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RELATIONAL ECONOMICS IN PRACTICE: The case of the Indigenous communities in Canada

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To mom and dad,

to whom I owe everything.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Carol Anne Hilton dedicated her book "*Indigenomics*" to breaking down the success of the rising Indigenous economy in Canada, tracing it back to a set of worldviews strongly embedded in the concept of relationality.

Largely studied by European anthropologists, the underlying philosophy of Indigenous economics is thousands years old and continues to inspire First Peoples in the building of enterprises and drive community led initiatives.

Now more than ever, Indigenous communities have been on the radar for the incredible potential their knowledge carries for navigating through the current global climate crisis. Indigenous knowledge systems have always relied on the idea that all is connected, meaning man and nature work together in a symbiotic, circular relationship. It is a perspective that naturally entails a strong sense of accountability and considers the long-term impacts of human actions, making that of Indigenous people the most sustainable of economies.

However, in Indigenous economics, the notion of accountability does not exclusively refer to the relationship between humans and land, but also to that between humans. Indigenous communities are characterised by strong social relations, which have been translated throughout history in a series of economic practices such as gift-giving ceremonies and food sharing.

These cultural traditions were the main tools through which Indigenous communities redistributed wealth to the benefit of all and guaranteed their survival during the months in which produce was scarce. Early signs of change within these dynamics can be traced back to the arrival of European settlers, with whom initially Indigenous Peoples often engaged in trade and barter. Many were also quick to join the labour market, however they never abandoned their traditions until forced to do so starting from 1874 with the establishment of the Indian Act, which commenced a period of systematic erasure of Indigenous culture.

Despite its numerous revisitations, its legacy still weighs heavily on First Peoples, furthermore it has only been a few decades since the Canadian government has taken responsibility for its past actions.

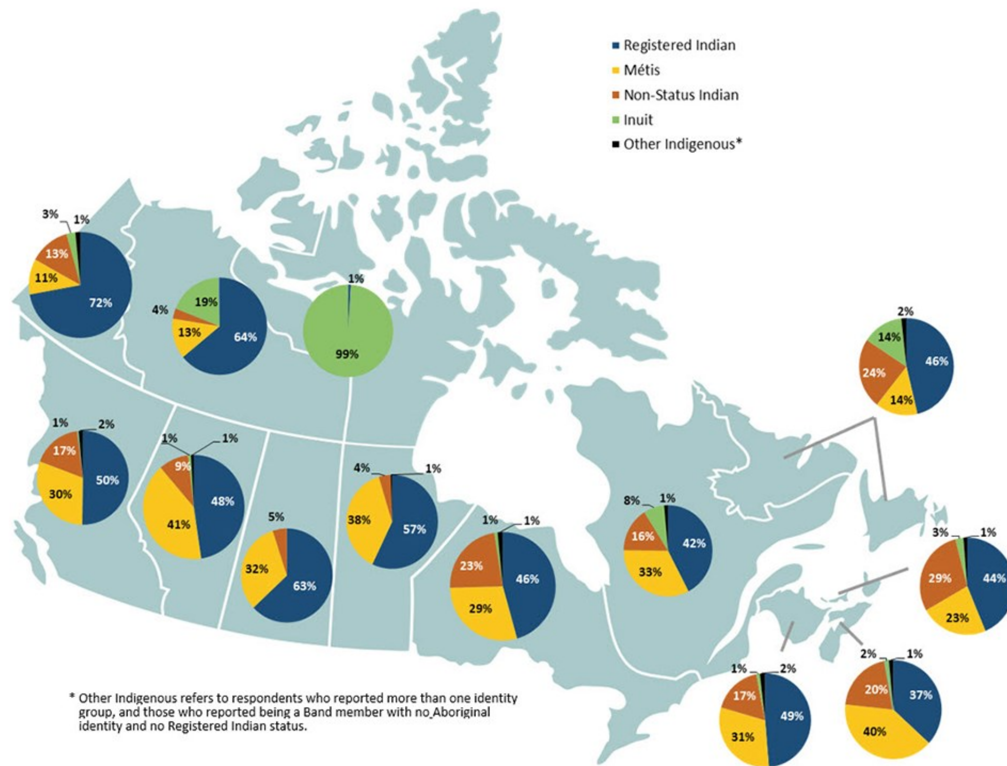
Today, Indigenous Peoples rely once again on their communities in a collective effort of revitalising their cultures and traditional languages, which are at great risk of vanishing forever. Many Indigenous people have also started building businesses in every sector with promising results, showcasing the revival of the Indigenous economy.

Chapter 1 introduces Canada's First Peoples by presenting the fundaments of their knowledge and worldviews, therefore providing the necessary context to better understand how traditional Indigenous economies distinguish themselves from the mainstream economy. Chapter 2 focuses entirely on analysing their relational nature and distinct practices, from resource management methods to ceremonial life. Chapter 3 explains the socio-economic repercussions of the Indian Act, as well as the many arrangements that are currently being stipulated between First Peoples and the central and federal governments so to guarantee Indigenous communities the possibility of self-determining themselves, in accordance with the statements of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). Finally, the thesis ends with a consideration regarding the possibility or not of incorporating Indigenous economic culture into western economic paradigms.

CHAPTER I

FRAMING INDIGENOUS ECONOMICS

1.1 Indigenous Peoples across Canada



Img.1 – Indigenous populations across Canada "Figure 2: Composition of the Indigenous population in Canada, 2016", Government of Canada, reported in the Annual Report to Parliament and available at https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1602010609492/1602010631711

Canada is home to a wide range of Indigenous peoples, or *Peuples autochtones du Canada*, among whom the Constitution Act (1982, Section 35) recognizes three main groups: First Nations, Métis and Inuit (Government of Canada, last modified on the 30th of August 2022). Each have their own languages, cultural practices and spiritual believes and, according to the 2021 census, make up for 5% percent of the national population (Government of Alberta, 2023).

The debate regarding the correct terminology to be used when addressing Indigenous peoples is ongoing. "*Indigenous*" has become the most current, international, and neutral denomination, and its establishment has been simultaneously accompanied by the tendency of defining indigeneity in relation to one's specific ethnic identity (E.g., Cree, Lakota, Haisla etc.). This testifies the vast diversity in culture that characterizes Indigenous peoples, which has long been oversimplified. Furthermore, the term "*Indigenous*" stems from Latin and means "Born of the land", a notion that immediately shifts the attention, as well as deeply resonates, to the role of relationships withing Indigenous worldviews.

Indian and *Aboriginal*, appear in numerous legal and official documents, such as the renown Indian Act (1876) and the previously mentioned Constitution Act. Yet, while "Indian" is slowly falling into disuse in spoken and written language, as its connotation is often considered to be pejorative and outdated, both of the terms are still employed in said specific legal contexts. They are also often reclaimed by Indigenous people themselves, therefore holding new meaning compared to the one designated by early settlers.

The government's classification in First Nations, Métis and Inuit offers an excessively limited distinction, as it founds itself on ethnic origin and geographical elements, rather than cultural ones. Likewise, the Indian Act categorizes people as "Status Indians", meaning those who are legally registered as an Indian under said act, and "Non-status Indians'", who are not registered as Indians under the Indian act. While the criteria to fit under this notion does consider further aspects, such as language and spiritual believes, it does not factor in many others that contribute to the shaping of Indigenous identity.

When interviewed on the matter, Dr. Kim Anderson, Associate Professor of Indigenous studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, said:

> When you think about it historically, our communities have their own ways of defining who is a community member. It wasn't based on race, or blood quantum […]. We had ways of adopting people into our nations, ways of integrating between nations, and ways of continually evolving in defining ourselves as who we are. Identities have always been changing throughout time, and we've always had

> the right to do that. It was with this interference on the part of the state that suddenly it became so prescribed and so static about who's what and what you are.

Indigenous people have long fought through a double-sided struggle, that is exploring their identity on the one hand, and seeing it recognized on the other. The issue of identity is one that dates back to hundreds of years' worth of forced assimilation, brought on by European settlers first, and later perpetuated by the Canadian government. It is the symptom of a rooted generational and historical trauma, whose consequences still affect community members today.

The psychological toll that weighs on Indigenous people is unquantifiable. The picture painted through statistics is one of great concern, as it reveals that, out of all groups, Indigenous Peoples have the highest rates in suicide attempts, drug use and mental health issues, and among the children in foster care, over half are indigenous, despite only making up for 7% of the population. When talking about the economic displacement and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples in her book "*Indigenomics*" (2021), Carol Anne Hilton says: << Indigenous Peoples are viewed through the lens of negative social statistics […] and often viewed from these limitations>>.

It is a statement that points out the need to overturn the negative public perception of Indigenous people, but foremost the perception that Indigenous people have of themselves, as it does not offer an accurate representation of their folk.

Communities have brought the struggle upon themselves, demonstrating great spirit of initiative and assuring that said statistics don't define Indigenous people nor determine their development potential. Over the last few decades Indigenous peoples have worked their way to ensuring their rightful place in all dimensions of societal life and have shown themselves as resourceful and capable, contradicting the idea forwarded by the Indian Act, which declared Indigenous people as wards of the state and disseminated the idea of being a burden to the economic development.

Indigenous people have been reclaiming their place in mainstream society, building successful businesses in all sectors, which have been growing at an

unprecedented speed. As a result of various treaties and agreements undertaken with the state, Indigenous peoples have, as of now, gained direct control over larger portions of lands.

This phenomenon represents an opportunity from which the national Canadian economy may largely benefit. The underlying philosophy that has guided Indigenous Peoples throughout time, is one that considers the long-term effects of human activity. Their strong, almost innate, one could say, connection to the land, makes them the perfect advocates for its conscious exploitation. Then again, the gain is mutual: despite facing the highest rates of poverty, most of the changes that are currently challenging the economic field today, concern the resource sector and are mainly occurring on traditional Indigenous land. Their thousands year's old strategies and knowledge offer valuable insight for the establishment of a new inclusive and sustainable economy.

In other words, Indigenous Peoples constitute both local and national powerhouses, whose recognition is essential for Canada's future. Closing the social-economic gap is beneficial to all Canadians.

