the representation of the image of Indigenous women still within these two binaries of the Princess and the Vixen? It all comes down to settler colonialism.]

This way of formatting attempts to be as close to the how Nêhiyawak storytelling would be in real life to share the history, culture, brilliance, and intellectual traditions of Dr. Johnson and her people, the Nêhiyawak.



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Season 2, Episode 2

The Spirit of Nêhiyawewin

PAULINA JOHNSON AND
REMY BOCQUILLON

Synopsis: *Nêhiyawewin (Four-Spirit Language) is felt throughout the soul of the people in their songs, prayers, and conversations. Knowing the medicine that is carried in the language connects those today with their ancestors and importantly, themselves. In this episode, we delve into the importance of language not just through communication but as a means of feeling, experiencing, seeing, listening, and believing.*

Kise-Manitou,

Ninanâskomon.

Creator,

I am grateful.

Hold me in your presence,

Allow me to hear what is not said

Allow me to feel that cannot be touched

Allow me to speak unto the world kindness

For we are made of the stars

Embedded in the land

Dreamt from the water

And carried within your flame

Allow me to feel the spirit of all that you are.

Part One:

Manitowakan, They Have Spirit

When nimosôm Chris calls me, he will say, “Hello, my girl;” a simple phrase that connects me to him through our familiarity, and through our relationship as grandfather and granddaughter. This phrase of my girl is heard throughout Indigenous families and is one of the most sincere but heartfelt expressions that can be used to convey safety and care. This connection is relevant to the language that we use and predominately the way that we come to know. Language has a divine ability in nêhiyawak culture, especially the use of nêhiyawewin, the language itself. But understanding the language means we need to assess the spirit of the language, and the mindset of the language. But what happens when colonial languages create a separation between the written and the spoken

word? Or better yet, how did our syllabary language come to be? Let us understand the spirit of the language but also the importance of sound and connection.

Part Two: *How Language is Understood*

Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack from Saddle Lake Cree Nation and Kyle Napier from the Northwest Territory Métis Nation Tthebacha, Denendeh - in their article “wahkotowin: Reconnecting to the Spirit of nêhiyawewin¹ (Cree Language)”, talk about the spirit of the language, the intent behind the language and its use. They assert that, and I quote “the language is ancestrally connected to nêhiyaw-askiy or mistik — literally, nêhiyaw lands; nêhiyawewin is distinct in its literal language — in its pronunciation, meaning, and linguistic variances; and nêhiyawak are guided by our specific laws — which inhabit ceremony, connections, and Creation” (Napier & Whiskeyjack, 2021, p. 3). Understanding the language itself reveals a deeper connection to our worldview. For instance, “The root words of nêhiyawak are nêwo, meaning four, and ayisiniywak, meaning beings of this earth. In our language, we nêhiyaw(ak) are the Indigenous people of four parts of the soils of this earth” (Napier & Whiskeyjack, 2021, p. 3). Renowned nêhiyaw educator Reuben Quinn states that when the nêhiyawewin language is spoken, more than 600,000 words and concepts were awakened. Unfortunately, because of colonization, most of the terms and concepts are sleeping — with only 15,000 words and terms generally known to be awake (Leavitt, 2018).

The Spirit of the language comes from the language as it is used to communicate, and also from the Creator themselves. Because of the relationship between each Indigenous language and the land of its origin, the languages are best understood when being used to discuss land through ancestral lineage and connection. Nêhiyawewin understandings of the world make the most sense on those ancestral lands (Napier & Whiskeyjack, 2021, p. 16). This is especially evident in the way we introduce ourselves. We say nitisiyihkâson, meaning my name is, but the root word attached to this phrase is actually connection to the land itself. Nitisiy, or the belly button, is a morphological metaphor that embodies the Spirit of the language. We introduce ourselves “as our Spirit through the connection to our mother, the umbilical cord connected first through our belly button... that spiritual connection is passed from our mother and our matrilineal ancestors, such as our grandmother, our grandmother’s grandmother, and all the way back to Spirit and Creation” (Whiskeyjack & Napier, 2021, p. 17).

¹ We write Nêhiyawewin with the “N” capitalized throughout this Volume, however, in respect to Whiskeyjack and Napier 2021, we use the lower case “n” in this episode.

