



## **Decolonization through collaborative filmmaking: Sharing stories from the heart**

Elizabeth Carlson  
*Laurentian University*

Gladys Rowe  
*University of Manitoba*

Teddy Zegeye-Gebrehiwot  
*University of Manitoba*

Sarah Story  
*University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg*

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### **Abstract**

Utilizing a conversational style, this article describes the collaborative, consensus based filmmaking process of a diverse group with Indigenous and settler identities who are engaged in creating the *Stories of Decolonization* film project. Although it has morphed in purpose and composition, the project has remained true to its core vision of providing a basic and accessible understanding of colonization and its continued impacts on those residing on lands occupied by Canada, and of inspiring greater participation in decolonization movements. The first short film of the project, *Land Dispossession and Settlement* shares personal and ancestral stories and features a diverse group of Winnipeg- and Canada-based persons who have come to understand themselves in relation to colonization and have engaged in decolonization work. In completing this first short film, the filmmakers have experienced a transformative journey through which they have engaged in critical dialogue and built strong relationships.

*That sense of where I come from has always been really solid and firmly rooted on the banks of this river and in this part of Manitoba. And you know what, it's interesting; I picked up my Great Grandfather's oral history. My family has been here for many generations along this river and I got that strong sense of understanding better why I feel the way I feel about this place. Why, for example, when I go away to work or study that I feel this pull back here and that there's certain things that I can do when I'm sitting on this land. As much as I love other places and other people, there's something truly firmly rooted in this place for me (Aimée Craft, Anishinaabe/Métis legal scholar, in Carlson, Rowe, Story, & Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, 2016)*

Craft's words, based on her own story, orient us to the meaning of her ancestral lands for herself and her family. Stories are vessels to engage with those around us and they provide a means to pass experiences along to future generations (Kovach, 2010). This article describes the development of the film series *Stories of Decolonization*, specifically focusing on the first film of the series, *Land Dispossession and Settlement*. We invite readers to watch the film in order to experience it as a multi-sensory example of the power of film to connect and teach.<sup>1</sup> *Stories of Decolonization* is an interview-based documentary film project that emerged from a need to provide a basic and accessible understanding of colonization and its continued impacts on everyday Canadian experiences. It is comprised of several films each focusing on a specific topic related to colonization and decolonization. The aim of the project is to help viewers build awareness, think critically, and take action. Although it disseminates personal experiences and stories documented in interview footage from Elizabeth Carlson's doctoral research, titled: *Living in Indigenous Sovereignty: Relational Accountability and the Stories of White Settler Anti-colonial and Decolonial Activists*, the project is bigger than this. Early in the planning stages, having become aware of some of the dangers of centering white saviour narratives, the filmmakers made the choice to expand the range of identities of those whose footage would appear in the film. Thus the collaborators interviewed are a diverse group (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) of local (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada) and national (Canada-wide) people who have come to understand themselves in relation to colonization and have engaged in decolonization work. As demonstrated through Craft's opening quotation, sharing heart-level stories personalizes history for viewers and this may help fuel motivation to work towards decolonization in their own contexts. This supports the work Indigenous people already do and invites non-Indigenous people to act and relate with integrity, working towards a just society.

Stories connect us to how we come to know our place and purpose in the world. Whose stories are told, at what point in time, and to which audiences are critical elements that shape individuals and societies. National stories, family stories, and personal stories ask us to think and reflect. According to Weber-Pillwax (2001) Stories are vessels to

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The film can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTruP6r2cAA>

engage with those around us and they provide a means to pass experiences along to future generations (Kovach, 2010). According to Weber-Pillwax (2001), “Stories may be for and about teaching, entertainment, praying, personal expression, history and power. They are to be listened to, remembered, thought about, meditated on” (p. 156). Stories possess heart and spirit. It is important that we listen to the words that are shared within stories; they have something to teach us (Thomas, 2005). Thomas (2005) writes, “When we listen with open hearts and open minds, we respect and honour the storytellers. I find this process incredibly comforting and respectful. I believe that storytelling respects and honours people while simultaneously documenting their realities” (p. 244).

Documentary filmmaking is one method of representing stories through which visual and aural representation can relate with audiences in different ways than written storytelling. The ability to hear and see someone as they are sharing an experience or a story can empathically connect the audience and enhance the understanding of the holistic nature of what is being conveyed. Gary (2010) describes “the power of visual storytelling and the paradigm shift created by both the democratization of filmmaking [created by the growing accessibility of filmmaking technology] and the advent of social networking tools” (para. 1) in generating new ideas around the “possibilities of film as a vehicle for social activism” (para. 1). Abrash and Whiteman (1999) describe projects in which “filmmaking is a process of community organizing and the finished film is best understood as a tool for social change” (p. 96). Wiebe (2015) writes, “the visual medium has the potential to be a creative avenue for enhancing awareness, critical thought and social justice” (p. 244). Nash and Corner (2016) cite Waugh (1984) in tracing “a history of leftist documentary film production as social intervention in which films are ‘made by activists speaking to specific publics to bring about specific political goals’ (p. xiii)” (Nash & Corner, 2016, p. 229). Filmmaking can indeed contribute to social change movements, with filmmakers and storytellers as activists who are contributing to shifts in everyday consciousness (Winton & Klein, 2010). Despite these potentials, the coupling of documentary film with emancipatory purpose is not a certainty. Corner (1996) writes,

Documentary practice exists within the same general climate as news production...it has been argued that the working practices that result from this climate are ‘skewed’ systematically towards reproducing a dominant view of the political and social world and marginalising where not actively traducing other

views. This is documentary as a tool of the established order. (p. 23)

Disbelieving the possibility of the unbiased or nonpolitical objective record (Corner, 1996), our story-based documentary project stands firmly in its explicit anti-colonial perspective as a tool for social change that flies in the face of dominant colonizing views.

As filmmakers, we would like to acknowledge the lands where we reside and on which a large proportion of the project was filmed. We are on Treaty One territory, traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Nehiyawak, Dakota, Nakota, and Red River Metis peoples, currently occupied by the City of Winnipeg. We acknowledge Indigenous peoples and lands here “as a radical push-back against the denial of Indigenous priority and continued presence” (Vowel, 2016, para. 8). We do this to resist dominant colonial narratives that maintain “the bulk of land was legally given over to the Canadian state through treaty” (Vowel, 2016, para.11), and demonstrate our accountability to oral scholarship of Indigenous Elders which maintains that “the land was to be shared with newcomers but that did not mean a loss of ownership” (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Saskatchewan, 2007, p. 18). We do this to “undo Indigenous erasure” and to inspire “non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands” (Vowel, 2016, para. 21), and we do this to point to the obligations and treaty responsibilities of settler peoples on these lands to “be in good relationships with Indigenous peoples, with non-human beings, with the land and water” (Vowel, 2016, para. 27).