Although measures have gradually been taken towards this direction, much is yet to be done. It is necessary for Indigenous people to have an official platform through which their voices can be heard and to have their potential recognized, however for this to happen there must be a common understanding of the value of Indigenous knowledge.

1.2 Indigenous knowledge

Despite the incredible variety that elapses between specific groups, in terms of culture, practices and beliefs, Indigenous peoples find common ground in knowledge systems that stem from the experiences of past generations, who inspire the actions of current and future ones. Marie Battiste (2005), member of the Potlotek First Nation in Nova Scotia, and Professor at the University of Saskatchewan, defines Indigenous knowledge as an << Adaptable, dynamic systems based on skills, abilities and problem-solving techniques that change over time depending on environmental conditions >>.

Due to the predominance of Western/European knowledge systems, those of Indigenous Peoples have had limited outlet routes so far, despite numerous attempts dating back to the 1990s of indigenizing the academy. Indigenous knowledge has a history of being dismissed as inferior in value, folkloric, primitive, and above all, unscientific (Hobson 1992; Grenier 1998; as cited by Knopf 2015). This last aspect is likely the most credited reason as to why said systems haven't found fertile enough ground to gain both public and academic acceptance. Self-evidence has guided the so-called West since the scientific revolution in 1543, and still does to this day, despite the spread of newer ways of thinking. The established knowledge system automatically neglects all that isn't blatant or manifest, leaving little to no space for different worldviews. In Battiste's words: << Eurocentric thinkers dismissed Indigenous knowledge in the same way they dismissed any socio-political cultural life they did not understand: they found it to be unsystematic and incapable of meeting the productivity needs of the modern world >> (Battiste, 2005). She talks of the predominance of Western Knowledge as "*Cognitive imperialism*", saying it << denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference. As a result […], cultural minorities have been led to believe that their poverty and impotence is a result of their race >> (Battiste, 2005).

However, the debate regarding the possibility of incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems into western ones is ongoing. The final aim, having it recognized as a legitimate source of knowledge, guaranteeing an approach to knowledge that is truly inclusive and representative.

Most western literature refers to Indigenous knowledge as traditional ecological knowledge. While the idiom is not necessarily rejected, many believe it to be in some ways inaccurate and in need of revisitation. Albert Wiggan, a Bardi-Kija-Nyul Nyul man and Indigenous rights advocate, rather refers to it as Indigenous science << […] because it is a foundation of knowledge that was developed through the same principle of western knowledge: observation, experimentation, and analysis >> (TEDx Talks, 2022). Johnathan Waterhouse (Al Jazeera English, 2018), an Indigenous Peoples scholar from Portland State University, offers a

practical example in favour of this consideration. His reflexion focuses on tribal fish management practices in America's North-West region, with specific attention drawn onto salmon ceremonies. He explains how after the first salmon run, there would be a fish count which would determine the total number of salmons that should be taken that year. This shows how traditional practices were supported by refined analysis, as native people fully understood the price of excessively exploiting nature's goods. On the contrary, in today's capitalist economies, the overall tendency is to let the market value of said goods determine the ways and the amount with whom they should be harvested.

Indigenous Peoples have made a habit of adapting and navigating through the changes that arise in the natural world. By closely observing nature they have developed a knowledge like no other, which strives towards the protection of biodiversity and leaving future generations with a positive legacy.

Another example that highlights the scientificity of Indigenous knowledge is provided by Milton M. R. Freeman (1989) and concerns the whale counts conducted by scientists during the '70s. Surveys stated that their population was very scarce with approximately 800 whales alive, while local Inuit hunters believed it to be around 7000. Inuit people disregarded the assumptions of western scientists that claimed whales only migrated in open water leads and were incapable of swimming under the ice offshore. The Inuit's thousands of years' worth experience led them to believe the contrary, stating that whales could indeed migrate long distances under the ice and therefore their number could not be estimated strictly through visual means. This led to the establishment of a new survey technique which included both western and Inuit hypothesis, thanks to whom the whale counts were refined and revisited in accuracy. (Freeman 1989, as cited in Freeman 1992).

Disregarding Indigenous knowledge systems entails a double loss for all. On the one hand we grieve the demise of identities of thousands of peoples around the globe, who have a right to see them preserved. On the other hand, we grieve the essential knowledge Indigenous people provide. Charles Dhewa, CEO of Knowledge Transfer Africa, speaks on the importance of traditional ways of

restoring wealth. He says: << […] you start with reclassifying or existing knowledges in ways that reflect a strong relationship between culture and natural resources. […] Globalisation should not just be about using imported knowledge but sharing comparative advantages of different knowledges >> (TEDx Talks, 2020).

Many are the dissimilarities that lie between Indigenous and western science, often making them seem incompatible. First of all, the difference in the approach to problems. While western knowledge tends to break them down in to smaller, more manageable parts, thinking it may ease their solution, Indigenous knowledge is essentially against this reductionism. Another difference also lies in the amount of data available to the western scientist, which is in many senses limited compared to the holistic knowledge of "*the local user*". (Freeman, 1992).

However, the main difference between the two can be redirected to the distinctive Indigenous idea of life as a cycle, rather than as a linear process. Freeman's words point out this basic rejection withing Indigenous science of the typically western cause-effect dichotomy:

> Perhaps the principal difference is again epistemological: the scientist is concerned with causality, with understanding an essentially linear process of cause and effect. If causes of observed effects can be measured and understood, then predictive statements about future outcomes can be made and the natural world can be managed. But the non-western forager lives in a world not of linear causal events but of constantly reforming multidimensional interacting cycles, where nothing is simply a cause or an effect, but all factors are influences impacting other elements of the system-as-a-whole.

Furthermore, the uniqueness of Indigenous research resides in the aim of sharing information and building connections, rather than arguments or drawing conclusions (Wilson 2008, as cited in Knopf 2015).

Though changes have yet to be put into practice. Present-day society however benefits in many ways from the pervasive mediatic flux of information, as it often offers hints for the revaluation of the supremacy of western established knowledge systems. Western science must confront its limitations and capture the benefits of embracing the knowledge offered by some of the most ancient and resilient

cultures of this world. In Freeman's own words (1992): << No one group of observers has a monopoly on truth, and the history of western science makes it quite clear that the scientific truths of today will, in ever-decreasing intervals of time, constitute the bulk of tomorrow's discarded hypotheses and superseded knowledge >>.

The empirical content of Indigenous knowledge holds great value to modern society, as it is applicable to many sectors. The examples hereby provided mainly show its utility in the development of a more sustainable economy, although it's worth is not restricted to this extent. Battiste (2005) however warns about its potential trivialization, stating how when approaching Indigenous knowledge, one must remember that its significance doesn't solely reside in its empirical nature. This reflexion provides a window on a much broader topic that considers all the risks that come with indigenizing the academy. First and foremost, that of ownership.

Indigenous knowledge is not available in the way the west may believes it is. When indigenizing the academy, the approach must be one of complementarity, collaboration, and above all, recognition. Indigenous science must be recognized for what it is, rather than for what it means, or for what value it holds, in relation to western standards. According to Marie Kovach, when creating combined integrated approaches, it is necessary to account to Indigenous standards, honouring their tribal worldview (Kovach 2010, as cited in Knopf 2015). Indigenous Peoples might be sceptical with the idea of sharing their knowledge as they don't conceive the idea of ownership the same way western knowledge does. According to Indigenous culture knowledge belongs to communities, in the sense that it is created, and later used, by a community to satisfy its own cultural needs and is not be exploited by any individual who seeks to use it for personal gain. Indigenous knowledge has often been used for extractive-research by the West, which has often left Indigenous Peoples uncredited, also stripping them from their right to consent its employment (The White/Wiphala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' food systems, FAO, 2021). Not to mention that its transmission takes

place in different ways and through different means, like orality, songs, dance, and theatre (McGloin et al, 2010, as cited in Knopf 2015) and must be respected.

Samantha Chisolm-Hatfield ((Al Jazeera English, 2018), post-doctoral researcher and associate at the North-west climate science adaption centre, comments on the matter by saying <<The parameters of what is used, how it's used, where it's used, when it's used, and who it's used by, are very different in the western mainstream world than in Indigenous cultural values>>. The question she believes must be posed regards what can be shared and what should be shared, as << Indigenous people should still be able to use the product of their knowledge for their own ceremonial ways>>.

Having that said, the question of how to align the two knowledges remains open. An initiative has been brought on by Canadian non-profit organisation ACTUA, which has been working on including Indigenous communities in science. CEO Jennifer Flanagan states that the company engages with around two hundred Indigenous communities, for a total of 35.000 youth. Senior advisor Doug Dokis highlights the importance of this powerful partnership as a way of creating meaningful relationships and reassuring about <<this technology […being] a tool and not a replacement for their cultural knowledge>>. By bringing science closer to Indigenous youth, specifically science that is complemented by land-based learning, the number of scientists with Indigenous background could significantly increase, possibly guaranteeing a more inclusive approach to knowledge in the near future.

Some, however, believe that while education may function as a useful starting point, it is important for Indigenous people to find their way back to land-based activities. Indigenous knowledge and climate change researcher Tero Mustonen, states that it is within this scenario that natural sciences might prove useful, as it is important to avoid the loss of important social figures such as hunters and gatherers, whom have always harvested their information by being directly in contact with the land, and who's presence is necessary for preservation of traditional Indigenous knowledge, as well as the survival of integral parts of Indigenous cultures (Al Jazeera English, 2018).

1.3 Indigenous worldview

For Indigenous knowledge to be recognized, the fundamental premise consists in understanding the way Indigenous people contemplate the world, in other words, their worldview.

Worldviews can be described as the ensemble of philosophies that each culture has developed in its efforts of conceptualizing the world. They offer a unique perception of reality through a cultural lens.

Indigenous peoples too are linked by a shared perspective of the world. Despite the differences that incur between individual communities and tribes, many common aspects may be found in their depiction of the world.

Carol Anne Hilton (2021) states: << Our worldview […] includes what we experience as good, what we identify as right and what we define as truth >>. In her book *Indigenomics* she escorts readers through the process of better understanding Indigenous worldviews, analysing the concepts of wealth, ownership, economy, and responsibility.