The spirit of the language shows us animacy or inanimacy in ways unrealized in English or other colonial languages. Colonial languages differentiate between nouns through gendered nouns and pronouns, but “nêhiyawewin refers to a noun as either animate or inanimate based on the corresponding verbs and pronouns. It should be noted, there are no uniform rules on what constitutes nouns with animate or inanimate characteristics in nêhiyawewin. Liquids, recognized with the -apoy suffix, like maskihkîwâpoy, tea [5:10 maskihkî, tea, liquid medicine, liquid tea], are viewed as inanimate, even though they have motion, but asiniy, or stones and rocks, are viewed as animate because they carry with them the Spirit of the grandfather. Some berries are animate, while others are inanimate” (Napier & Whiskeyjack, 2021, p. 19).

Understanding the Spirit of the language is vital to people and their sense of self. With that, let us dive deeper into the tension of where the syllabic writing system came to be.

Part Three: *Calling Badger*

Nêhiyaw scholar Dr. Winona Wheeler (2000), in her article “Calling Badger and the Symbols of the Spirit Language: The Cree Origins of the Syllabic System”, shares the story of Calling Badger and the origin of nêhiyawewin syllabary. Specifically, Wheeler asks how Cree syllabics came to be, as two conflicting accounts acknowledge the origins. The first, which is widely disregarded by Moniyawak, is recorded through nêhiyawak oral narratives of Calling Badger. Alternatively, the more accepted origin is its creation by Methodist James Evans’ in the early to mid-1800s. Wheeler argues that the rationale behind the conflict is rooted in two main reasons: first, the latter version supports colonial discourse, and second, scholars pay little attention to the version stored in nêhiyaw oral tradition.

The narrative of Reverend James Evans tells that “...Evans arrived among the muskego-wininiwak, Swampy Cree People, of Norway House in August of 1840 and by mid-November printed three hundred copies of the hymn ‘Jesus my all to Heaven has gone’ in Cree syllabics. A remarkable feat for anyone who had only been among Cree people for a few short months and who continued relying on interpreters for the duration of his time in Cree country” (Wheeler, 2000, p. 20). However, the story of Calling Badger forwards a different reality from that of the Reverend, as told by Chief Fine Day of the Sweetgrass First Nation. And I quote, “According to Fine Day, a Wood Cree named Badger Call [or Calling Badger or Badger Voice or mistanâkôwêw] died and returned to life with the gift

of writing from the Spirit World" (Wheeler, 2000, p. 20). The story goes,

A Wood Cree named Badger-call died and then became alive again. While he was dead he was given the characters of the syllabary and told that with them he could write Cree. Strike-him-on-the-back learned this writing from Badger-call. He made a feast and announced that he would teach it to anyone who wanted to learn. This is how I learned it. Badger-call also taught the writing to the missionaries. When the writing was given to Badger-call he was told 'They [the missionaries] will change the script and will say that the writing belongs to them. But only those who know Cree will be able to read it.' This is how we know that the writing does not belong to the whites, for it can be read only by those who know the Cree language. (Mandelbaum, 1940, p. 180)

During his time among the Plains Cree in the Rocky Boy reserve in Montana, Anthropologist Verne Dusenbury was told a similar story by Raining Bird in December of 1959 where, "In all oral accounts of the origin of the Cree syllabary it was told that the missionaries learned Cree syllabics from the Cree" (Wheeler, 2000, p. 21). The Cree Syllabary consists of triangles, angles, and hooks that mirror the four directions - a teaching integral to the Four-Spirit belief system (Wheeler, 2000, p. 21).

It is significant to note that Sequoyah's Cherokee alphabet has received attention as an Indigenous invention, but unlike the Cree syllabary, no competing claims to its invention threaten its Indigenous origins because it was so well recorded in its making (Wheeler, 2000, p. 23). But, "Unlike the Cherokee experience, however, Cree people had little to no chance to learn how to read and write because prior to Evans arriving in Norway House the only school in Rupert's Land were located in the Red River settlement" (Wheeler, 2000, p. 24). The Reverend's version has been the only one told for so long that many do not realize that there is more to the story, simply because many settlers supported the idea that the nêhiyawak were not capable of an established writing system.