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

As filmmakers we are a diverse group with Indigenous and settler identities and have experienced a filmmaking journey that has allowed us to build strong relationships, engage in critical dialogue, and learn about the power of film to create a transformative experience:

**Gladys:** I am a Muskego Inninew Iskwew (Swampy Cree woman) of mixed ancestry with membership in Fox Lake Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba. I am currently completing my PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Manitoba. My research will explore experiences of urban Indigenous women with pregnancy, birth, and motherhood through an Indigenist arts-based inquiry.

**Elizabeth (Liz):** I am a white settler woman of Swedish, Saami, German, Scots-Irish, and

English ancestry who lives on Treaty 1 territory. I understand myself to be complicit in reproducing colonial systems and dynamics in Canada, to benefit from these, and to be simultaneously working to dismantle and decolonize these. I have recently completed the PhD dissertation in social work at the University of Manitoba mentioned above, and I also work as a therapist and social work instructor.

**Teddy:** I am a father, a husband, a brother, an Ethiopian-Greek settler, a filmmaker, an activist, and a socialist. I came to Canada as a baby, and no one in my family had any intention of being part of colonization. However, this doesn't undo the reality that I receive benefits from a system that extracts resources from, dominates, removes, displaces, kills, and otherwise harms Indigenous values, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous people. I believe I have a responsibility to work towards dismantling this system.

**Sarah:** I am a settler-occupier of mixed Eastern and Western European heritage who was raised rural on Treaty 4 territory. I am a Joint Master Student in Archival Studies and History at the University of Manitoba. At the centre of my archival activism is a commitment to take responsibility for disrupting the settler-colonial archive and offering to share skills or resources with colonized and marginalized groups who request archival assistance in the development of sustainable independent or community-controlled digital preservation systems.

## **DEFINING COLONIALISM, DECOLONIZATION, AND ANTI-COLONIALISM**

Central to the history and formation of Canada as a nation, colonization as a process and structure is implicit in the current realities that continue to impact all of us. According to Hart and Rowe (2014) as Indigenous peoples,

Colonialism is the evolving processes where we, as peoples of this land, face impositions— from genocide, to assimilation, to marginalization—of views, ideas, beliefs, values, and practices by other peoples at the cost of our lives, views, ideas, beliefs, values, practices, lands, and/or resources. It is when we, as peoples of this land, are stopped, hindered, cajoled, and/or manipulated from making and enacting decisions about our lives, individually and as a group, because of being a person of the peoples of this land. (p. 35)

Emma LaRocque (2010) writes, “On a fundamental level, colonizers invaded, stole, and exploited natural and human resources, the consequences of which left the colonized dispossessed, demoralized, objectified, and marginalized” (p. 7). She writes, “When the dust settled, indigenous peoples across the Americas were massively destroyed and exiled in their own lands” (LaRocque, 2010, p. 7). Simpson (2013a) frames colonialism as “a choice that Canadians make every day” (p. 53). She says, “It is a choice to maintain and

uphold a system that is based on the hyperexploitation of the land and of Indigenous peoples” (Simpson, 2013a, p. 53).

In response to colonization, decolonization, or the active resistance to and dismantling of colonization in Canada, was initiated through 400 years of Indigenous resistance. Resistance was enacted by “every Indigenous nation occupied by Canada” (Ladner & Simpson, 2010, p. 1) that has “been confronting state/settler societies and their governments since those societies began threatening [their] sovereignty, self-determination and jurisdiction” (Ladner & Simpson, 2010, p. 1). As the concept of decolonization is being popularized and taken up by settler society, caution is in order. As Tuck and Yang (2012) assert, decolonization is far from metaphorical:

One trend we have noticed, with growing apprehension, is the ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives. Decolonization, which we assert is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects, is far too often subsumed into the directives of these projects, with no regard for how decolonization wants something different than those forms of justice. (p.2)

They specify:

Decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land, and not just symbolically. This is precisely why decolonization is necessarily unsettling, especially across lines of solidarity. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 7)

Anti-colonialism, as it is used here, has similar elements. Simpson (2004) describes anti-colonial strategies as requiring “the recovery of Indigenous intellectual traditions, Indigenous control over Indigenous national territories, [and] the protection of Indigenous lands from environmental destruction” (p. 381). Hart (2009), citing Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995), defines anti-colonialism as “the political struggle of colonized peoples against the specific and existing ideology and practice of colonialism” (p. 29). While he sees Indigenous resurgence at the centre of anti-colonialism, he nonetheless envisions the peripheral involvement of non-Indigenous peoples in anti-colonialism (personal communication, January 14, 2016). We share some of the literature on which we base our understandings of colonialism, decolonization, and anti-colonialism here, as these

concepts are central to the way the film project has evolved and may provide clarity to readers. We view the work of this film project in highlighting Canadian colonialism and advancing decolonization and anti-colonialism to be precursors to reconciliation. It is our belief that meaningful and substantive reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on these lands requires a critical understanding of colonialism and action toward dismantling it.

### **COLLABORATIVE FILMMAKING AND DECOLONIZATION: OUR PROCESS**

We open this section with a description of collaborative filmmaking, which is the method we grew into while creating the first *Stories of Decolonization* film. Wiebe (2015) connects collaborative filmmaking to decolonization. She emphasizes the importance of “co-creating knowledge about the lived effects of colonization” (p. 253), and the process of collaborative filmmaking in contributing to “the broader aim of decolonization” (p. 253) and structural change. As an artistic practice of academic-activists that creates a community of resistance, “collaborative filmmaking provides a forum for resistance to dominant colonial discourses while creating space for radical difference in pursuit of decolonization” (Wiebe, 2015, p. 244). As Wiebe (2015) notes, not only does collaborative filmmaking as an arts-based intervention have the potential to “transform knowledge production” (p. 244), it also allows for equal participation in the co-creation process. Challenging dominant discourses through group agency, our project moved away from “a hierarchichal, linear...model of engagement” (Wiebe, p. 249). We utilized a consensus decision making model and shared many of the filmmaking roles that might conventionally be engaged by a single person (e.g. director, producer). Although, as Thomas (2012) writes, “taking a collaborative approach requires a considerable personal commitment and more time and effort than might usually be put into the already time-consuming and demanding business of documentary making” (p. 84), we found collaborative filmmaking to more fully embody our personal and collective values and to have its own rewards. Our approach allowed for deep connection among the collaborators which disrupted conventions of objectivity and allowed for the wholistic inclusion of emotion in the process (Wiebe, 2015). The multiple social locations and perspectives of our filmmaking team made for creative and dynamic tensions and contributions. Thomas

(2012) emphasizes the importance of reflexivity in filmmaking, and the necessity of including discussion of the filmmaking process as “an important aspect of an ethical collaborative approach” (p. 83). Through our conference presentations and in this article, we are engaging this type of reflexivity regarding our processes. The following is a description of our process through our individual voices, interspersed with insights from relevant literature.