Wealth is intrinsically connected to the distribution system and to meaningful intercommunity relationships. In a diametrically opposed outlook compared to that of the "West", success and status stem from generosity, and the classic economic concept of accumulation is viewed as a mean to support the community rather than the individual.

Ownership, be it of knowledge or goods, belongs to communities and bonds past, present, and future generations.

Indigenous worldviews distinguish themselves for their unique conception of spirituality. According to this outlook, there is an animate force that resides in all that surrounds us. No entity is inanimate, therefore everything that comprises this earth has a purpose, a role, and consequently must be respected. All things must necessarily co-exist as they hold equal value in the greatness of the cosmos. This creates a balanced life experience, which holds individuals and communities

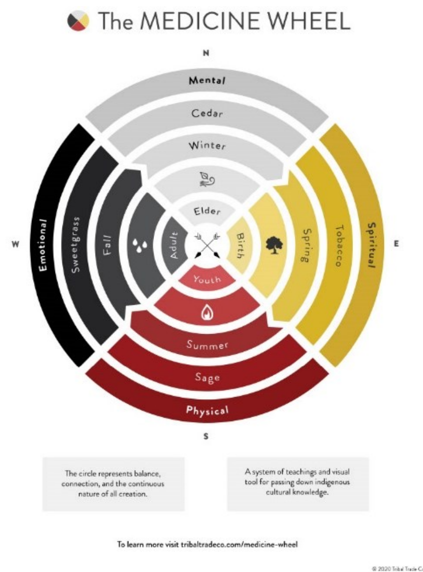
accountable, as they are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting it (Mitchell, 2005). As stated by communicator and educator Lewis Cardinal (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2019) there is life force that oversees all things, which redefines how one sees themselves, making respect and reciprocity the guiding principles when interacting with the world.

Spirituality is the lens through which Indigenous Peoples orient their relationships to all animate things. It especially oversees the relationship with the land. Photographer Aaron Huey has spent years of his life documenting the culture and history of the Lakota Sioux of Pine Ridge Reservation in the state of Indiana. The story of how they came to be on the reservation perfectly encapsulates the clash between Indigenous and Western worldviews (Zak, 2020). In 1851 agreements were made that legally defined the territories of the Lakota Nation, followed by the second Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868 which also grated them the right to hunting in nearby states. As explained by Huey (TEDxDU, 2010), the relationship with the American government during the course of these years was never completely peaceful, as the Lakota's right to sovereignty was often overstepped, however the hostilities exasperated in 1874 with the discovery of gold in their territories, which created a great flux of white settlers into the region. This culminated in a series of wars, which ended with the "Wounded Knee massacre" in 1890. The battles however represented much more than a simple fight between two parties, but rather showcases the differences between the forces that drove them to succeed. If on the one hand the American government acted so to pursue commercial development and profit, that of the Lakota was a fight to protect their spiritual connection to the land (Zak, 2020) and ensure its continuity.

Finally, another key concept of Indigenous worldviews is responsibility, which should guide all actions and practices. It especially oversees the previously mentioned relationship with nature, making man its caretaker rather than its exploiter. It is a principle that has inspired recent Indigenous led movements that

have gathered with the aim of safeguarding Indigenous soil from unsustainable government measures (e.g., “No Dakota Access Pipeline”, “Idle no more” etc.). Amidst the global climate crisis, responsibility has become a tool for Indigenous people to fight back and prove the worth of their worldview, long disregarded throughout colonial times.

All of the concepts here presented offer an insight to the underlying Indigenous belief that life is a cycle, where all is interconnected.



Img. 1.2 – *Example of a medicine wheel created by Mallory Graham*

The circularity of this worldview is well represented by the so called “*medicine wheels of life*”, a western born denomination originally referred to by Indigenous communities of North America as “*sacred circles*”.

As shown above in image 1.2, medicine wheels are circular symbols, dived into four equal parts, each of which is associated to a colour (most often black, white, yellow and red) and features different attributes. They << […] represent the alignment of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realities >> (Bob Joseph, 2020) and are known to be source of teachings, guiding Indigenous people through life.

They come in different forms as they answer the specific cultural needs of different communities, however they all reflect the interconnectivity and interdependence of the aspects that constitute life as a whole.

When researching the founding elements that comprise Indigenous worldviews, one realises that in order to conceive one facet, it is imperative to consider all the remaining. The true significance of Indigenous economics may only be unearthed when regarded in relation to family, community, and nature. Those are all interconnected dimensions which thrive off of each other. As everything is tied together, the key aspect of the Indigenous worldview may be found in the concept of relationship. It is not a binary relationship that creates an opposition between entities, but rather entails an effort of understanding each other. This is the necessary fundamental premise in order to spark creative solutions to collective problems. (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2019). This is the heart behind the relational Indigenous economics.

CHAPTER II

RELATIONAL ECONOMIES

Indigenous economic knowledge has been under the radar of the western academy for a few decades, as its value in the design of a more sustainable economy has been placed under the spotlight. Indigenous people, however, do not refer to it in a perspective of individual gain as they experience the world in "*all their relations*", a commonly used expression among different First Peoples to indicate the interconnectedness of all things that compose the universe.

Indigenous traditional languages have their own words to describe this concept. In Cree, for example, the term "*wahkohtowin*" refers not only to the connection that runs between all forms of creation, but also to the inherent law that results from said connection: a reciprocal obligation to fulfil a set of responsibilities, that allow to maintain the balance of the cosmos (Métis elder Maria Campbell, as cited in Wildcat, 2018).

Indigenous economics does not subsist without its relational connotation, without the idea that economies stem from relationships, and that simultaneously relationships are reinforced through economic practices.

2.1 Relationship between people and the land

If we were to choose one characteristic above all, that defines Indigenous Peoples, it would be their relationship with the land. Differently from what western media outlets seem to be suggesting amidst the current climate crisis, Indigenous people do not believe humans should be estranged from nature, as the two are connected in a symbiotic relationship of giving and taking. It is a relationship based on reciprocity.

This perspective translated into a fluid conception of land division (Malone and Chisholm, 2016). Territorial distribution mainly regarded hunting grounds, which were assigned to independent groups formed by sets of families, managed

according to their own specific traditions (Government of Canada, last modified on the 2nd of May 2017).

To Indigenous people, land sacred as it is regarded as the source of all forms of life: << […] the land gives life, and […], as human beings, we are a part of that >> (Hilton, 2021).

Even in its roughest manifestations, nature offers humans with the means for their survival. It is therefore a source of knowledge, which has long guided practices and founded traditions.

For example, Syilx member and educator Jeannette Armstrong shares her experience as a First Nation woman living in the southern Okanagan valley (British Colombia). It is the only place in Canada that falls under the definition of desert. The climate can therefore be unforgiving at times, with little to no rain during the year. However, she explains how the scarcity has led her people to achieve unimaginable accomplishments in terms of what is needed for survival and taught them the importance of a respectful relationship with nature, that must not be over-exploited, in order to provide the generations to come with the same opportunities and resources. Similarly to Carol Anne Hilton, Armstrong says <<We must also be aware in everything that we are doing that the same possibilities must be available to our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren, and so it is an immense responsibility. I think of it in terms of our direct connection to how the land operates, how the land gives life, and how, as human beings, we are a part of that >> (Armstrong, 2007).

Both evoke the holistic essence of the Indigenous worldview, where all is connected and interdependent. People and nature are equally part of the same system, the same cosmos, therefore one cannot exist without the other. Armstrong (2007) says that it is from this awareness that Indigenous Peoples have developed practices, philosophies and government systems.

In an Indigenous worldview, not only does the resourcefulness of land not go unnoticed, it is also celebrated and acknowledged. Trees, plants, water, fire, wind and local fauna have always acted as assets to the development of flourishing

economies of subsistence embedded in a strong zero-waste mentality and which have skilfully moulded themselves according to the land's availability, in a completely opposite logic compared to the one that has guided western economics since its genesis. Plants were both source of food and medicine, different parts of trees would be used to make canoes, bows, arrows, baskets, and a variety of tools. Animals also concurred in the establishment of nutritious daily diets, as well as being used in the making of blankets, clothing, and shelter.

Western academics failed to recognise the characteristic flexibility, adaptability, and practical learning of Indigenous economies, misinterpreting them as primitive and lacking in structure. As Indigenous economies were grounded in subsistence rather than in the accumulation of capital, they were often dismissed as not dynamic enough, when in fact they naturally moved towards the establishment of a continuous flow of goods and services (Sahlins 1971, as cited by Natcher, 2009).

A practical example of an artisanal and economic activity that showcases the attitude towards nature is that of basket making, a long-lasting tradition within Indigenous communities across Canada. Often used as means for food storage, transportation, and cooking, refinedly crafted baskets were highly valued items of trade among nations, as well as with non-Indigenous people after their settlement. Today their utilitarian aim has been lost, replaced by modern day facilities, however their production is still ongoing, and are mainly being sold as art works. Baskets are made out of different types of roots or bark (cedar, birch, pine etc.) depending on the surrounding flora, which equally act as prime material in the making of canoes and traditional medicines. Picking a tree for either of these practices requires the following of protocols specific to each nation, which indicate during which period to harvest, which tool to use, how deep to cut and whether offerings, such as water, tobacco or prayers should be addressed to *Mother Nature.*

That of basket making, is only one example that demonstrates how the retrieval of commodities is accompanied by rituals and practices that allow one to give thanks to the land, as well as empathise with it.

Another fundamental activity to the creation of social economies was fishery, typical of both western and eastern coastal nations. Among the varieties of fish, salmons are particularly dear to most Indigenous communities as they are a symbol of perseverance. Salmons spend their lives weaving between different worlds: after hatching, they pass their youth in fresh waters and later migrate into salt waters where they spend most of their adulthood. Though for a limited time span, they finally return to fresh waters for reproduction purposes, and it is shortly after spawning that adult salmons die, enrichening the rivers with nutrients (NOAA Fisheries, last modified on the 6th of October 2022). They are considered powerful sacred beings as they continuously fight against obstacles represented by predators, waterfalls, tides, currents, and human traps (Cullon, 2017).