As quoted in a telephone interview in 2020, Wheeler states that the story of Calling Badger is "...a sacred story on how syllabics were gifted to the people and the purposes that it was given for [story] and that comes down to oral tradition..." (as cited in Strong, 2020). The reality of obtaining a sacred story such as Calling Badger is difficult since receiving the full account may require protocol. Still, you may not receive the full account either. Wheeler states, "If that's what [the Elders] say happened, then that's how they understood it to happen. And that's what they believed happened. I am not one to question that...[and] The reality is that people received the syllabic system as spirit language. It was a gift from spirit. So naturally that required a spiritual kind of journey or a spir-

itual kind of relationship for that transmission to happen. It was a really powerful gift, and powerful gifts are gifts from spirit” (as cited in Strong, 2020).

When I was younger, I was told that when we did write down our language the intent was not for a written record, but to help within that short period of time. Wheeler expands on this concept, as there is little to no physical evidence of nêhiyawewin in the archaeological record except for that which is found on birch bark. Wheeler explains, “[t]hings weren’t intended to last a long time. Unlike the Western worldview, there was no priority given to posterity...It wouldn’t have been perceived [as] a need to leave something written for the future because there was still so much power in oral transmission, and that was the primary form of communication” (as cited in Strong, 2020).

This extends to the fact that our language and culture are oral-based. But one of the most important aspects to remember is that Indigenous peoples were fluent in multiple Indigenous languages, including their allies, but importantly, also in sign language.

Part Four: *Sign Language*

I have brought you from every direction to sit in this council. Young men are not learning your sign language, and soon it will disappear from this country. (Gen. Hugh Scott, quoted in Oen, 2018a)

This quote, relayed by Carlos Oen in an article for the BC independent news outlet *The Tyee* dates from September 1930, when General Hugh Scott, a veteran of the U.S. Cavalry used Plains Sign Language to warn against the disappearance of Indigenous Sign Languages.

Indigenous Sign Languages (ILS) in North America, which include Plains Sign Language (PISL) which Scott is referring to – the most documented and most widespread of them (Davis, 2015, p. 914) – play a vital role in Indigenous culture and communication both within and between communities. ISLs inhabit a particular place, remaining closely linked to the lived and embodied experience, and show a greater link to oral culture than one would think at first glance. They display many uses, including but not limited to communication with deaf and hard-of-hearing people. ISL has been an inherent part of communities, as Davis notes:

It has been well documented in the research literature that a highly con-

ventionalized and linguistically enriched sign language emerged as a common means of communication among various American Indian communities and nations. The use of sign language among native groups was so prevalent and widespread in previous times that it served as a lingua franca. (Davis, 2015, p. 913)

A *lingua franca* is a common language that speakers in various language groups adopt to communicate with other groups with which they have no other language in common. This status of *lingua franca*, as well as a sign language's richness and completeness as a standalone language, was achieved because of the foundational role of the deaf in Indigenous communities. ISLs were passed down through generations and across communities – even those with no deaf or hard-of-hearing people present – which could not have been done without Deaf Elders and the deaf children they taught (Davis, 2015, p. 915).

Though PISL is the most documented, there isn't a single Indigenous Sign Language, but multiple, each presenting their own signs, their own idiosyncrasies, and even their own stories. Professor Darin Flynn distinguishes between three distinct ISLs in Canada, namely Plains Signs Language (which Flynn locates in particular with the Dakota, the Blackfoot and Plains Cree), Plateau Sign Language (used by the Salish, Sahaptian and Ktunaxa Nations in BC) and Inuit Sign Language. As Flynn notes in Carlos Oen's article for The Tyee mentioned earlier, "These are unique languages that aren't directly related to each other. They were created presumably by Deaf individuals. Therefore, they are distinct genetic lineages" (Oen, 2018a). This means that sign languages evolved and changed, while still remaining culturally rooted in and relevant to the communities they were spoken in. Deaf people, and PISL users in particular, have their own traditional stories that exist in addition to oral narratives (such as "Timber" or "The Chewing Gum Story" in ASL) but without being separated from them.