**Liz:** The film project, *Stories of Decolonization*, in some ways originates with my doctoral research. Because I wanted to learn how to deepen my own decolonization work, and how to more ethically live in Indigenous sovereignty, I have focused my research on ways that white settler peoples can engage effectively and accountably in anti-colonial and decolonial work. My dissertation, *Living in Indigenous Sovereignty: Relational Accountability and the Stories of White Settler Anti-colonial and Decolonial Activists*, is based on community consultations and on interviews with fourteen white settler peoples for whom anti-colonial and/or decolonial work has been a major life focus. As I was inviting academic committee members to supervise the research, Dr. Yvonne Pompana challenged me to consider creating a film based on the research as it would be a helpful classroom teaching tool. The thought completely overwhelmed me. I didn't know the first thing about filmmaking. But I felt that I really needed to listen to what Dr. Pompana was saying. When I thought about it, a major goal of the research was that it would contribute to decolonial change, and I realized that film is a way to inspire greater numbers of people toward that change than a dissertation. I also had conversations with my academic advisor, Dr. Tuula Heinonen, which resulted in the decision to formally separate the academic research project from the film project even though they have in common research data doubling as film footage. The parting of the film project from the doctoral research was done partially for practical reasons: the ethical entanglements of film in research are more difficult to navigate, and we did not wish to see filmmaking timelines impact on the timelines for the completion of my doctoral program. For Wiebe (2015) and many others who use film/video in research, videography and film production are vehicles for the research and part of the methodology, whereas in our case film became a vehicle for research dissemination and more.

**Liz:** Not knowing where to start, I attended a local film festival and asked how to make a film with no funding and no filmmaking knowledge. It was suggested to me that I contact university film departments and seek to be connected with a film student or recent graduate at the beginning of their film career that may be interested in what I was doing. So I sent out an email to film professors, asking that it be forwarded to those interested in exploring activism against oppression through film. What happened next was the first in a series of serendipitous encounters through which the film team would be assembled. I am grateful to have been connected with Teddy Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, who not only had technical and artistic filmmaking skills we would need, but also a strong commitment to social



justice and a solid analysis of structural oppression.

**Teddy:** I got involved in this project in July of 2011, after receiving an email from Liz. At the time I was just finishing up a film studies degree and I was interested in radical politics which held anti-oppression (particularly anti-racism) and anti-capitalism as core values. I knew a little about colonialism, but not really anything about decolonization. I wanted to work on a project that connected my filmmaking skills to social justice and so collaborating with Liz, who knew a lot on the subject, allowed me to participate even though I had lots to learn. At the beginning of the project, I viewed my primary role as helping with the technical aspects, and this was partially due to how we initially imagined the project to be very connected to Liz's research interviews and therefore focused on white-settlers doing decolonization work. Their insights would educate other white-settlers. From the numerous conversations Liz and I had as we were getting to know each other at the beginning of the project, it was clear to me that she was critical of whiteness, racism, and oppression, so this white-focus didn't bother me. But reflecting upon this early time, I recognize that another reason that I viewed my involvement with the film primarily in a technical role was so that I could distance myself from how I too was complicit with colonialism and thus, I too had a responsibility to do decolonization work. It was easy for me to imagine Liz talking to white people about what white people should do in decolonization work, while conveniently leaving myself out of consideration.

**Teddy:** So, participating in the project shifted how I viewed my involvement. Some instances that were particularly instructive included hearing both Tasha Hubbard and Chickadee Richard give their presentations at the Idle No More Teach-In (that we video recorded for the film); listening to the answers of various collaborators when we interviewed them for the film; having conversations about colonization, decolonization, and broad ideas for the film with Liz while we were getting to know each other; attending Idle No More events; reading passages from Paulette Regan's book "Unsettling the Settler Within;" attending an Elders gathering at Sagkeeng First Nation; and visiting, for the first time, my ancestral homeland Ethiopia.

**Liz:** The first film is over six years in the making, and began with a series of meetings Teddy and I would have during which, as he mentioned, we had extensive conversations about our understandings and learnings around colonialism and decolonization. We also discussed the ethics important to our process. We compared filmmaking ethics to anti-colonial research ethics (Carlson, 2016), which seek to equalize power imbalances and maximize research participant choice and control.

Thomas (2012) explores the ethics of documentary filmmaking relationships. He contends,

It is incumbent on the filmmakers to examine her or his own ethical position

because any film reflects the filmmaker's ethics as much as those of the participants and in collaborative film it is important to be clear about whose ethics are whose" (p. 83).

He notes that standardized ethical guidelines are non-existent, leaving filmmakers to their individual consciences to resolve ethical conflicts in their daily work. Noting the "imbalances of power inherent in the documentary process" (p. 80), Thomas indicates the ongoing and individualized processes of addressing these power imbalances faced by filmmakers. Ethical agreements made with film subjects are often challenged by pressures for faster and cheaper production (Thomas, 2012). Thomas (2012, citing Sanders, 2007) believes ethical relationships between documentary filmmakers and film subjects are built on mutual trust and ought not be limited to a one-time consent form. In addition, these relationships should entail ongoing, collaborative negotiation. In his own work, Thomas (2012) prefers to offer "participants the opportunity to view the film at a rough cut and have their opinions taken into account" (p. 81). He advocates the use of Nash's (2009) practice of offering "an informal right of veto to their participants in relation to footage shot of them" (Thomas, 2012, pp. 81-82), which serves to disrupt their power imbalance, recognizing "the participant's power and the filmmaker's vulnerability within the documentary relationship" (p. 82).

**Liz:** These were early principles around ethics discussed and agreed upon by Teddy and I, which remained present throughout, and were integrated into the filmmaking process.