Having spent thousands of years monitoring this journey, Indigenous peoples were aware of its tediousness, and considered the return of salmons to fresh waters as an offering from the animal itself. Documentation on the matter, mentions the tradition of the Coast Salish people, the Bella Cool River people and the Kwakwaka'wakw people, of returning the bones and remains of the salmon to the water, thus paying their respects (Cullon, 2017). This particular tradition is one that has endured the disruption of colonisation and is being steadily practiced by these communities.

Fishing techniques themselves, varied among nations, but found a common denominator in their sustainable nature. Among Coast Salish people, sex selection was a frequently used method that guaranteed an annual steady, healthy population of fish (Cecco, 2021a). The Tsleil-Waututh nation specifically, was renowned for using advanced weir systems that would trap the salmons, so that fishers would be able to prioritise the harvest of the male population. According to the studies of archaeologist Jesse Morin, a sole male salmon can, as a matter of fact, mate with up to ten females, ensuring just as many salmons the next year (Owen, 2021).

Processing practices, such as the drying of salmon in the sun or through smoke, were also very popular, as they considerably prolonged the preservation of the meat, often up to a year, making fish the perfect trade item among nations.

All radically changed with the destruction of many Indigenous technological methods by early settlers, later succeeded by the building of the Grand Coulee dam in Washington State (1939), followed on the Canadian side by the Mica dam, the Revelstoke dam, and the Keenleyside dam. As a result, salmons have diminished in numbers and have not made their way back to the Columbia River for over 80 years, paralysing this facet of the Indigenous economy and of coastal Indigenous cultures.

Although aboriginal fishery rights have now been prioritised over other forms of fishery, by the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada (*R. vs Sparrow*, 1990), there are concerns regarding the maximum allocation of fish available per person, as this may not satisfy Indigenous nations' subsistence and ceremonial needs, as well as stripping Indigenous people from their identities as fishers or fish caretakers (Cullen, 2017).

The extensive damage perpetuated by European colonisers first, and the Canadian government later, go well beyond the construction of the north-western dam system. Following the "*doctrine of discovery*", a concept already used during early colonial propaganda to justify the claim on Indigenous land, the newly founded Canadian government chose to physically displace Indigenous people, who quickly saw their access to traditional territories denied and were often forcefully relocated towards those chosen by the settlers themselves (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, Volume 1). The distance created between community members and their native land resulted in the incapability to sustain their own socio-economic customs, as well as practice the traditional knowledges that had been developed to fulfil the needs of those specific territories. The cultural genocide that took place was further perpetuated by the joint actions of the government and churches through the residential school system and other initiatives of forced assimilation.

By compelling First Peoples to internalise wester paradigms and adhere to western practices, the relational quality of Indigenous economics has been severely damaged. Nonetheless, the desire of Indigenous people to work towards its restoration is strong.

Indigenous led movements have opened new collaborations with the government to guarantee the conservation of First People's traditions. Projects such as "*Bringing the Salmon home*", unite non-Indigenous parties, Indigenous community members (specifically those of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, Ktunaxa Nation and Secwépemc Nation) as well as British Columbia and Canada, in a joint effort to reintroduce salmons in the Columbia River and bring back their culturally related practices (e.g., salmon ceremonies) (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, 2022).

Other present-day initiatives mainly revolve around regional approaches in the journey to restore the relationship with the land and are often known as "Indigenous *place-based learning*". In 2021, the UNESCO's Canadian Commission defined it as a << multi-faceted concept >>, that arises from the layering of different dimensions ranging from the learning of Indigenous languages, local geography and traditional local knowledge, land protection rights, accountability, and reconciliation. It is much more than simply learning outdoors and rather represents a road towards the future for the benefit of all Canadians, as it allows First Peoples to ground their identity in their innate role of caretakers of the land and contemporarily form both historically and environmentally conscious Canadian citizens.

Questions regarding the possibility of including more people into these initiatives arise when considering the large amounts of Indigenous people who are now based in cities, after being driven out of their homeland. According to Statistics Canada 2021 census, 44.3% of the total Indigenous population lives in urban centres and the number seems to be steadily growing throughout the years (Cimellaro, 2022). Therefore, there is a considerable amount of Indigenous people, especially youth, who are physically distant from the land-management and land-based practices that take place within reserves or Indigenous controlled lands. However, because of its multidimensional approach, when applied effectively, Indigenous place-based learning may be able to answer part of the specific cultural needs of this particular demographic, for example through teachings in schools. This requires an effort in the making of curriculums that include everything from Indigenous history, worldviews, current issues and

values, so that Indigenous youth may thrive withing the system that sustains them (Fettes, 2014) and experience their indigeneity without fear of discrimination or isolation.

As for land-based activities, their reinforcement has been particularly successful in the Canadian Artic, where the harvesting and production of wild foods is still central to the Inuit way of life. Inuit people still heavily rely on non-monetary subsistence economies. Though there have been efforts in their monetary quantification, which according to Vail and Clinton in 2001 (as cited by Natcher, 2009) amounted to approximately $60 million when also including the sale and trade of animal skin or other natural resources employed in later use, there are risks that come with associating Indigenous economies with a purely numerical value, as it diminishes their cultural and social significance (Natcher, 2009).

In 2003 the Sivummat Economic Development Strategy Group designed a document entitled "*Nunavut Economic Development: Building a Foundation for the Future*", which aims to tackle varies challenges, such as the high unemployment rates withing a rapidly growing population, limited government fundings and maintain a healthy relationship to the land. As opportunities withing the harvesting, fishing and mining sectors will increase, Inuit people are aware that it is crucial to uphold their values, resisting those of the mainstream economy. That is not to say Indigenous people do not welcome change, as this project alone is the result of intercultural collaborations, all intended to preserve Nunavut's landscape, improve the overall quality life of its people and maintain its mixed economy, meaning both its traditional land-based connotations and the assets it has gained from the wage-economy and specific industries.

Lastly, when considering Indigenous Peoples' relationship to the land, founded on respect, reciprocity and responsibility, it is sadly ironic how they are among those who least benefit from its untainted resources. Clean and drinkable water, for instance, is internationally recognised as a common good and, according to UN experts, must be treated as such rather than as a commodity (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023), yet in Canada First Peoples living on reserves are the demographic group that most suffers from having little to no

access to safe water. Many communities must rely on shipped bottler water, as the one supplied by the tap often contains toxic metals and chemicals (Cecco, 2021b). The difficulty in providing water infrastructure is often logistic and dependant on the location of the reserves, however it is unfair for Indigenous people to bare the burden of this challenge alone, especially considering how their displacement was forced by the government in the first place. Canada has stated that in 2016, $1.8 billion were issued to be used during the course of 5 years (Government of Canada, last modified on the 19th of September, 2023), yet many nations claim they are yet to receive a great portion of these funds.

2.2 Relationship between people

The considerations developed regarding the Inuit case bring us to the second dimension of relational economics, that of relationships between people and their practical translation into sharing and exchange practices.

By further elaborating on the idea brought up by Natcher, of the devaluation of subsistence economies when quantified in numerical value, one comes across the fact that the Inuit feel great pride in sharing their harvest. A survey conducted in 2001 by Heather Tait, showcased that 96% of households shared harvested wild food with each other (e.g., caribou, whales, ducks, seals and berries) and the main reason behind this tradition is still identified in the common effort of maximising the overall well-being of the community (Natcher, 2009).

Strong kinship bonds also come to light by analysing statistics regarding community involvement. The overall assessment showed high percentages of active involvement of Inuit adults of different age ranges, with no differences in terms of participation levels between men and women, but a more enhanced concentration among older members (31% aged 15-24 volunteered for community groups or organisations, versus 44 % of those over 55) (Tait, 2001). Natcher (2009) however underlines how young people tend to be more involved in other activities, such a school and wage-earning jobs and will later naturally shift towards a more frequent participation in community driven and oriented activities.

Similar patterns were later observed in the Aboriginal Peoples Survey of 2017 regarding harvesting activities among First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit. The ties between harvesting and the wage economy were confirmed. Participation of the Inuit of Nunangat in such activities dropped from 70% in 2006 to 58% in 2017, however this change only affected working-age adults, who mentioned not having enough time to dedicate to harvesting despite their desire to. Percentages showed that time-related barriers targeted 47% of those engaged in the labour market, against the 21% who declared to be unemployed and 20% who were out of the labour force.

Aside from the anthropological interest in the subject, the traditional social connotations of the Indigenous economy and the importance they hold for its functioning, have been recognised in 1996 by the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, which said: << The social relations underlying the production of food in the traditional economy are critical to the functioning of that economy, and the sharing of food within the household and through the extended family and community are the primary means of reinforcing those social relations >>.

It is important for institutions to acknowledge these foundations of the Indigenous worldview, as it sets more culturally appropriate parameters on how to approach Indigenous communities when working with them. The value attributed to relationships constitutes one of said parameters.

From a western point of view, the idea of defining subsistence economies, such as that of the Inuit, as flourishing, may be received with perplexity, as the criteria to determine a thriving economy are vastly different. Subsistence is often associated with pure survival. The meaning of the term itself is fitting for Indigenous economies in general, as it refers to the state of living or existing through time, in spite of difficult circumstances (Cambridge Dictionary), in this case represented by harsh weather and geographic conditions, as well as historical events. However, when thinking in a western economic perspective, survival is merely a prerequisite for living a full, prosperous life. It is not the ultimate goal.

What western economics has failed to understand, is that Indigenous subsistence economies have always included the notions of abundance and wealth. The

difference between the two systems is rather to be identified in the definition of prosperity and its opposite, poverty. One is considered prosperous when connected to its community and poor when lacking in relationships with the land and the people. In an Indigenous worldview, relationship is the compass that guides all human action, therefore heavily influencing how the more material side of wealth should be managed. Wealth is redistributed with the intention of maintaining the social relations that allow the whole system to flourish.