Coming back to Gen. Scott's warning, PISL is disappearing. It was true then, around the 1930s, and is even more so now. As Davis (2015, p. 911) notes, no more than a few hundred Indigenous people still know and use PISL. Other Indigenous Sign Languages, like Plateau Sign Language, have already disappeared beyond the point of revitalization. These are the direct effects of settler colonialism. These sign languages existed before any contact with European settlers. But, like any other aspect of Indigenous culture and like Indigenous spoken languages, Indigenous Sign Languages were seen as a threat that needed to be erased. This attempt to eradicate ISLs is undoubtedly another facet of cultural genocide and a necessary part of justifying settler presence on the land. The roles of sign languages in Plains Cree, Coast Salish and Inuit cultures were

too important for the functioning of inter-group relations and the reproduction of Indigenous (deaf and hearing) populations not to be considered a threat. While American Sign Language and Quebec Sign Language are valuable tools for deaf and hard-of-hearing populations, their declaration as the “standard” sign languages tend to erase Indigenous particularities and consequently, their stories, cultures, and links to their ancestors. An even more paradoxical constatation, when, as Davis argues, PISL was so developed it constituted the basis for half of what ASL came to be (Oen, 2018a).

It is true that PISL is severely endangered as a result of settler policies, but, as Oen argues in the Tyee article, it has not disappeared. Oen here refers in particular to the story of Martin Heavy Head Jr. (Blood tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy), who learned PISL at home to communicate with his father’s uncle (Oen, 2018a), and for whom it was still a part of everyday practices, though mostly with older generations. Heavy Head wishes to continue to preserve, learn, teach and use PISL. It remains an important thread linking generations, a language charged with its own history. As Heavy Head notes, quoted by Oen:

To me it is a nice connection with life before colonization. It is something very direct. I know when I make these signs, that these are signs that my ancestors thousands of years [ago] were using, too. That feels pretty good. (Oen, 2018a)

This is why efforts to preserve, but even more so, to revive Indigenous Sign languages are so critical. Not only does language constitute a direct link to one’s ancestors through the stories they help convey, but it is also necessary in order to include deaf and hard-of-hearing people in their communities and their cultures. Deaf people already face a lack of access to societies where sign languages are not common. But the imposition of a singular sign language such as ASL – even if it descends from Indigenous sign languages – results in exclusion from one’s ancestral community, from being able to understand, participate and belong. It leads to a loss of connection to the ancestors Heavy Head cherishes. It presents the risk of repeating the cultural erasure of Indigenous identities through the imposition of English and French.

But, as Carlos Oen notes in the Tyee article, Indigenous Sign Languages are “endangered, but not dead” (Oen, 2018b). He refers to the initiative by Max (Haudenosaunee; Bear Clan) and Marsha (Haudenosaunee; Turtle Clan) Ireland, who are working towards developing a new Oneida Sign Language, based on PISL:

With the help of Elder Olive Helm, the couple has come up with 250 signs,

a 13-letter alphabet (just like spoken Oneida) and signs that let people count up to 100. They are determined to create an Oneida Sign Language based on Plain Indigenous Sign Language once widely used by Indigenous people, not ASL. (Oen, 2018b)

However, despite the integration of sign languages into the *Indigenous Languages Act* in 2019, the efforts made by the Irelands to promote, preserve and even expand on Indigenous Sign Languages are threatened as long as there aren't stronger legislations recognizing, integrating, and financing such initiatives.

Part Five: *Sound*

As discussed in episodes in season one, Indigenous cultures are deeply rooted in orality. The words spoken out loud, sung or whispered, and the sounds they make are in direct relation with the land, with humans and non-humans, with ancestors and Creator. This goes beyond the language as direct communication between two individuals, but also includes songs and the sounds of drums and rattles. Referring to Indigenous cultures as oral cultures does not simply imply a difference between spoken and/or written languages, but also differences in modes of perceiving, experiencing, and relating.

This is what Dr. Dylan Robinson, a xwélmexw (Stó:lō/Skwah) artist and writer, explains in his book *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, published in 2020. Here, Robinson underlines the specificity of Indigenous “frameworks of perception” (Robinson, 2020, p. 15), wherein sound is not only what is being listened to, but can become healing, medicine, and law. The listener is never the only subject present, and also becomes what is being listened to.