**Teddy:** During our first two years of meeting, we filmed a number of events with permission (and with the understanding that the purpose of recording was our film project), including an Idle No More Teach-in,<sup>2</sup> and street-signs with colonization themed names.

This stage was exciting because the possibilities were open and we had yet to see how these elements might fit into the project. As we gained this experience working together and got to know each other better, we discussed and drafted film ideas and budgets, which show consistency with some of our values. For example, we valued a non-hierarchical, egalitarian approach early in the process, and our draft budget reflected the camera operator, the sound recorder, the person carrying the equipment, and the person directing all getting paid the same rate. Even

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The teach-in can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqYCKyFhczi>

though the budget we ended up using in the end was significantly smaller than the one we drafted early on, everyone was paid an equal rate on set. Early on we also discussed including scenes in the film that were more symbolic, visual, artistic, silent, dreamy, less explicit, and less dialogue based. Though none of the specific ideas made their way into the first film, the commitment to having an artistic scene intended to connect with viewers on an emotional level was retained for this project. We found another way to do it that better matched the theme and the resources we had, and with the input of our next team member.

**Liz:** As Teddy and I moved forward in our planning and preparations, we began to think about how, and under what conditions, we would add to our team. We discussed the importance of including Indigenous peoples in core decision making roles in the project but were concerned about avoiding a situation in which such input was exploited--Indigenous peoples giving with no reciprocity. This was a real danger because of our lack of funding, and was, in my mind, a major reason for our delay in inviting an Indigenous filmmaker to join our team. I hoped that perhaps fundraising efforts would allow us to offer some reciprocity. However, in the early years of the work on this film, we were unable to secure any funding. A second serendipitous meeting occurred days later, before the film had taken shape in tangible ways.

**Gladys:** I had known Liz from my work as a Master of Social Work student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. During this time Liz and I became friends and supported each other through the various stages of our Graduate Studies by working in shared spaces and becoming sounding boards for experiences and ideas in our academic work. During the spring and fall of 2013 I had finished my Master of Social Work and had been accepted into my PhD program in Interdisciplinary Studies. As someone passionate about the ability of the arts to share stories and provide opportunities to build understanding and relationships, I knew that arts-based work was going to be included in my PhD work. I enrolled in an undergraduate film course to explore the medium as a potential method to include in my graduate work. At the completion of the course I knew that I both loved the medium as a way to transmit stories, and also felt completely unable to tackle a film project without much more hands on experience. I was sharing this with Liz one day at a coffee shop while we worked together. I thought she was going to jump out of her seat across from me! Serendipity is a concept that I truly believe in--the idea that we can put voice to our desires, wishes, hopes, worries, and experiences and that opportunities will be placed in front of us that will answer in conversation with these vocalizations. This is one such example that has taken me on a journey of growth and exploration both personally and as a filmmaker. Liz shared the work that she and Teddy had undertaken so far and their desire to include more team members on the film, we discussed mutual benefits and opportunities for reciprocity in the process. Benefits for me included my own growth as a filmmaker as well as my own personal and professional passion to educate about colonization and decolonization and the multiplicity of experiences, opportunities, and actions that

exist within these concepts. For Teddy and Liz, this was an opportunity for another set of hands, another set of eyes, and another heart contributing to the completion of an important project.

**Liz:** As has been noted, the film includes interview footage of collaborators from multiple social locations. While decisions were made within the writing and framing of the dissertation itself to mitigate the risk of centering white saviour narratives through an emphasis on Indigenous scholarship and Indigenous-led activism, we decided (partially in response to feedback from Dr. Peter Kulchyski) to initiate non-dissertation research interviews including interviews with Indigenous and racially marginalized activists specifically for the purpose of broadening the focus of the film project and mitigating the risk of the film project centering the heroics of white settlers. These collaborators were invited for interviews based on our perceptions about what they might contribute to the project, as well as being local to the Winnipeg area.

**Gladys:** As I was brought up to speed by Teddy and Liz, we started to talk about a smaller project that could be completed prior to the larger documentary film work. During this time we discussed the various purposes of a smaller work: a possible teaser or trailer for the larger documentary, or a basic educational yet artistic film that would "bring people up to speed" to prepare them to view the larger documentary. Through consensus we agreed upon the latter purpose and set out to develop an outline, interview guide, and potential list of participants that would accomplish this goal. One of the other points we agreed upon was that it would be important for us as filmmakers to be transparent in the process and we also took part as interviewees in the initial filming with the intention of adding our own stories to the voices in this new short film.

**Teddy:** In our goal of being transparent and using reflexivity as a technique to formally challenge the division of power between filmmaker and film subject, we decided to each answer, on film, the same six questions that we asked all the participants who were interviewed specifically for this film (the participants who were part of Liz's doctoral research had more in depth questions that were pre-approved by the ethics board). The six questions we asked were:

1. Who are you? How do you identify? Who are you in relationship to colonialism in Canada?
2. What is some evidence of ongoing colonialism in Canada that you have observed or experienced?
3. Was there a moment when you became consciously aware that Canada has a historical and present-day process or structure of colonialism?
4. How did this knowledge impact you? (intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, physically)
5. How have you responded to this knowledge? How has it changed the way you think and relate? How have you acted upon this

- knowledge?
6. Why is decolonization important to you? Why do you do this work?

In *Stories of Decolonization: Land Dispossession and Settlement*, only Liz's interview was used, but we hope to use the footage of Gladys and myself in future films of the project.

**Gladys:** Filming a diverse group of local Winnipeg people in a variety of locations across the city, we began to build rapport as a team and I began to gain experience in lighting, sound, camera angles, and filming. During this time I became very excited about the quality and depth of the stories that people were willing to share with us.

**Teddy:** Because the film interviews covered basic and historical concepts, we felt the longer documentary could be freed up from the need to cover these basics and go deeper into more complex, and more nuanced ideas.

**Gladys:** In the development and metamorphosis of the film outline, we also agreed to include creative elements of storytelling that would enhance and add to the interviews. As one of the initial interview questions explored identity, a topic of great interest to me, and one I worked on in my Master of Social Work thesis, I brought to the group a Shel Silverstein poem entitled *Zebra Question* that explored perception of identity and we brainstormed visual representations of each of the interview participants body parts as a layer of the film. Another idea we explored was a trail of footprints in snow and imagery of red throughout that would create a visual journey following a young person through the story. Each of these ideas were brought forward and built upon in a group process.