Though the idea of a more equally distributed wealth has also been central in western economic discourse for centuries and has been translated for example in different systems of taxation and allocation of goods and services, the overall tendency is to think in terms of individual gain, resulting in socio-economic gaps that divide the population. According to an Indigenous worldview, if an economic system puts certain demographic categories in disadvantage compared to others, creating disparaging relations between its economic agents, it cannot be denoted as thriving. Furthermore, the accountability of these disadvantages falls on society as a whole. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure a balanced distribution of wealth.

Reciprocity is the core value, the social mechanism, that drives all forms of association of Indigenous community life. It is << When reciprocity finds economic expression for the provision of goods and services to people and communities it is the social economy that results >> (Restakis, 2006, as cited by Natcher, 2009).

Naturally, the passing of time has modified the traditional idea of Indigenous well-being, which is now intertwined with some of its western connotations. Considering the example offered by the inhabitants of the Canadian Artic, when speaking of a thriving economy that goes to the benefit of all, mentions of a more profitable engagement in the wage economy and the need for more monetary fundings do come to the surface. The reasoning behind this partial shift is however to be redirected towards the historical happenings that took place, meaning that as much as Indigenous people make use of western imported technologies, methods and support systems, as they may feel more convenient, all

is a direct result of the paradoxical approach of Euro-Canadian settlers in regards to Indigenous Peoples since their arrival, that worked to forcefully assimilate First Peoples (especially children) on the one hand and isolate remaining communities on the other. One must add that the erasure of cultural practices, which were deemed illegal by the Indian Act, has often left Indigenous people with no choice but to adhere to western ways of life.

That said, the idea of how community welfare should take form, does not solely rely on money making and accumulation. That of relationship, is an integral aspect of Indigenous culture that the arrival of westerners has not completely managed to eradicate and that community members are holding on to, using it as guideline in the development of a present day thriving indigenous economy. Family and community are still perceived as resource, meaning collaboration and cooperation are favoured over competition. That of Indigenous people is a much more inclusive, as well as shared, view of the world that values connectivity above all. As Carol Anne Hilton (2021) has simply, yet effectively summed up, to Indigenous people <<Relationship is everything>>. It is the source of one's identity; it is what grounds people; it is the immaterial dimension thanks to whom future generations will prosper and live on through time.

The use of the adjective "relational" to refer to the economic theory common to Indigenous people in North America, is, therefore, anything but casual. Economy stems from people, from family and community, from the knowledge such entities offer and the needs they need to see fulfilled. It is relational, and it is the answer to the sacred relationship that lies between people and land, as it offers society with the means to strengthen its bonds during generational turnovers.

There has been much debate regarding the possibility for First Peoples to return to an economy fully based on subsistence and though it is likely that from this point onwards it will maintain its blended nature, as pointed out by Weinberg (2014), despite what is actually realisable, it is important to collectively recognise the history of Indigenous economics, as ignoring it represents a dismissal of Indigenous culture as a whole.

2.3 Gift-giving and exchange practices

There is an adaptation by Leah Dorion of a traditional Métis story that centres around a maple tree, uniquely characterised by a hollow in its trunk. The tree functioned as a resting place for bypassing families during their travels and legend has it that one day a family forgot to pack some sugar needed for their tea and bannock, which they would have savoured together during their rest. That was until the father took his son to the tree and lifted him up to inspect the hollow. To the child's surprise, the hole was filled with goods, including sugar. The father explained that the tree had long been sacred to Métis people as it functioned as an emergency stash, helping travellers in times of need. He continued by saying that whoever took from the tree, was equally responsible with filling it with something of their own. It was shorty after that the mother gave her son some handkerchiefs and a pail to give back to the tree, in the hope that the offering could help future visitors.

The story of "*The Giving Tree*" acts as the perfect metaphor for understanding the significance of sharing and gifting within the Indigenous mentality.

The practical translation of this worldview took the form of exchange networks that varied in nature, which were first studied by German-born anthropologist Franz Boas. Boas' research centred around the cultural traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples (word that translates to "*those who speak the Kwak'wala language*") native to both coastal areas of Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia, often referred to in anthropological works as the Kwakiutl. Despite its frequent use, this nomenclature was later deemed incorrect as it was the result of an extension made by English settlers of the name of a single community, the Kwakiutl, to Kwakwaka'wakw peoples as a whole. The Kwakwaka'wakw engaged in traditional activities of hunting, gathering and fishing. Their access to water provided them with enough to sustain themselves during the winter months, alongside with a surplus of resources, destined either for trade, particularly with their Nuu-cha-nulth neighbours, or ceremonial practices, in which the excess harvest was redistributed within the community.

Said practices were typical of a wide range of North-western Indigenous Nations, including the Coast Salish, and are most commonly regrouped under the definition of "*potlach*", that stems from the Chinook word "*patshatl*", meaning both "*to give*" or "*gift*".

Potlaches were long-lasting celebrations held to commend certain rites of passage, such as births, the naming of children, weddings and funerals, but their functions went beyond their motive of initiation. Rather than being a temporary celebration, they represented an opportunity for communities to restore social order withing existing government systems: this occurred through the conferral of status and rank, by allowing debts to be repaid and by determining who owned the rights to fishing, hunting, and gathering, circumscribing the territories in which those activities could take place. Just like societies all over the world, First Peoples built hierarchies to give themselves structural stability, however the power that followed had no aim in itself, but rather functioned to guarantee the well-being of the community. Those who owned more were directly accountable for those who had less. Ethnographic research reports how families would accumulate wealth, consisting in food, blankets, clothing, jewellery, bentwood boxes, cedar baskets, arms, canoes and other prestigious items, which would be redistributed in occasion of the potlach.

In potlaches, formal speeches would be accompanied by dancing, singing, drumming, theatrical exhibitions, also providing communities with the opportunity to pass down traditional knowledge to the younger generations. In these circumstances, the host would gift all their stored wealth - at times gathered throughout the course of years – partaking in a circular movement of goods that contributed to sustaining those who had less, strengthening social connections and investing the giver with social prestige. There was a strong sense of respect for those who demonstrated their ability to gift, and differently from what western studies have indicated, the driving force behind large-scale potlaches cannot be traced back to an underlying competitiveness. "*War of property*" (Mauss, 2002, pg. 47) were the terms through which Mauss expressed the relation between wealth and power. However, according to Kelly (2017) Mauss' understanding of the phenomenon certainly captured what were historically accurate situations of

inter-community tensions for the access and control of scarce resources but lacked in explaining the overall dynamics between wealth and power. A culturally appropriate revision of this socio-economic institution can be found in the words of Haggarty (2010), who talks about << generosity>> being <<the prerequisite of power>>. Although his words find context in gift-giving practices among the nations of Fraser River Valley in north-west Saskatchewan, the same logic can be used when interpretating the potlach.

When arriving in British Columbia, Boas' intentions were to study the ways of what he personally referred to as authentic and "primitive" societies. A desire that most likely influenced the content of his writings, which, despite having opened a window to some of the most ancient knowledge and cultural systems to ever exist, were deemed highly inaccurate. The potlaches witnessed by Boas were, however, partly already contaminated by the arrival of Europeans. By the late XIX century, most Indigenous Peoples were already engaged either in the wage economy or the fur trade. This heavily influenced the potlach, as a relatively large portion of redistributed goods, were no longer traditionally crafted items, but industrial items, acquired either through newly earned salaries or barter with European settlers. However, at the time, the colonial capitalistic economy was merely considered as an alternative route for the advancement of their traditional economies (Soloff, 2021). In this respect, Raibmon (2000) argues that the << Kwakiutl embraced changes that granted them sovereignty; they resisted changes that stripped them of land, resources, and the capacity to organize and govern themselves >> (as cited by Soloff, 2021).

Despite the interest Boas showed towards the potlach, to the point of hosting some himself and fighting its ban alongside Indigenous communities, his works did not seem to capture the true essence of this institution, conducting his interpretation through a capitalist lens, failing to comply to the primary task of an anthropologist, that is attempting to understand a community's culture through the eyes of its members. His personal letters seem to look up at the potlach with great admiration, which on the other hand lacked in his formal academic writings, where he would often accentuate its usurious nature (Soloff, 2021). For example, Boas considered the sharing of food during feastings to be <<destruction of

property>>, as it could only be <<*repaid* through other feasts>> (Soloff, 2021). The lexicon itself stresses on the more materialistic elements of the potlach, subordinating its social components to its economic dimension.

Mauss on the other hand, focused on further inquiring the notion of “gift” and its social implications. That is not to say that Mauss fully captured the essence of these cultural practices, as both him and Boas were men of their time, meaning that regardless of the genuinity of their curiosity, their approach was heavily embedded in a western-centric and racist mentality, often disregarding the cultures they would analyse as mere objects of their research. Nonetheless, Mauss considerations represented a step forward towards a better understanding of those Indigenous exchange practices rooted in relationships. In his “*Essai sur le don*” (1925), he explains how the traditional idea of gift-giving is vastly different in western society, identifying it in the act of an individual, or group, stemming from their free will. While in British Columbia’s North-Western First Nations, giving and receiving created a circular system of reciprocal obligations, meaning there was awareness that new transactions would follow. Gifts were “free” only in the sense that no institution was monitoring the transaction (Mauss, 1969 as cited by Carrier, 1991), penalising those who didn’t carry it out. However, to ignore the obligation meant to ignore the existing of a social relationship, therefore was met with disapproval. Nonetheless, the quantity of gifts was always determined taking into consideration the ability of the recipient to reciprocate (Barnett, 1995).

Another aspect of the gift is its inalienability. This idea is common to both western and Indigenous mindsets, yet it was heavily emphasised by Mauss as typical of those societies that made of the gift a socio-economic determinant. The economies that followed relied on the idea that the gift bared << the identity of the giver and the relationship between the giver and the recipient >> (Carrier, 1991). Compared to Boas, the reflections advanced by Mauss represented a starting point for later researchers, who introduced a new overview of gift-giving, namely, the idea that the dynamics that uphold gift-giving cannot be explained through economic reasoning, as economy does not represent the premise of the social relations in place but rather their result (Carrier, 1991).

Kelly (2017) speaks of the potlach in terms of reciprocity, pointing out how the exchange is not to be thought as the closing of a loop, but rather a relationship that extends itself eternally through time, binding the parties involved in a long-term perspective. This is also true for the countless sharing networks, common to all Indigenous people across Canada. Their nature was more informal and intimate, lacking the institutionalisation typical of the potlach. It mainly occurred between family members, blood relatives, in-laws and friends (Haggarty, 2010). However, sharing networks could be expanded, especially through arranged marriages. This was also the case for those Indigenous women who married European settlers. Relationships were extended to them and the children to come, meaning they were responsible for the obligations those entailed, but could equally savour their benefits (Haggarty, 2010). Inter-community sharing was also practiced. For example, the Cree and Dene communities of north-west Saskatchewan helped one another in gathering, fishing and hunting activities, later splitting the harvest (Robertson & the Kwaguł Gixsan Clan, 2012, as cited by Haggarty, 2010).
From a western point of view, sharing and gift-giving as economic motors, represent an unfamiliar and intricate system built on unfamiliar premises. Their unique dynamics especially come to light when compared to those of other exchange practices, such as barter or trade. Both are built upon << a temporary agreement between strangers >> and therefore do not require the parties to absolve to future expectations or nourish existing relationships, as there is no lasting connection between the people involved. The drive behind those practices were understood all the same by Europeans upon their arrival, facilitating the start of trade relations with the autochthonous peoples. The purpose of these transactions was the maximising of profit, which is precisely was led anthropologists to believe there was something different than pure material gain at the root of Indigenous economics. Families with access to scarce or exclusive resources could obtain many more benefits by trading their items, which is why it may come as a surprise that sharing was, as a matter of fact, the most common form of circulation of goods (Haggarty, 2010)

Much changed with the establishment of the Indian Act in 1876, a body of laws that regulated the Indigenous life in its entirety, from the imposing of government

structures that came in the form of "band councils", to the overall management of reserves. The Act was followed by many amendments, including that of 1884 which formally banned potlaches from being held, as the federal government considered them an obstacle to the full assimilation of Indigenous people. Although the ban most certainly contributed to persecutions, occasional imprisonments and confiscation of valuable ceremonial items, potlaches were still celebrated underground, albeit with many restrictions. The primary deterrent for the practicing of traditional relational economies is to be identified in the Residential School System. By physically displacing Indigenous children from their families, entire generations were robbed of their culture, as it made its the transmission of knowledge almost impossible.
Newer publications have also been drawing attention towards the effects of the potlach ban on Indigenous women and their role. Women upheld remarkable positions withing their communities, as medicine women, healers, knowledge-keepers and chiefs, meaning they would hold potlaches and other celebrations of their own. According to Peepeekisis knowledge-keeper Brass, after the potlach ban men would often lie to Indian agents who patrolled the area by telling them they were on their way to hunt, when in truth they would practice ceremonies hidden in the bushes (Monkman, 2017). Although recent research showcases how women would also partake in hunting and fishing activities, it was more typical of the male demographic, therefore it is likely that, the women would stay home alongside the children not to arouse suspicion, resulting in the exclusion from this tradition that lasted for over 70 years (Monkman, 2017). In addition, one must consider that patriarchism was partly internalised by Indigenous people as a result of the imposition of western ways of life.

As of today, potlaches are practiced in a much less formal manner, but still represent important cultural institutions through which Indigenous people may reconnect with each other and their traditions. According to Kelly (2017) it is hard to forward the idea of a contemporary gift-economy, as <<the role of gifting […] lacks conceptual development>> in today's research. Food sharing is however

still prevalent within communities and aids in testifying the presence of relationality withing an Indigenous mindset.

CHAPTER III

ECONOMY: CANADA'S CHOSEN PATH TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

3.1 The long path to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Indian Act first came to be in 1874, only few years after the birth of The Dominion of Canada in 1867 (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Ontario) with the British North America Act. All prior relations between Indigenous and Europeans were regulated through The Royal Proclamation of 1763, which formally guaranteed First Peoples a series of rights and set the conditions for the acquirement of their land by the government (The Canadian Encylopedia, 2022). The Proclamation was the official document that oversaw all governing matters of the North American Territories, ceased by France to Britain after the Seven Years War (Hall, 2019). However, it also stated that colonies could purchase Indigenous land only through treaties with the nations that inhabited it. Furthermore, a huge territory west of the Appalachian Mountains was deemed as an Indian Reserve that settlers could not legally trespass or acquire, a decision that was met with profound dissent by the northern colonies who sought expansion and was one of the causes that led to the American Revolution (Blakemore, 2023). The conflicting interests between British colonists and Indigenous nations resulted in a new geopolitical arrangement and North-America's native population was gradually divided between what are now known as Canada and the United States of America. Both countries adopted new legislations that administered the relationship with Indigenous Peoples, all in a context of strong power imbalance in favour of the settlers.

In 1871 the Unites States' Congress approved the Indian Appropriations Act, in which Native Americans were declared wards of the state. The same exact words were used 3 years later in Canada's Indian Act.

All the established agreements and conditions granted by the 1763 proclamation were disregarded in their entirety with the entry into force of the Indian Act, which didn't limit itself to banning Indigenous ceremonial life as mentioned in chapter 2.3, but rather created a system that segregated First Nations people to specific government-chosen territories, known as reserves, and controlled all aspects of their life, from education, to culture, politics and religion. Usually located in rural or remote areas, reserves rarely coincided with Indigenous traditional lands (Irwin, 2011) and were designated with the aim of confining Indigenous communities until they were deemed ready to integrate with the settlers' society. Drawing from personal experience, Chief Bob Joseph offers an insight into this idea when talking about how Indigenous traditional names would at a certain point be replaced with European names, appointed by the band's Indian agent. This practice perfectly grasps the government's approach in "solving" what used to be referred to as "the Indian problem", that is, racially legally defining Indigenous people, only to later undefine them when assimilation occurred (The Agenda | TVO Today, 2018).

This logic was already translated into law in the midst of the XIX century with the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869, both of whom meant to assimilate Indigenous Peoples into western ways of life, therefore reducing the number of status-Indians whom the federal government was financially responsible for ("Indian Act and enfranchisement of Indigenous Peoples", 2016). The enfranchisement was initially to be carried out through voluntary subscription, for example by giving up one's status in exchange for land or voting rights, however the policy quickly failed once it was made clear that Indigenous people were determined to maintain their identity, resulting in a unilateral execution of the act (Irwin, 2011). Both were later englobed in the Indian Act in 1876 which pursued the same objectives but in a much more meticulous manner. As a matter of fact, although many policies were not included in the Act itself, the new legislation empowered federal representatives and Indian agents, who were then free to initiate their systematic implementation (Joseph, 2015). The Pass System provides a significant example. Originally introduced in the 1880s to stall the movement of Indigenous people, considered as a potential

threat especially during “The North-West Rebellion” (Nestor, 2018), it was later used by authorities as a mean for the achievement of a full assimilation. The system required status-Indians to be in possession of a pass in order to travel from one territory to another, signed by an Indian agent, who would inquire the reasons behind their travel, stipulating its duration and purpose. It operated alongside the Permit System, which granted agents with the opportunity to control the selling and purchasing of agricultural goods, causing First Nations to merely reach subsistence levels. This idea of subsistence had very little in common with that of traditional Indigenous economies, which envisaged the obtainment of produce through barter, sharing practices, ceremonial life and the possibility to move freely so to gain access to a variety of resources. Traditional economies were in many ways distant from today’s idea of consumerism, nonetheless they were more than sufficient in satisfying people’s nutritional requirements, as well as meeting their cultural needs.

The Pass and Permit System also functioned as deterrents to the emergence of competition within the agricultural market. Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that Indigenous Peoples had already developed skills in this field, growing crops long before European contact. For example, the first traces of maize farms were found in Mexico and date back to 200 A.D. and are said to have spread in less than 1000 years throughout the whole North American continent (Shay, 1990, as cited by Flynn and Syms, 1996). In addition to the traditional knowledge they had built, Indigenous people were quick in learning from settlers, Indian agents and farm instructors, however their success was viewed with increasing concern, leading to new policies that favoured the interests of the settlers’ economy over those of Indigenous Peoples (“Indian Act and the Permit System”, 2015). Among those was the Peasant Farm Policy introduced in 1889, which forced First Nations to practice agriculture through obsolete farming tools, after already adapting to western technology, therefore limiting their chances of economic development (Cuthand, 2021). Equally damaging was the 1880’s amendment to the Indian Act which banned those who lived on reserves, where farming and gathering were particularly prevalent, from trading goods with non-band members. Despite undergoing numerous transformations, section 32 of the act was not repealed until

2014. The clause recited (Government of Canada, last modified on the 15th of September 2023):

> 32 (1). A transaction of any kind whereby a band or a member thereof purports to sell, barter, exchange, give or otherwise dispose of cattle or other animals, grain or hay, whether wild or cultivated, or root crops or plants or their products from a reserve in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta, to a person other than a member of that band, is void unless the superintendent approves the transaction in writing.

By crushing any form of economic potential, Canada's legal strategies condemned Indigenous Peoples to poverty, establishing the groundwork for a socio-economic gap that divides the country's population to this day. Altogether, the previously mentioned policies cast a light on the contradictory logic at the root of the enfranchisement campaign. Government measures moved in opposite directions, from minimising contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as much as possible, to making Indigenous communities dependent from state aid, to forcing them to choose between their indigeneity and assimilating into a world where they would face equal discrimination, as well as be completely cut off from their family affections.

When comparing it to its original version, much of the Indian Act's content has been revisited. Starting from the 1950s, efforts have been made to remove the more discriminatory features, most famously the denial of Indigenous people's voting rights (granted in 1960), the compulsory enfranchisement provisions described in section 112 (1961), and all remaining enfranchisement clauses through the Bill C-31 (1985), which allowed many Indigenous people to reclaim their status, especially women, who had lost it after engaging in marriages with non-band members (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2022).

Recent years have seen an increase in discourse regarding the necessity to reconsider the position of Indigenous Peoples within the system, consequently encouraging further reflections on the Indian Act's relevance in Canada's present-day society. Conflicting opinions emerged on the matter, creating a wedge

between those who firmly believe the act should be discarded altogether, as it is the embodiment of colonial legacy, and those who fear that its eradication could lead to the loss of those protections that come with the Indian status (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2022). First Nations do however find common ground in the desire of establishing themselves as more autonomously led realities with distinct rights and freely express their identity as Indigenous Peoples, first and foremost by reclaiming their bond with the land.

Within this context, it is necessary to remember the importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which officially laid the ground for a renewal of pre-existing relations between Indigenous people and the state. Adopted on the 7th of September 2007, the declaration is the result of approximately 30 years of work in progress. The first draft had already been outlined during the 70s by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations within the UN's Human Rights Commission (Charters and Stavenhagen, 2009), however as the Indigenous Peoples who sought representation varied in background, language and culture, creating a finalised document on which the majority could agree upon required three decades.

The whole declaration rests upon the conviction that Indigenous people have the right to self-determination, which includes the possibility to << freely determine their political status>> and << pursue their economic, social and cultural development>> (Article 3). The economic dimension is frequently brough up throughout the text, so to explicitly emphasise its role in the achievement of empowerment. Article 20 states that << Indigenous Peoples have the right […] to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities >>, while simultaneously maintaining their right to fully participate in the state's cultural, economic, and political life (Article 5). Altogether, the declaration tells the story of all that has been denied by colonial policies, with articles 5 and 20 being particularly relevant to Canada's past. It comes as no surprise that alongside Australia, New Zealand and the United States, Canada had voted against its adoption. However, since its issuance, there have been attempts to enforce it, more recently through the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples Act (2021), which intends to set the 2007 Declaration as an official guideline to favour a more conscious interpretation and application of Canadian law in regard to Indigenous Peoples' rights (Government of Canada, last modified on the 10th of December 2021). The act was then followed in 2023 by the UN Declaration Act Action Plan, designed in cooperation with First Nations, Inuit and Mètis to dismantle the systemic racism upon which the country was developed and work in cooperation to face its consequences (Government of Canada, last modified on the 20th of July 2023).

Another significant aspect of the declaration is the framework it provides for Indigenous land claims by stating the inherent right of Indigenous Peoples to own their traditional territories, which they may use, develop and control according to their customs and which should be protected through legal recognition by the State (Article 26). Where restitution is not possible, Indigenous people have a right to fair compensation (Article 28). That is not to say that countries have an obligation to cease land to First Nations, as the document itself is not legally binding. It is at the discretion of the State to make it so. However, the 2021 act and 2023 plan represent the first steps in this direction.

3.2 Land management, land claims and food security

The 1996 Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management is a historic agreement signed between the Minister of Indian Affairs and First Nations who wished to subtract themselves from the 44 provisions of the Indian Act concerning land and land use, in favour of governing their reserves through a community developed land code (First Nations Land Management Resource Centre, 2023). It was translated into law in 1999 with the First Nation Land Management Act (FNLMA), most recently replaced in 2022 by the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management Act (FAFNLMA), after concerns regarding the incongruence of the act with the 1996 agreement. Today the accordance has expanded its reach beyond the initial thirteen nations involved, resulting in over a hundred First Nations (Government of Canada, last modified on the 1st of August 2023) who now hold law-making powers and may implement provisions regarding land, environmental protection and natural resources (Boutilier, 2016).

It is referred to as a “nation-to-nation” agreement, a definition that holds great significance since it formally puts the Canadian government and First Nations on the same level.

In 2019 the Yellowhead Institute issued a special report by Jobin and Riddle, analysing both its benefits and downsides. The evaluation showed many advantages such as the possibility for First Nations to directly collect land revenues with the sole exception of oil and gas royalties and make community-based decisions without the interference of the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. Surveys have also noticed an increase in job opportunities (despite most of them being temporary), while KPMG, an advisory platform for enterprises, organisations and communities, carried out a study that indicated a boost in business, as well as in the efficiency of land management related activities, stating how under the Indian Act acquiring leases and permits could take up to 584 days, against a 17-day average under the land code system. Overall, there is no doubt that Indigenous communities can profit from acting autonomously, as it considerably reduces transaction costs and times (McIntyre, 2018), however there are downsides to lesser involvement of the federal government. Jobin and Riddle (2019) warn that with << the FNLM regime the federal government offloads fiscal, fiduciary, and environmental responsibilities on First Nations >>, meaning that First Nations may need to face consequences of previous actions of the federal government alone.

Lastly, the report points out how the Land Management Act is rooted in a neo-liberalism, which partly dictates the nature of the economic development it intends to achieve. In this respect, success is defined through typical standards of the capitalist market and not in terms of <<cultural revitalisation>> (Jobin and Riddle, 2019).

An additional path to reclaiming self-government is represented by Treaty Land Entitlement claims, whereby First Nations may regain access to lands once promised by the Crown with the signing of numerous treaties (e.g., Numbered Treaties, 1871-1921), from which they were forcefully displaced, or which were never “ceased” to begin with. The land is either selected among what are now

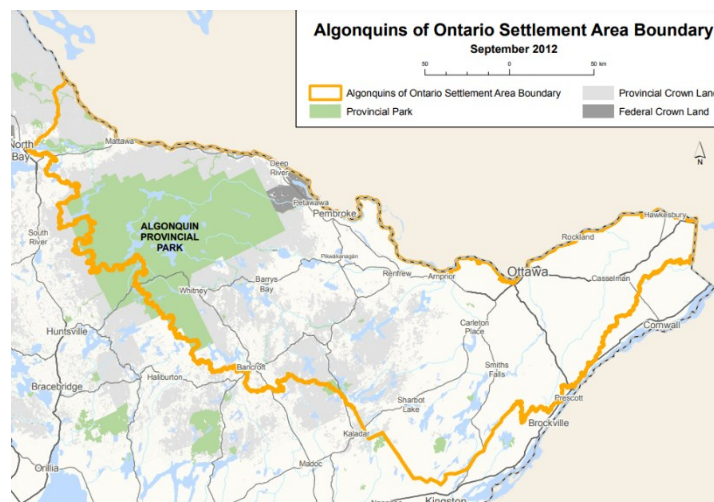
defined as unoccupied Crown territories or purchased by wilful sellers, a procedure that may then be followed by a proposal submitted to the Government of Canada to add the chosen land to the First Nation's reserve, according to the Addition to Reserves process (Government of Canada, last modified on the 7th of May 2018).

Through the new regime First Nations may also receive government fundings to support their purchase. Tim Daniels is a member of the Long Plain Nation and current Chief Operating Officer of the Treaty 1 Development Corporation and is mainly known for his efforts in developing urban reserves in Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie. Urban reserves are one of the most innovative outcomes of the Treaty Land Entitlement Framework, as they grant Indigenous people with the opportunity to reconnect to their community, after being driven away from reserves due to a lack in job opportunities, housing, access to basic services and overall higher levels of poverty. In his interview with CBC reporter Kyle Muzyca (2022), Daniels also points out how their remoteness undoubtedly puts them in disadvantage when compared to cities, which offer enterprises with a greater variety of stimuli, as well as a larger clientele. He explains that urban reserves were born out of the necessity of Indigenous Peoples to adapt to the mainstream economy. On the other hand, Ben Fawcett, who obtained his doctoral degree in geography and planning at the University of Saskatchewan, remarks that the creation of urban reserves is not accessible to all, but rather represents an interesting opportunity for those Nations who have <<enough capital to develop them>> (Muzyca, 2022).

A practical example of land claim which has taken yet again a different approach from the two mentioned above, is the Algonquin comprehensive land claim. Comprehensive land claims result in modern-day-treaties and involve those Indigenous communities that had neither signed previous treaties with the Crown, nor were displaced, and usually include << forms of local government, rights to wildlife, rights protecting language and culture, and joint management of lands and resources. >> (Crowe, 2015).

The Algonquin Nation, the federal government of Ontario and Canada have been

in negotiations since the 1990s to find a solution favourable to all, as the territory in question covers an area of 36,000 square kilometres (see Img.1.6) and is home to over 1 million people. As stated by the Government of Ontario, the future agreement will not have implications on third parties in terms of loss of private property. Approximately 4% of Crown land will be transferred, which will then be managed in fee simple, meaning planning and development approvals will follow the same dynamics as those of private property. In addition, no new reserves will result from said agreement. Nonetheless, coherently with what is stated in article 28 of the 2007 UN Declaration, since returning traditional land in its entirety is not possible, the Algonquins have asked for 300 million dollars in compensation.



Img. 1.3 – Traditional land claimed by the Algonquin Nation, “Map of the Algonquins of Ontario Land Claim”, Government of Canada, 2012. Available at https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1355436558998/1539789262384

With more and more Indigenous communities being in direct control of land, the question has naturally shifted towards the topic of how those territories should be managed. Many believe that within the regime created by the FAFNLMA, the TLE and Specific Land claims, lies an opportunity for First Nations to take up more prominent roles in agriculture. In a forum on Indigenous agriculture held in Saskatoon, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals in land and resource management and local experts, argued that a considerable number of factors must align for this to be achieved. As of right now, most Indigenous communities lease their land rather than farm it, despite the latter being able to increase job opportunities and guarantee food security (Marshall, 2017). However,

those who participated to the forum (as reported by Arcand et al., 2020) pointed out that agriculture requires big investments, resources, risk management strategies and expertise. A temporary solution could be for small to medium-sized businesses who have expressed the desire of working with First Nations, to employ or partner with a higher percentage of Indigenous people, allowing communities to gain further knowledge before taking up agricultural projects in autonomy. Participants have also highlighted the importance of returning to traditional knowledge and practices, after expressing concern about the effects of intensive farming on the environment and human health.

Considering the bureaucracy underlining negotiations, it will take a considerable amount of time until First Peoples will gain the certainty needed to develop more detailed land management programs. However, Indigenous people seem to find common ground in the belief that the best solution to ensure a steady productivity of the land, that also meets environmental challenges and the community's needs of employment, lies in blended agricultural methodologies, which make use of both modern machinery and traditional Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. This approach to agriculture is characterised by an inherent sustainability and would allow Indigenous Peoples to revert to traditional food systems, which according to the FAO and the CINE represent crucial means to ensure the well-being and health of Indigenous communities worldwide (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations & Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment, 2013). In 2021, as part as their Sustainable Development Goals 2030, the United Nations held a Summit on Food Systems, however its debates did not pay sufficient attention to the food systems of Indigenous Peoples, which led to the drafting of a White Paper specifically focused on the peculiarities of said food systems and how research has proved them to be a significant asset for the creation of sustainable lifestyles. Studies show that Indigenous Peoples inhabit the remaining 80% of the world's biodiversity (Somerville, 2008 as cited by the FAO) and shape their habits to ensure its preservation. Their relationship with the land has spurred them to develop complex and dynamic food systems often characterised by a combined use of harvesting and food production, and a reliance

on multiple food sources (local crops, wild plants, domestic and wild animals) originating from a variety of territories, therefore taking a different approach to that of mainstream agricultural methods, which focus on intensively farming circumscribed areas of land (IFAD, 2022). When speaking of agrobiodiversity, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (2022) highlighted Indigenous Peoples' tendency of using underutilised species as a valuable heritage, as well as some traditional land management skills that include <<agroforestry gardens, integrated rice-fish paddy fields, shifting cultivation, and pasture management>>. In Canada, First Peoples were known for relying on efficient land management techniques, such as a localised and controlled use of fire. Indigenous communities used fire as a tool to manage the buildup of combustible materials, to manage pests, to create lands suitable for cattle, rejuvenate the quality and quantity of forage, and stimulate the growth of medicinal plants ("Indigenous Fire Management and Traditional Knowledge", 2019). This is just one of the many practices that sustained both Indigenous economies and the environment.

When considering today's increased sensitivity towards the issues of Indigenous Peoples, the expansion of Indigenous land base, the establishment of Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate science (according to western standards), the growing number of Indigenous youths involved in STEM, it is possible that First Peoples will develop more detailed programs in terms of land management and food security.

As of now, while negotiations with the government continue, community members have taken matter into their own hands, leading movements that strive to secure Indigenous Peoples' right to food sovereignty. According to Nyleni's definition featured in the 2007 UN Declaration, the term refers to << the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through socially just, ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their collective right to define their own policies, strategies and systems for food production, distribution and consumption>>.

An interesting initiative in this direction is offered by Ojibiikaan, a project founded in 2018 aimed at encouraging harvesting, as well as cultural practices, in Toronto's urban setting. In Ojibiikaan's gardens, the harvesting is accompanied by ceremonies and storytelling and is always preceded by thorough moments of observation of lighting patterns, soil structure and surrounding fauna. The initiative has been successful in growing sunchokes, sage, tobacco and what are known as the "three sister crops" (squash, beans, and corn) and is currently working on revitalising some traditional foods, such as moose meat stew, three sisters stew and wild blueberry pudding (as stated by Ojibiikaan Inidgenous Cultural Network).

CBC also reported a successful venture in an article written by Martha Troian (2017), that of the T'Sou-ke Nation on Vancouver Island. In the last ten years the small nation of 250 people has been using a solar micro-grid to generate electricity for the entire community and has become a popular destination for eco-tourism, attracting over 2000 visitors annually. The grid is so productive that during the summer months, power is sold back to the Canadian electric utility British Colombia Hydro, generating a revenue of thousands of dollars each year. The T'Sou-ke has also been specializing in farming wasabi plants and oysters. The entire project has been so fruitful that chiefs from Manitoba have visited to learn about the benefits of micro-grid technologies, which might be able to significantly help communities that still rely on diesel for power. The initiatives are part of a broader program set up by the Nation, that aims at becoming a zero-net community in the foreseeable future.

Both examples have shown how small, localised businesses must not be underestimated, as they have kept communities active and creative while land-claims and land-management negotiations still take place and are now leading the way for others to follow.

3.3 Reconciliation

The theme of reconciliation has resurfaced in recent years due to new discoveries of burial sites and unmarked graves near residential schools. The Indian Residential School System was a government-led initiative, operated by Anglican, Catholic and Methodist churches, that forcefully removed approximately 150.000 Indigenous children from their homes, so to educate them according to the European standards (Miller, 2023). The System was meant to eradicate the Indigenous culture. Children would have their hair cut[1], were forced out of traditional attire, severely punished for speaking their languages, forced to adhere to christianity and hardly ever saw their families. On top of this, countless testimonies recall a widespread use of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, causing trauma that has lasted generations and affects Indigenous people to this day. The last residential school was closed 1996 (Miller, 2013).

The horrors of Canada's past have been divulged to the public through mediatic amplification, encouraging people to reflect on the lingering effects of these historical events on the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and their ability to move forward towards a more self-determined living. To this end, in 2008 the Canadian government founded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which operates to this day in multiple ways, for instance by spreading new truths regarding Indigenous Peoples so to dismantle their perception imposed by previous governments and early settlers and by welcoming calls to action concerning child welfare, education, language and culture, health and justice (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). Starting from 2021, Canada has also decided to proclaim the 30th of September of each year as National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, taking the time to remember the lives that were forever altered by the residential school system. It is on this occasion, that in 2022 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, reflected upon the notion of reconciliation by mentioning <<challenges of leadership, challenges of family and challenges of healing>> that must be shared, as well as the importance of a meaningful collaboration between

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[1] Hair was often kept long as in many communities it symbolises strength, power and the connections to all things part of creation (Hilleary, 2018)

Indigenous Peoples and Canada, by saying: << How many times do Indigenous Peoples need to tell their stories of trauma, of loss, of pain, of grief, until we absorb those stories as non-Indigenous People and make them our own, because they too are the story of Canada and therefore they too are the stories of each of us >> (Global News, 2022).

The term “reconciliation” however, has acquired an even broader meaning throughout the years and is aimed at resolving a plethora of issues. It is about addressing the historical events that have caused generational trauma among communities, it is about advancing self-determination through a practical implementation of both international and national legal and judicial tools, it is about improving the quality and safety of services and infrastructures, such as access to clear drinking water, safe housing, and physical and mental wellness (Government of Canada, last modified on the 8th of September 2023).

It would seem that in this process of healing that concerns all aspects of Indigenous Peoples’ lives, economy has established itself as the primary path to be followed for its achievement. Initiatives have been set in motion in an optic of multilevel cooperation, gradually working towards the removal of systemic barriers that insist between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population.

For example, considering that Indigenous people will likely not be able to retrieve control over all traditional territories, communities have long been raising their voices to assure their right of being involved in decision-making processes when it comes to economic development projects. This is the subject of call to action 92 presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and which is specifically directed to the country’s corporate sector. (Government of Canada, last modified on the 1st of April 2022). Indigenous people have fewer outlets to express their entrepreneurial potential, as they are setback by difficulties of accessing loans, financial institutions (like banks) and other resources such as reliable high-speed internet or transportation, especially for those living on reserve (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

That is not to say that Indigenous communities have not accomplished significant goals. On the contrary, Indigenous Peoples have created economic opportunities

for themselves, which are true to their customs and cultural ways. Sustainable Indigenous tourism, agriculture, traditional medicine and Indigenous-owned businesses, are among the most successful fields which Indigenous people have been engaging in.

What is not as often remarked is that with economic reconciliation Canada has been presented with opportunity of reviving its economy. Evidence brought forward by The National Indigenous Economic Development Board has shown that by including Indigenous Canadians in the national economy the country's GPD would increase by $27.7 billion dollars annually, showcasing how by guaranteeing Indigenous people the same living standards, meaning equal access to education, the labour market, healthcare and other resources, Canada would benefit in its entirety (National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, 2017).

The question that remains unanswered is whether the future will present the conditions for a modern revival of the traditional relational economy. Relationality is certainly making a comeback when speaking in terms of connectedness to the land and its sustainable management, however it is yet to be determined whether the increasing number of Indigenous people who will have access to stable and profitable jobs, will grant them with the necessary resources to sustain not only themselves but their social relations, igniting once again the virtuous cycle through which the economic dimension and kinship and community ties fuel each other.

CONCLUSIONS

As of 2016, the Indigenous economy was estimated to have a value of 32 billion dollars (TD Economics, 2016) and has been steadily growing since. The survey also expressed the optimistic outlook of many business leaders who, when thinking back on the objectives they had set for the company, claimed their firms to be extremely successful (11%) or very successful (44%). However, much is yet to be done to ensure First People's economic development.

Ken Coates, Canada research chair in regional innovation at the University of Saskatchewan, talks about the necessary conditions for this to happen (The Agenda | TVO Today, "10 Questions on Indigenous Futures" 00:00 – 9:25). He believes Indigenous Peoples should be able to set their own standards and goals and should be free to use mainstream tools and technologies if it pleases them. Modernity and tradition should be seen as complementary, rather than as opposing forces. For example, Coates states how the Inuit in Nunavut (?)have made extensive use of television broadcasting to revitalize and spread the use of their traditional languages.

He also talks about the importance of giving life to a << co-production of policy >>, meaning the government must grant Indigenous Peoples their rightful place within the political system, allowing decisions to be made through joint effort.

Currently the primary issue lies with the pace of government-led initiatives, which move quite slowly in comparison to the pressing needs of Indigenous communities, for whom the possibility of managing land, providing food security, accessing healthcare, education and proper infrastructure, represent a matter of cultural survival. As previously mentioned in chapter 3.3, Canada could benefit greatly from including Indigenous people in the national market. However, as much as this information is indispensable for contextualising Indigenous economies and better understanding their role in present-day Canada, it would be a mistake to use it as a meter to define their value.

Indigenous economies should be recognised for their resilience, adaptability and for the sense of initiative which they have shown throughout history, rather than

for what they may have to offer to external parties. It is the same risk that has been observed with the acknowledgement of Indigenous Knowledge as a legitimate science. If engaged in a complementary and respectful approach, there is no doubt that Indigenous cultures may provide the world with the necessary tools to overcome global challenges. However, no true discourse regarding the transferability of their knowledge is possible without prior recognition of Indigenous communities as independent entities, with a right to self-government, cultural identity.

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