However, just as with the erasure of languages and cultures, settler colonialism attempted to eradicate those frameworks of perception and relations to sound and song. The settler modes of listening and perceiving were derived from a now predominant written culture where the printed text is the only bearer of truth, either as law, science, or dogma, and posited as standards of how rules are made and life is ordered. In this, the Western world characterizes itself as “modern,” whereas oral cultures were seen as pre-modern at best and uncivilized at worst (McLuhan, 1970). Modernity was the rational, written argument, the reproducible experiment and its written protocol, which shun direct experience as deception of the senses. This ‘modern’ separation had direct consequences on who is considered a subject and thus, who is being alienated and

exploited. As with Nature, oral cultures and their communities were othered and reduced to resources for Western so-called “enlightened” nations. The paradox? The basis of this Enlightenment and so-called Modernity actually lies in colonialism itself (Bhambra, 2023). Cultural genocide also happens in practices of sounding and listening.

Dylan Robinson (2020) illustrates this with the court case of *Delgamuukw v. the Queen* (1985), relating to the “land claim trial in which Gitxsan and Wet’suwet’en sought jurisdiction over their territories in British Columbia,” regions without treaties with the Crown. In this case, the lawyer, Peter Grant, asked Chief Mary Johnson to sing a Gitxsan song as part of the evidence for the land claims. Here, the song was acting as “more-than-song” as Robinson notes – it was a direct relation to the land, to history, and has value as law. Chief Mary Johnson eventually could sing the song (the limx oo’y), despite Judge McEachern being very reluctant to hear it. But what is striking here is that even after the song, the judge refused to grant it any value. As he argued in the exchange quoted by Robinson: “This is a trial, not a performance...” (British Columbia Supreme Court, 1985, pp. 670-71, as cited in Robinson, 2020, p. 43).

Songs, as any cultural practice, were hunted down and forbidden. But even when they were tolerated (such as in the mentioned case), they were trapped in colonial perceptions of value and thus dismissed as simple songs. This, for Robinson, shows the enormous difference in how sounds are being listened to and by whom, and how the effects of settler colonialism reach as far as ordering modes of perception and experience.

Robinson calls this *hungry listening*. Not only the inability to listen differently, which is seen in the judge’s refusal, but also the imposition of a mode of listening structured around contemplation and extraction, which “prioritizes the capture and certainty of information” (Robinson, 2020, p. 38). This notion of hungry listening can also become problematic in the case of preservation and conservation of cultures, even with the best intentions. It can be seen when one asks only the question of who or what is being recorded, and by whom, and not who those songs, spoken language, and sounds, collected in the name of historical or ethnographic research or in the name of cultural preservation and knowledge production, are being recorded for? And does the same lack of listening also apply when “more-than-songs” are relegated to recorded material, neglecting the importance they have in their respective community? How can songs and languages still exist and be practised if they are only recorded but not actually transmitted?

For Robinson, hungry listening means making room for Indigenous frame-

works of perception, because critical listening positionalities question and challenge the settler's hungry listening. It means to know and understand that some songs, and even some sounds, should not be heard by everyone; they are not to be understood; they are not knowledge bits ready to be recorded, extracted and categorized.

In doing this podcast, and the research project, *The Auntie is In* also hopes to create that room; to use the technologies, platforms, and the medium of recorded sounds and voices, to challenge *hungry listenings*.

Part Six: *Restoration of Meaning*

Andrea Smith (2016) explains how language revitalization efforts by Indigenous communities have been blocked, like many other programs, by a lack of funding. Federal agencies have a habit of “losing” reports, with Canadian Heritage withholding funding due to “missing documentation.” Funding is repeatedly provided to bilingualism programs that ensure the survival of French as a language and culture in Canada, while the same is not true for any Indigenous language. This marks a continual attempt at the erasure of Indigenous culture through language suppression by the Canadian government. In spite of this, communities and scholars are fighting to find innovative ways to keep their language alive.

In the Western perspective, language revitalization often starts and ends with the physical act of speaking a language again. This limits efforts to the creation of dictionaries and a focus on the grammar and rules of endangered languages. However, as we have seen throughout this episode, Indigenous languages do not adhere to the rigid language rules of settlers [26:25 and linguistics including the phonology, the sound, the semantics, the meaning and syntax, the structures of sentences]. Rather, they are a dynamic and place-based means of communication that are active participants in the production and maintenance of culture and knowledge (Blair & Ferdeen, 2009; McCarty et al., n.d.). Language is a tool of expression, both for the self and for the collective (Hanemann, 2020). It serves a key role in being part of a community, allowing self-expression and connection with others. Globally, language serves as a form of collective memory, creating a framework for cultural concepts, particularly ways of being and ways of knowing.