**Liz:** After completing the film interviews, these, as well as teach-in footage, were transcribed by Jacquie Nicholson in addition to ourselves. Next, Gladys, Teddy, and I worked together to highlight, round-robin style, film interview content that we each felt was most important and compelling around each film interview question. Meanwhile, I scoured the research interviews, particularly those with local-to-Winnipeg participants, for content that might complement these topics. Next, we collectively labeled all interview content we had chosen by themes. We quickly realized that we had too much good footage for the one short film we had begun to work on, and discussed the idea of expanding into several short films, or modules, which we also felt would be a convenient fit for classroom educators. We had a number of themes in mind for the various modules, and engaged in a process of decision-making regarding where to start with the first module.

**Gladys:** It was during this phase of footage and transcript review that we realized what we had gathered had expanded from the original questions we outlined in the interview process. Originally we coded the transcripts according to the initial outline, but our discussions soon moved to the content we had in front of us, and

how we could share interviewees experiences beyond the constraints we had designed ourselves into. It was exciting and overwhelming for me to think about how to represent the stories that were shared in a way that was true to each person. After in depth discussions we agreed that we needed to start with land.

**Liz:** I was in favour of focusing our first short film on land dispossession and settlement because from the beginning, settler colonialism in Canada has been, at its core, about land. My immersion during the dissertation process in Indigenous scholarly literature about colonialism and decolonization had led me to this understanding, which developed further through the filmmaking process and became one of the most transformative areas of insight I gained through both projects.

Taiiaki Alfred (2009) writes,

Logically and morally, there is no escaping that the real and deeper problems of colonialism are a direct result of the theft of our lands, which cannot be addressed in any way other than through the return of those lands to us. There are at least two aspects of this large problem. The first is comprehension of the economic dimension; the continuing effect upon our communities of being illegally dispossessed of their lands. The second is the social dimension; the political and legal denials of collective Indigenous existences. (pp. 182-183)

“It is the loss of our land that has been the precise cause of our impoverishment” (p.7), state Manuel and Derrickson (2015). They note that in Canada, Indigenous peoples now control only 0.2 percent of the lands while 99.8% are under settler control. As has been noted, written and/or popularized settler perspectives on treaties seem to be quite different than what is maintained in Indigenous oral tradition. For example, Craft (2013) writes,

Anishinaabe expected they would not be limited in their movements or their sustenance activities...Neither an owner or a seller, the Anishinabe used the land and cared for it. The Anishinabe retained control over the land, subject to sharing it with the White settlers for the limited purpose of sustenance. (p. 112)

It was important to us as filmmakers to help to correct popular historical and treaty-related inaccuracies on so central an issue as land, and to help educate the Canadian public about the historical and contemporary processes of land displacement core to Canadian settler colonialism. We felt this would help to lay the groundwork for future modules that focus increasingly on decolonization. As Simpson (2013b) says, a root of decolonization is “land and how we’re going to share it” (9:45-9:47). Alfred (2009)

writes,

Something was stolen, lies were told, and they have never been made right. That is the crux of the problem...what was stolen must be given back, and amends must be made for the crimes that were committed from which all non-Indigenous Canadians, old families and recent immigrants, have gained their existence as people on this land and citizens of this country” (p. 182).

*Stories of Decolonization: Land Dispossession and Settlement* was chosen as the first of the series in order to begin to address the call of these activists that land be addressed when it comes to colonialism and decolonization.

**Gladys:** The film spotlights personal stories of land dispossession and settlement and illustrate how these connect to our present reality. Over the period of a year we started to pull together interview and presentation footage that might fit the theme of this new module. We sought, and received, permission to use footage from Leanne Simpson’s presentation at the Second International Indigenous Voices in Social Work Conference, and notified Tasha Hubbard and Chickadee Richard, who had already given permission for us to film their teach-in presentations for the purpose of the film, of which clips we wished to use, providing the opportunity for their input. At the beginning of the process we had several hours of footage that we worked with to begin to craft the story of the film. The collaborative manner in which we worked ensured that decision-making was consensus based during this time with discussions about purpose, crescendo, timing, and theme being addressed at every step in the editing. One of the methods that we during this time was to create mutually agreed upon drafts, review the drafts, provide suggestions, and making decisions as a group on what edits would be made. It was a tedious but fruitful method that has produced a film that each of us can see our influence and voice within.

**Teddy:** Editing is not easily done as a group. At first we edited together, all sitting around the computer and making cuts and ordering footage, which, as Gladys noted, was a time-consuming process. Gladys, Liz, and I did the main ordering of all the interview footage, and even though we had the general trajectory of the film, we didn’t have any b-roll, archival footage, photographs, music, or titles in place. As we added these elements, we found it was more efficient for me to do the editing based on group discussion and then show the group a draft for feedback and discussion toward the next draft.

**Liz:** The third in the series of serendipitous encounters occurred in May, 2015 when I met Sarah at a gathering of the Manitoba Research Alliance, which had contributed funding to my dissertation research. Sarah expressed enthusiasm for the project and mentioned her background in archives. We began to conceptualize her inclusion into the project, and she joined us for a meeting in June, 2015. At

that point, we had a rough cut of the first module completed, and it was useful to receive her feedback as she came to the project with fresh eyes.

**Sarah:** At the time I first met the team, they had been working together for four years so their relationships were tight. I did not know what my role in the film would be at that time, but I recognized the value that my archival understanding could offer to the project. After viewing the film footage, I realized that I could also offer my lived experience and understanding of rural settler culture. Rural farming stories feature prominently in this film. I was raised in and maintain strong ties to a white farming community in rural Manitoba. Long before this project I had broken my silence to challenge “isms”, mainly sexism and racism, that still prevail in rural spaces. I shared oppositional perspectives and brought forward counter-narratives that disrupted the often exclusionary histories, dehumanizing myths and denigrating stereotypes widely espoused in my hometown; perspectives that put strain on some of my relationships with extended family and the rural community. During this period, I met Liz. I was exhausted but I had also made a commitment to locate and give support to folks in Winnipeg doing decolonial work. When Liz told me about the film project, I immediately recognized the potential of a decolonizing film to be an effective tool to promote the personal learning process and to educate rural folks. Film is a perfect intervention for rural areas in which there are few safe spaces to explore identities that disrupt dominant settler narratives because many learn about history through film and television. I learned through involvement with the project that it is both a necessary and challenging balancing act to produce a film that forwards a critical anti-colonial perspective that my rural relations would be open to hearing and taking seriously. For this reason, I believe I was meant to support the telling of this particular story. My personal goal was to ensure that rural representations were realistic and could be connected with by a broad rural audience. I really wanted the stories and representations to “hit home” in a way there was no space for settler denial, or placing blame elsewhere. For me, it is important to consider how all our stories are tied to one another, and how settlers have benefitted from oppressive systems and genocidal policies used to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land and resources for our personal attainment and advancement, and how we continue to benefit as a result. I feel the stories in this film highlight those important points in a consumable way.

**Sarah:** Joining the team midway through the process was a challenge because much groundwork had been established between Teddy, Gladys, and Liz. Prior to my involvement, they had already discussed the themes and vision of the project, filmed all the interviews for the project, and also filmed each other telling their own stories. So, I spent several months observing their process to build an understanding of their philosophies, roles, routines, and personalities and I provided feedback when I believed it was helpful, which was sometimes difficult to judge due to lack of clarity regarding my role. Despite these challenges, I was able to contribute in meaningful ways. The archival records and other visuals layer, complement, and complicate the storytellers clips in important ways. The



land herself is a central character in the story. I love that.

**Gladys:** During the Spring of 2015 we decided it was time to capture non-interview, or b-roll footage that would be included in the film drafts. In thinking about the imagery in the stories, the theme of the film, and the locations around Winnipeg, we agreed that Whiteshell Provincial Park would be an excellent location with many opportunities to add to the story of the film. We spent many meetings discussion the purpose of the Whiteshell trip, the locations that we would include as "must stop" places, and planning the logistics of on the land filming. When the day came we set out before dawn, in order to capture the sunrise and mist at our first location. Our ride out was filled with anticipation, excitement, and laughter.

**Sarah:** This day is one of my fondest moments on the project because we spent the day out on the land together. It was the first full day that I spent with the film team and in the Whiteshell. Each time I speak about this day, I get emotional as I had a powerful "ah-ha" moment while audio recording wind move through a shimmering stand of birch trees. I still do not have the right words to describe it but I can say that it was at this moment the stories shared by the collaborators on the film deepened in meaning for me, as did the purpose of the film. My personal journey has felt in flux the past few years. Coming to understand the hard truths about my own family's history in Canada has fundamentally changed the ways I view who I am in this place. It has challenged my personal sense of family history. I still struggle to find a way to honour the stories of my family and their experiences living on this land, while acknowledging that these beautiful and storied spaces that we love so deeply and that have provided us with a bountiful living are the same lands that were taken from Indigenous peoples who called them "home" thousands of years before we stepped foot on the continent. Now, every time I am on the land, I cannot ignore these stories. It is a powerful learning. I feel that being apart of this film project helped me reach that important understanding and I am grateful for that.

**Gladys:** One of the many memorable moments of our filming day was the time we spent out on the Lake. In the afternoon we met Chris, our boat captain, at our on-the-lake filming location. As we boarded the small fishing boat and began our journey, the wind started to pick up, creating white caps on the top of the lake. Not wanting to change our tightly timed film plan, we figured we could move into a quieter area of the lake in order to complete the shots we had planned. The best laid plans, as evidenced in our experience that afternoon, are sometimes the least likely to be accomplished. The water and wind continued to build and we turned to make our way back across the lake and to try and salvage possible shots. The water and wind had other ideas and we ended up drenched beyond belief in our journey back across the lake, bouncing over top of the whitecaps and fearing for our lives as Chris navigated between the waves. We desperately tried to keep the film equipment dry and to not take on too much water into the boat. As we crossed to the original lakeside Teddy was able to gather beautiful shots that have been included in this film. Many of us laughed so hard at the absurdity of the experience. Our nerves were tested, and it was an experience that I know I will

never forget!

**Sarah:** In addition to the beautiful landscape footage we captured at the Whiteshell, archival sources - nearly forty records in total- are key b-roll footage in the film. The central values that guide our respectful, ethical filmmaking process underpinned our decisions about the inclusion of archival materials. Since the colonization of Turtle Island, Indigenous peoples have been documented by state agencies' aims to control and assimilate; churches' desire to convert; researchers' need to understand; and adventure-seeking travelers' enthusiasm to capture the "authentic". This has resulted in publicly available archival collections that portray and interpret Indigenous lives, sometimes without the knowledge or consent of those recorded. Due to their inherently colonial nature, we considered how the use of archival documents reinforced settler-colonial-narratives, perpetuated stereotypes, or disrespected Indigenous people and tried to make the best choices available.<sup>3</sup> To mitigate misrepresentations and stereotypical depictions of the storytellers in the film, we had meaningful critical group dialogue, and showed those interviewed their footage along with the archival images that accompanied it. They had the opportunity to give us feedback, including the chance to revoke their consent for us to use their footage. I think that our approach to archival usage might be uncommon in film, but it can also be improved with further consideration. In the future, supporting only archives that make concerted efforts to decolonize their practices and procedures, or demonstrate concerted efforts to develop more mutually respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples would strengthen our ethical usage of archival materials.

**Gladys:** I was excited about the potential of archival imagery to add to the stories that were being shared in the film. However, I had not foreseen all that this would entail ethically. With Sarah's expertise joining the film team I was able to learn a great deal about ethics in archives including critical questions such as who possessed the images, how were they procured, and the right of individuals, families, and Nations to determine use and possession. Considering my education and understanding of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) research principles, I am quite embarrassed to share that this oversight occurred –

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<sup>3</sup> For example, we used materials from archives that provided contextual information, such as how the materials were created, collected and archived. We refrained from using records of Indigenous ceremonies and sacred items and Indigenous heritage that have been placed in the public domain. We also decided not use individual and group portraits of Indigenous peoples that they themselves did not contribute to the archive. Sometimes, however, making decisions about which archival documents to use proved difficult when we had to weigh multiple values. For example we used a Tribune newspaper photograph of four female demonstrators in Kenora during the 1972 Anicinabe Park Occupation. We chose it because we wanted to demonstrate, as Leanne Simpson (2008) has explained, Indigenous peoples have not been "passive victims of colonialism" (p. 13), but that that they have "resisted, organized and mobilized at every point in history" (Simpson, 2008, p. 13). The conflict arises because, while on the one hand, we wanted to represent historical and contemporary Indigenous resistance, on the other hand, we wanted to avoid using photographs of Indigenous people that were taken and archived without their consent. Furthermore, we discussed how records visually complemented, challenged, or represented the stories shared by Indigenous collaborators in the film. We also made an effort to integrate a variety of photos to avoid misrepresenting Indigenous people as a homogenous group or as excluded from the contemporary (located in "the past").

but I do want to bring it up as a critical learning point for me about the care that is needed when undertaking a project like this.