Scholarship in language restoration is now moving beyond simply “revitalization” of language, and instead giving more attention to reclamation (Leonard

2017, as cited in Hanemann, 2020). Language reclamation, rather than focusing on creating new speakers of a language, aims to incorporate sociocultural facets and expand the definition of language (Leonard 2017, as cited in Hanemann, 2020; McCarty et al., n.d.). Under this paradigm, language reclamation can be used as a means of decolonization. It involves going further than learning the language and delving into the needs of Indigenous communities in the past, present and future (McCarty et al., n.d.). It also requires a level of discernment about the ideologies, beliefs, worldviews and histories of language communities (Hanemann, 2020; Blair & Ferdeen, 2009). Approaching language in this way emphasizes empowerment and self-determination while acknowledging the environmental context in which the language was created and the one that exists today (Hanemann, 2020). It also recognizes the role of harmful legislation and colonial policies aimed at disenfranchising the language and its speakers.

Increasing sophistication of and access to technology has provided many opportunities to expand language reclamation efforts (McIvor et al., 2020). However, it is important to recognize that Elders who are masters of the language are often not as adept at operating personal computers and other aspects of technology (Hanemann, 2020; McIvor et al., 2020). The inverse is true for younger generations; they are skilled at technology use but lack knowledge of Indigenous languages. This necessitates intergenerational learning in the work of language restoration (Hanemann, 2020; McIvor et al., 2020). Community members of all generations need to be involved for language to survive and thrive (McIvor et al., 2020). Intergenerational teaching and learning are fundamental to successful language restoration (Blair & Ferdeen, 2009). Developing language skills in learners is best achieved in an immersive setting where ceremony and prayer are integral aspects, other cultural facets like drama, dance, and song also play key roles in developing language proficiency and connection (Blair & Ferdeen, 2009). Language learning and teaching also necessitate continual inward reflection, about meaning and connection between oneself, their community, their ancestors and the land.

In their work discussing the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI)'s Cree Immersion Day Camp hosted at the University of Alberta during the summer, Blair and Ferdeen (2009) quote a nêhiyawewin teacher discussing how we view language:

If you think about it, our language is actually our life - pimatisiwin, and everything kind of falls into place [...] there's a sharing of knowledge, that community you live in, people helping one another - nitohthênihtowin. Love, respect, sharing. (p. 72)

Language revitalization is not simply knowing the rules and vocabulary of a language but rather actively pursuing the meaning of language (McCarty et al., n.d.). [29:53 And that means using it in the everyday contexts, not in the way that grammar, dictionaries, and linguists tell us. Language is about sound and use, not the formalities in how it is written].

Part Seven:

Conclusion

The language of the people is embedded in the land and connects the Nêhiyawak to different times, places, and realities. Our language is not only healing but once spoken, it lives for eternity in layers of the world waiting to be heard and the voices of the past brought forward again. The truth is language is much more than just sound as it can be seen, felt, and experienced.

When we understand the modes of delivery today, we can start to understand a worldview that is very different from what we have expected or what we know. We layer our emotions and feelings, hopes and dreams, fears and worries, anger and pain, but also laughter and joy all within our ability to connect. Whether it is through oral transmission, written syllabary or through sign language, how we know is deeply rooted in a collective consciousness of being tied to philosophical and ontological teachings shared within the Nêhiyawak world.

One thing I know for sure about my language is that when any auntie is in disapproval, the eyes will be very telling and no words will ever be needed.

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Glossary

Nêhiyawewin - Speaking Cree or the Plains Cree Language

Nêwo - four

Ayisiniywak - The beings of this earth

Manitou - Creator

Moniyawak - non-Indigenous people; literally, “not of us” people

Ninanâskomon - I am grateful

Nimosôm - my grandfather

Nêhiyaw-askiy or mistik - Nêhiyaw lands

Nitisiyihkâson - my name is

Nitisiy - the belly button

-apoy - a liquid

Maskihkiwâpoy - tea

Asiniy - stones and rocks

Muskego-wininiwak - Swampy Cree People

Wâhkôtowin - kinship/interrelatedness

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