**Teddy:** The ordering and adding of b-roll, archival footage, photographs, music, and titles was a creative and messy process and sometimes it forced us to discuss and take different sides around subjective aspects that were difficult to articulate. In addition to talking about very concrete choices, such as where to have music or silence, or what image to use as b-roll and where, we also discussed broader questions such as what kind of emotion and clips we wanted to end the film. We discussed questions of responsibility in how we portray people in the film even if they themselves are okay with how they are represented, and asked whether we wanted the film to follow a chronological timeline or a nonlinear timeline. One method that helped deal with our challenging and subjective decisions was to simply try out suggestions even if we didn't all agree on them. Sometimes seeing the suggestion was enough to reach some consensus on it. Later in our editing process, in order to save time we implemented a different method than the one described previously. Early on I would show the drafts to the group in-person and we would have our initial discussions face-to-face, but in an effort to accommodate our schedules more efficiently, we decided that it would be easier to each view the film on our own, send thoughts by email, and then meet for discussion. I used vimeo.com to post the videos because they have good privacy settings. After we discussed the draft and made suggestions for change, I would take the new feedback and begin the process again. Modify, share, feedback, repeat. During this phase, as the editor I was careful to be very open to the input of others in the group because they did not have the same access to trying out ideas and directly modifying the draft.

**Sarah:** Liz mentioned previously the “serendipity” of meeting the right people at the right time. Once I felt comfortable, I told the group about my husband, Rob Kenning, who is a tradesman and also a music composer with a degree in classical music and a diploma in music composition, and about the possibility that he might offer his talents for the film. When music is composed for a film, rather than pre-made, it is tailored to the film's mood, visuals and dialogue, and thus is much more effective in capturing the film's emotional ebbs and flows. Rob's involvement was another example of reciprocity in the project. To our great benefit, Rob offered his skills as a composer, while he gained by having an opportunity to write music again, which is his passion. He had his work cut out for him; we didn't have the “lingua franca”, the language of the music industry, to explain what styles of music we desired at various points in the film. Reflecting on this challenge, Rob (personal communication, October 2, 2016) said, “That is why I asked you guys to describe what you wanted in emotions rather than trying to speak music lingo, or what you guys think is music lingo (laughs).” We held meetings to discuss how we wanted the music to feel and Rob wrote music to capture those feelings.

**Gladys:** I think I really underestimated (being a complete novice in filmmaking) the

amount of time that it would take to move the film from a draft to completion: the nuanced and detailed focus that it took to make sure that the tone of the film and the musical composition produced the intended emotion and meaning at the conclusion. This in particular was apparent for me during meetings with Rob. I was largely unavailable and mostly hands-off during this time period due to family responsibilities. In the interest of completion of the film I felt that the feedback and direction from the other filmmakers in meeting with Rob would sufficiently represent what I hoped the outcome of the completed composition would be.

**Sarah:** Rob explained upfront that as a non-Indigenous composer, he was unwilling to create music that appropriated Indigenous sounds, or replicated offensive musical scores of films that stereotyped Indigenous people. The film completion timeline, in addition to delays with the other filmmaking processes meant that Rob had little time to write, rewrite, and experiment with the score while also taking all the suggestions of the group into account. This issue challenged group communication and relationships, and tested our consensus-based process.

**Gladys:** During this time period each of us had a lot of different things happening personally, academically, and professionally. The time that we committed to spend on the project seemed to keep growing exponentially in order to remain true to the process and ethics we originally outlined. I felt at times that there had to be an “easier” way, but truly there wasn’t. The compromise we came to when Teddy took over most of the hands on editing was one I was in favour of, but it demanded trust and understanding that we were all on the same page, or at least committed to listening to everyone’s perspectives. I felt like I had built this foundation with my fellow filmmakers and this is one of the reasons I feel this film finally was completed.

**Teddy:** Once we had a draft that included only the interview clips we were relatively certain about wanting to use, we sent each collaborator a copy of their own clips, asking whether they were okay with their use. They gave feedback and we made adjustments and proceeded with editing the film. After a final draft was completed, each collaborator was able to view their clips in the context of the whole film, and provide feedback. This was how we made sure that participants were represented in an ethical way.

**Liz:** Our group of filmmakers opted for public accessibility of the film project through free online platforms to facilitate its use in public education. We also pursue community screenings with question and answer/discussion opportunities to build engagement (Nash & Corner, 2016). Thomas (2012) recommends that filmmakers become willing to be put on the spot, to become vulnerable, and to risk criticism. During a conference-based screening, we received both encouraging and challenging feedback that resulted in further revisions to the film. In particular, the tone of one interview footage clip used in the film was perceived some audience members as inappropriate. We re-worked this clip to eliminate some of

these aspects.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a group of filmmakers, we feel good about the collaborative filmmaking process we engaged as well as the ethics we chose to embody throughout our process. This is not to say that our process was without shortcomings. Thomas (2012) suggests,

Collaboration means giving space to participants to genuinely contribute to the film, not just with their ‘performance’ but also with ideas. As active rather than passive participants, they can escape the role of victim, share in shaping the film and develop a sense of joint ownership of the final product” (p. 83).

Despite our strides in giving collaborators the opportunity to view, approve, and provide input regarding our use of their clips, for the most part they were not included in the important discussions that shaped the look and feel of the film. Involving participants in the co-creation of a film seems to us a difficult ethic to achieve, and we acknowledge the limits to our own practice of disrupting power dynamics in filmmaking. Our involvement in the collaborative creation of the first film of our project has been transformative for each of us in multiple ways.

**Gladys:** At the beginning of this partnership I knew that I would be working with a talented and passionate group of people while learning some important skills that I would use in my own PhD work and contributing to an important education area of decolonization. What I didn’t expect in the process was the depth of relationship I would develop with fellow filmmakers. To be able to engage in a method of filmmaking that used consensus based decision making at the core we had to develop trust, reinforce commitment, and figure out a way to ensure that each of us was able to contribute and feel heard in its development. I have the utmost respect and admiration for my fellow filmmakers and I am honoured to have been able to walk on this journey with them. I have learned about my own gifts and challenges along the way and I have been able to nurture my creativity in an environment that I feel I was heard and valued. I believe that we, as filmmakers, have been a micro-environment of exactly what we set out to address when we first began this process. How do we, as people who live on this land, see ourselves as part of processes of colonization and decolonization? This overarching question is one we worked through at each meeting, in each draft, and within each discussion that we were a part of in creating the film. These relationships and the energy that it takes to be fully present in these types of relationships are important as we consider our own answers to this question.

**Teddy:** I have definitely grown through the process of making this film. Through

learning more and considering my own connection to colonization, I have come to see myself as more than just a technical contributor. I see myself as one of the main creators of this film as well as someone on my own personal journey of doing decolonization work. Some of this transformation is visible in the film. Consider the opening scene. You see a pair of light-skinned hands holding up a shell with sage in it. The hands are lit with high contrast lighting, the background is completely black and we don't see any other part of the people these hands belong to, just a close up of the hands. Another pair of dark-skinned hands enters the frame and lights the sage with a match. Cut to a very green and symmetrical landscape shot with a river cutting through the middle. It is sunny. The two pairs of hands from the previous shot fade-in and superimpose on the landscape. The dark-skinned hands begin smudging and drawing the smoke from the sage out of the frame towards the body. The smudging hands leave and another set of hands enter and begin smudging, meanwhile the background landscape shot is now closer on the river and slowly tilts up. This second pair of hands smudges more quickly before the hands fade out. This scene is significant to me. We filmed it very late in the process of making this film and it was even later in the group discussions and editing that we decided to put it at the beginning of the film. To me, this scene signifies that Indigenous customs, Indigenous values and Indigenous people are not some secondary, unimportant aspect of life here, on this land; but integral, necessary, and important. Since decolonization should include more than an acknowledgement of this, but an actual change in the social relations, a re-ordering of the relationships we currently have, the film itself needed to find a way to reflect this value. In visual storytelling the order of what a viewer sees carries much significance to its interpretation and so placing this smudging scene first reflects this value. Additionally, the dark-skinned hands are my own and so I feel like I am, in a very small way, going beyond the detached technical filmmaker role and including myself, literally revealing myself, as one that also needs to participate – is open to criticism – is open to learning – is vulnerable but most importantly not removed and on the outside but committed and involved. At the same time this is a symbolic scene and the work I must do goes immeasurably beyond participating as disembodied hands in a frame.

**Liz:** For me, this project has been about community. It is the result of support of, and contributions from, many people. Academia has programmed within me a comfort level for working alone. Despite the wonderful and respectful personalities of the filmmaking team, working collaboratively with a consensus model on a project that required so very many decisions, large and small, theoretical and subjective, was a challenge that has created growth in me. My sense of ethics in research and filmmaking have grown through this process, as has my conviction of the importance of keeping land in focus while engaging in decolonial work. I have learned from the others in the filmmaking team as well as from those we interviewed for the project. I cherish the strong relationships that have formed through this project and feel so blessed by the gifts and contributions of each person involved.

**Sarah:** I also feel blessed for the opportunity to be involved, to learn and grow, and to deepen my understandings of settler-colonialism, decolonization, and filmmaking. I learned of the hundreds of hours of discussion and behind the scenes energy required to make the film. I see the film as representative of the relationships that we, the filmmakers, have developed with each other and with others who have contributed to it. I appreciate the patience and efforts of Teddy, Gladys and Liz to create a space for me during my learning process. I have been able to learn through their words, ideas, and actions toward me and others. I can carry forward this knowledge in my own ways and to my own circles. Though I came into a project after key relationships were built, and found that, contrary to our intentions, we did not reach a true consensus in all decision making processes, I had a chance to develop my capacity to communicate my thoughts and try to share my stories in ways that do not reinforce colonial attitudes and notions. I hope that the relations I have formed with the team, and the mutually respectful relationships that are at the heart of this important work evolve and strengthen overtime. For me, the strength of this project lies in its collaborative, ethical, thoughtful, and respectful nature.

**Teddy:** I think when setting out to work on a project that will take significant time and energy of you and others, it's very important to examine what you are trying to accomplish and why you believe it is important or even possible. I am hesitant to overvalue the contribution of this film to decolonization work. I think that it is too easy for people to watch things that confirm what they already believe, to avoid things that challenge them, and to consume films for the experience of watching them rather than as a means to transform. But these limitations are not cause for despair. As a filmmaker, it is through acknowledging these limitations that I can make choices to better achieve the goal of transforming the hearts and minds of viewers. Though I don't think any single film has the power to be a catalyst for a social movement, I think this film and this project can be used as a tool, or at the very least an occasion to have a conversation about land dispossession, displacement, decolonization, and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The voices we hear in the film offer important perspectives that can steer such conversations in the right direction. These important conversations help, and over the long term, not through an individual work such as our film, but through the combination of multiple works in multiple mediums, and of course activism completely outside of the world of film and art, the whole discourse can shift along with the actual social relations that keep reinforcing colonization. It has been a privilege to be involved in making this film, and I am supremely grateful and lucky for this experience, but there is also other very important work to do.

Learning and growth can occur through listening to stories. Stories that are shared, for example, through teachings, relationships, and in film provide opportunities to meaningfully reflect and work to understand what they mean for us in our own contexts. As filmmakers we were provided this gift when we committed to the creation of this film.

This article has shared pieces of our own journeys, meaningfully reflecting on the process, our dialogues, and the stories shared by interviewees. Taking the time to reflect has been a valuable experience as filmmakers and in retrospect considering our intention to be as open and collaborative as possible, future articles reflecting on the filmmaking process may also include the experience of film participants. This could add insight into the impact of sharing a public story of who we are and where we come from in relation to our own decolonization journeys. The journeys we have each taken by participating in the making of a film that focuses on land dispossession and settlement in Canada have led to personal and professional growth. This film is a medium through which we have chosen to learn, reflect and to act. We do hope that this work will support the necessary awareness and education in order to build a foundation that can support meaningful reconciliation. After all, as Leah Gazan imparts:

We need to acknowledge that if we are going to move forward, that means taking responsibility in physical and spiritual and mental and emotional ways because its only when we do that that we can maybe have hope, maybe find out a way to share this land, and maybe make sure to find a way that our ancestral lands are respected in this country. (Leah Gazan, University of Winnipeg Instructor, Indigenous Activist, Wood Mountain Lakota Nation, Treaty 4 Territory, in Carlson, Rowe, Story, and Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, 2016)

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## **AUTHOR NOTE**

### **Elizabeth Carlson**

Assistant Professor  
Faculty of Social Work  
Laurentian University  
Contact: lizcarlson7@gmail.com

### **Gladys Rowe**

Interdisciplinary PhD Student  
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

### **Teddy Zegeye-Gebrehiwot**

Media Technician, Centre for Creative Writing and Oral Culture  
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

### **Sarah Story**

Joint Master's Student, Archival Studies & History  
University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba