

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE TEMPORALITY OF HAA SHUKÁ: A SCALAR PERSPECTIVE ON CLIMATE
CHANGE, LINGÍT KNOWLEDGE, AND ALASKAN IDENTITY

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Abstract

Lingít (Tlingit) people often say that we have lived on our homelands in Southeast Alaska since time immemorial. Over the course of this long history, environmental changes have been a constant companion, including tsunamis, floods, glacial advance, and volcanic eruptions. As a result, Lingít people have a deep cultural system of adaptation that is informed by ancestral knowledge. More recently, Lingít people have been forced to contend with changes brought about by settler colonialism. This includes environmental degradation due to industrialization, globalization, and colonialism, often referred to as climate change. Lingít people have found ways to continue adaptation in the face of these ongoing changes. This dissertation interrogates the way that this deep ancestral knowledge manifests in climate change mitigation and adaptation work in professional spaces like tribal governments and Native-run non-profits.

I first establish a basis for what I call “Lingít worlding,” which includes the oldest Lingít stories – the Raven Cycle – as well as everyday manifestations of cultural practice. Next, I consider how Alaska is viewed as both an untouched wilderness and a fragile ecosystem. From this basis, I continue to three case studies: tourism, external research, and Transformative Scenario Planning. In the first case study, I consider discussions of environmental degradation caused by cruise ship tourism. Whereas non-Native residents cite concerns over quality of life, Lingít attention to generational impacts illustrates the different temporal stakes of these issues. The second case study probes the limits of scientific research frameworks like co-production. I critique the limitations of research created by grant frameworks like that of the National Science Foundation, looking specifically at a regional research project focused on geohazards. Ultimately, I argue for a place-based approach to research led by tribes and other local organizations. My final case study considers different constructions of Southeast Alaska's

future in a Transformative Scenario Planning process and the way that Alaska Native identity is taken up in those conversations. I argue that, for Lingít people involved in this process, an orientation towards ancestral knowledge facilitates innovation for current generations and for future descendants. This uniquely Lingít understanding of temporality (haa shuká) resists linear time imposed by climate change discourse.

Dedication

To my grandmother, Kaajisdushí Betty Marie Allen. Even though you did not see the completion of this work in this world, I know you have been with me on this entire journey. Ixsián.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Preface.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
<i>Climate Change and Settler Colonialism</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Rejecting the Planetary.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Haa Kuusteeyí and Adaptation</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Theoretical Orientation</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Chapter Summaries.....</i>	<i>27</i>
Chapter One: 10,000 Years of Lingít Worlding.....	32
<i>The Raven Cycle</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Opening the Box of Knowledge: Active Engagement Not Cultural Preservation</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Lingít Worlding in Action</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Conclusion: Living Haa Kuusteeyí.....</i>	<i>54</i>
Chapter Two: Alaska: Native Homeland and Settler Construct.....	56
<i>From “Seward’s Folly” to “The Last Frontier”: Alaska in the Public Imaginary.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Alaska and Climate Change.....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Climate Talk in Alaska.....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Place-Based Since Time Immemorial.....</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Conclusion: Illusions and Realities</i>	<i>76</i>
Chapter Three: Whose Way of Life?: Cruise Tourism and Scalar Relationships with Environment on Lingít Aaní.....	79
<i>Corporate and Tourist Interactions with “Green Tourism”</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Seeking Solutions: Small Town SOUL.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Economic Entanglements: The Lingít Encounter with Tourism.....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Differing Temporal Stakes: What if there is no cedar? What if there are no salmon?</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Conclusion: Belonging in Question.....</i>	<i>103</i>
Chapter Four: Fisheries Scientists and Other Friends: Scientific Study and Funding on Lingít Aaní.....	106
<i>The “National” is not Silent in “National Science Foundation”.....</i>	<i>110</i>

<i>The Problem of Co-Production</i>	115
<i>Raven’s Methodology, Survivance, and Transmotion</i>	123
<i>Conclusion: Autonomy and Survivance</i>	131
Chapter Five: Transformative Scenario Planning and Lingít Ancestral Futures	133
<i>Spruce Root and the Project of Indigenizing</i>	137
<i>The “Wack” History of Scenario Planning</i>	141
<i>Finalized Scenario Summaries</i>	145
<i>Temporal Slippage and Settler Hybridity</i>	146
<i>Asserting Lingít Presence Since Time Immemorial</i>	153
<i>Conclusion: Tools of Haa Shuká</i>	156
Conclusion: The Future is Indigenous	159
<i>Haa Shuká, Our Future/Past</i>	162
<i>Scale</i>	163
<i>Knowledge Systems</i>	165
<i>Futures</i>	167
<i>Haa Kuusteeyí</i>	168
<i>Our Futures Are Our Own to Envision</i>	169
Bibliography	172

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Preface

This dissertation relies on a great deal of Lingít cultural context with which some readers might not be familiar. Given the dissertation’s focus on Lingít culture and worlding, I will lay out much that context in the Preface and Introduction. Oftentimes, in the Lingít way, not everything is said up front. Things are sometimes indirect, too. It is my hope that by the time the information is needed, it will have been provided. But just know that things will unfold in time.

It does not fit easily with Lingít¹ protocols to introduce oneself. It is proper to be introduced by someone of the opposite moiety; in Lingít culture, we are separated into two groups, called “naax,” or, in anthropological terms, moieties. These are Eagles/Wolves and Ravens. I am Yéil (Raven), so it would be proper to have a Ch’áak (Eagle) introduce me. In more recent years, introductions have become a vector for teaching the Lingít language. As a result, many people have begun to introduce themselves in the language, as it is something often taught in beginning language classes. This has also been important as a means of keeping Lingít names alive, and some even choose to go primarily by their Lingít name. In contexts with a mix of Native and non-Native attendees – or even Lingít and non-Lingít – it can be difficult to always rely on having an appropriate relative of the opposite moiety to perform an introduction. Because of this multifaceted history, I am choosing to include an introduction in both Lingít and English that will position me as Lingít and will begin to introduce some of the kinship relations in our culture:

¹ This is the proper spelling of, what in English, is “Tlingit.” While the Lingít language was not originally a written language, it is now and has its own orthography. I will often use Lingít words when I am able and, per Max Liboiron (2021) and Chadwick Allen (2012), I choose not to italicize them. This is because italicization marks something as “other” when in fact, from the perspective of what is now often referred to as “the Americas,” English is actually the “other” and our Indigenous languages should not be marked as such.

Aandax̱joon yóo x̱at duwasáakw. Gaanaax̱teidíx̱ x̱át sitee. Yéil naax̱ x̱at sitee.

Kaagwaantaan yádi. My name is Aandax̱joon. I am Lingít of the Gaanax̱teidí clan and a child of the Kaagwaantaan clan. One of my Lingít language teachers told us that introductions are meant to situate you and your ancestors in relation to land, so I will also specify the nationalities of my European ancestors as well. My mother grew up in Maine, but her mother's people are from Finland. My mother's father's people are Scottish and Irish. My mother was adopted into the Gaanax̱teidí clan and her name is Saayéik. My father, Robert Allen Jr., is Kaagwaantaan of the Box House. His Lingít names² are Deiklí and L'ux̱ Shakee. My paternal grandmother is Kaajisdushí Betty Allen. My paternal grandfather was brought into the Gaanax̱teidí clan and his name was Shtoowóos' Robert Allen. His people are originally from England. His family lived in California and eventually moved to Neenana, Alaska³. My grandmother, Kaajisdushí, was born in Juneau, though her mother, Kudaxsaneegí Ruth Martin had roots in Sheet'ká (Sitka). Kaajisdushí's father, Aanaxké Herbert Martin was T'aḵdeintaan from Xuna (Hoonah), with roots in Glacier Bay. My father was born in Kodiak, Alaska. My family moved to Sheet'ká when my father was a baby, and he has lived there most of his life. I was born in Sheet'ká and lived there until I was nine, when I moved to Maine. Though I often visited my family who were all still

² Some people receive multiple names, usually as part of a special occasion. My father's first name was Deiklí, which was the name of one of his great uncles. His second name, L'ux̱ Shakee, was given in honor of a kutéeyaa – or totem pole – raising for my family. He and his siblings all received second names as part of the ceremony.

³ A note on terminology: As previously mentioned, Lingít words are used because they are the most accurate descriptor available. And indeed, when it is possible/practical to use a Lingít word, I have aimed to use one. However, in many cases, settler colonial concepts do not have equivalent words in Lingít, or using the settler word is intentional in dissecting its cultural or policy implications.

In the case of “Alaska,” Lingít people did not historically have a concept of “Alaska” in the same way as it exists as a state within the settler colonial nation. There is Lingít Aaní, which is specifically the homelands of Lingít people. And there is lingít'aaní, which translates to “the world.” Neither of these accurately encompasses the notion of a state. Alaska is itself a settler colonial scalar concept and the very fact of its construction (and perception) is integral to this project and will be discussed more in-depth in later chapters.

living in Alaska. I moved back to Sheet'ká in June of 2023 to complete my fieldwork, intending to only stay about 14 months, but I decided to move permanently to Sheet'ká in January of 2024.

The Lingít clan system is matrilineal. For example, my grandmother was Kaagwaantaan, so my father is also Kaagwaantaan. While his sisters' children are also all Kaagwaantaan, I was not born into a clan through my mother. However, in the fall of 2018, my mother and I were both brought into the Gaanax̓teidí clan in a naming ceremony. The clan needed more members, especially women, and all the descendants of male children and grandchildren of my grandmother needed a clan. My grandfather had been brought into Gaanax̓teidí, so it was a fitting choice. When a Lingít father has a child with a non-Lingít mother, the non-Lingít mother will often be adopted to give her child a clan.

All of this is important context to convey because adoption and familial ties are often discussed by ethnographers. When I mention these things, they are not mere ethnographic terms or fictitious kinships relations. These are my blood and clan relatives who I would be related to regardless of my status as a researcher and anthropologist. This is my community not in the sense that I was delighted and surprised by the warm welcome I received as a researcher but because it has always been my community. I am first Gaanax̓teidí and Kaagwaantaan yádi, as well as a tribal citizen of both Sitka Tribe of Alaska and Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. These forms of belonging will always come first to me, and I will not value my research over my community. At the same time, my research would also not be what it is without those identities.

As a junior in college, I wrote a paper about catastrophe and Lingít oral history. When the class did a peer review, I got comments from another student telling me that I needed firmer

dates for things and that none of the information I described was “verifiable.” We were required to incorporate some of the peer feedback for our final drafts, and I had to speak with the professor and be excused from this on the grounds that this student devalued Indigenous forms of knowledge. While this was not the first time I had encountered such reactions to me, a Lingít student, writing about my culture, it was certainly formative in the way I approached my research after that encounter. The disavowal of Indigenous Knowledge in academic spaces motivated me to write a project that exists on Lingít terms. By this, I mean that I have taken my academic training and my knowledge of Lingít culture and sought to keep the work grounded in the Lingít worldview. This, alongside my positionality as a Lingít researcher, has greatly shaped my ethnography.

Given that Sheet’ká is my ancestral homeland, it is of no surprise that I would choose it as my field site. For one, there is the matter of practicality; most of my family resides in Sitka, and I had a very convenient housing arrangement in an incredibly tough market. It is also a place that I care deeply about and one that has strong connections to my grandmother who walked into the forest in 2022. All these things called me back to Sheet’ká.

However, it is not simply a personal interest that has brought me to this research. It emerged first from a profound frustration with the way environment, climate change, and catastrophe were discussed in academic and popular discourse. I saw a clear gap in that discourse, one that encompassed much of what was ongoing on Lingít Aaní (Tlingit land). Southeast Alaska has always been a place with a great number of shifts and changes environmentally. Over 10,000 years of Lingít residency in southeast Alaska has provided a great wealth of experience with these changes. Indeed, stories of floods, volcanoes, glacial advance and retreat, and tsunamis are all prominently featured in Lingít history.

In climate change mitigation and research, there has been recent interest in Lingít knowledge alongside increased awareness of Indigenous Knowledge in general. Of course, this increased interest also comes with downsides. Researchers flood into the region, oftentimes with little to no understanding of Indigenous research protocols or of Lingít culture. While some tribes have infrastructure pertaining to research requests and collaboration, others do not. This is also a large infrastructural ask for the tribes as it takes time and resources to both develop and deploy research protocols, and to review new proposals. Additionally, Indigenous Knowledge and technology being recognized often goes hand in hand with Western science providing “validation” of that knowledge. In some cases, this can be useful for sovereign claims, such as the discovery of remains that were over 10,000 years old, thereby validating the fact that Lingít people have been in southeast Alaska for this duration (if not longer). In other cases, it can be condescending, or even somewhat silly. In 2018, Lingít, X̱aadas (Haida), and Ts’msyen (Tsimshian) people were given an innovation award for the creation of a certain style of halibut hook (Jenkins 2018). The hook only can be bitten by halibut of the appropriate size. If a fish is too small, it cannot bite and if it is a very large female with the potential to lay eggs, the fish is too big to be caught. Given the longevity of this technology, many Native people found it quite comical to now receive an award for it.

With this recognition, there is an ironic double bind that I noticed when thinking about climate change in southeast Alaska. There is, on the one hand, a great excess of research and attention by settler researchers and institutions; on the other hand, there is a lack of meaningful interaction with the intricacies of Lingít knowledge. Additionally, there continues to be a lack of Native voices in climate change discourse, despite the vast number of projects that claim to support such endeavors. For this reason, I wanted to join the number of Native scholars who

have written and spoken about how Indigeneity and Indigenous epistemologies – or knowledge systems – are central to climate mitigation and preparedness, as well as to rethink the framework within which we discuss and understand such changes. I aim to conceptualize the way that Lingít people continue to live haa kuusteeyí, or “our way of life” even within changing circumstances and within the contours of settler colonial capitalism. Despite these associations with(in) the settler colonial system, haa kuusteeyí does not exist in a subordinate position to Western epistemologies. It should also not be viewed as being partially assimilated into Western knowledge. Rather, haa kuusteeyí illustrates alterities that exist in the present moment. As Joanne Barker writes,

[T]he existence that Indigenous peoples claim as possible is not about the future at all; it is about life *now*. It is an insistence that things do not have to be the way they are, that another way is not only possible but already being lived out through other understandings of land and water, kin relationships, and territorial-based practices. (Barker 2021, 23-24)

Lingít people often say that haa kuusteeyí is not about what you do, but how you do something. Essentially, it is about how we as Lingít people live now and always. Haa kuusteeyí is thus an example of the alterities that Barker describes. With this in mind, I want to consider these various issues through a Lingít lens, as is appropriate when thinking about and from Lingít Aaní.

While ethnographies often begin with the arrival at the field site, my experience could only be described as a return home. I had been living for the prior six months in Los Angeles, CA because my fiancé was attending the University of Southern California as a graduate student. Despite having moved away from Sheet’ká in 2008, I had been back multiple times per year – in both the summer and for holidays – every subsequent year with the exception of 2020 due to the

COVID-19 pandemic creating unsafe travel conditions. Returning to southeast Alaska for research and with the eventual goal of living there full-time had been a desire of mine for a number of years at that point, so I was excited it was finally coming to fruition. I flew into the Sitka Rocky Gutierrez Airport with my dog, Kei.á, moved back into my childhood bedroom and began my research. On the whole, it was a lovely mix of being able to spend more time with family, reconnecting with old friends, and meeting new people and making new connections. It was ultimately not a temporary state, but rather the first year of a long-term commitment to Sheet'ká, a place that is my home and not just my field site. This will likely come through at various points in my writing, and it has certainly influenced the way I think about this ethnography, even down to the descriptions of place.

Due to a lifelong familiarity with Sheet'ká and Alaska more broadly, I always struggle to describe it in my writing because I often overlook things that feel obvious to me, but that are unclear to others. In fact, I once wrote a paper about southeast Alaska and referred to it simply as “southeast,” as many locals often do, without even realizing it. I was told by my fiancé that this did not have any meaning to people not from Alaska, and I had to go back and fix this throughout the paper. It feels difficult sometimes to take note of the things that I find to be obvious, though that was part of the task for the entirety of my field work. Seeking to take note of that which goes unseen and unspoken is what constitutes so much of anthropology. Despite the outlook that perspectives external to the community are best suited to anthropological research, the insights of someone from within community provide their own unique viewpoint.⁴ Attempting to take a step back and imagine the experience of someone who has never been to

⁴ This aligns with the work of scholars who have researched within their own communities and on matters close to their own family histories and circumstances (see Medicine 2001; Harrison 2008; Narayan 2024; Jacobs 2006).

Sheet'ká has been a challenge, but I have done my best in this preface to describe Sheet'ká and to give a sense of it.

Sheet'ká is located on the island of Shee. In English these are referred to as Sitka and Baranof Island. I will refer to the island from now on as Shee, while I may use either Sheet'ká or Sitka, as it is sometimes useful to conceptualize it by way of the settler colonial⁵ construct as it is a municipality and this has impacts on its residents. For example, my monthly utility bills are from the City and Borough of Sitka. The city of Sitka has a little over 8,000 residents. While, on the one hand, this may not sound too small, the isolated nature of the town means that the rural feel is exacerbated. There is no way to just drive to the next town over for any services. The only way on and off the island is via water or air. Due to the mountains, the town is concentrated close to the water and in the limited flat areas on the island.

While Sitka is small and isolated by many standards, it is large by the standards of other villages in the region. There are two full-sized grocery stores and one small market. There are three gas stations, five harbors, and there is even a branch campus of University of Alaska Southeast. It also has the benefit of having a larger airport where Alaska Airlines flies 737 planes, rather than some places where only smaller planes can land. For my whole life, the airport only had one gate and barely enough room to get through security and onto the plane. An airport remodel began in 2024, bringing with it Sitka's first escalator and multiple gates for the busy summer season. So few flights go in and out of the town that locals know the flight numbers of the year-round flights. For example, Flight 62 is southbound to Seattle and flies out a little before noon and Flight 67 is northbound from Seattle and gets in around 6:15pm. Once on

⁵ Settler colonialism is a specific type of colonialism that involves "settlers" replacing the Indigenous population, rather than merely extracting from the colony. Through this process, the colony becomes the new center of power in the form of the settler colonial state (Wolfe 2006; Arvin 2019; Moreton-Robinson 2015). I will discuss this term further in the introduction, but this is meant to provide the basis of my usage of the term.

the island, there is a movie theater with a single screen, a decent-sized hospital, and even four horses, which are owned by one of my cousins. For tourists, there are a number of bus and walking tours, wildlife cruises, and Fortress of the Bear, which is essentially a zoo that houses about 7 bears. All that is to say, Sitka is a small town by most standards, but in Alaska it is the fifth most populous city and the largest by land area.

Sea travel is such an integral part of the history of this region and to sharing knowledge and goods. Looking out the window from my childhood home, I would often watch boat traffic and imagine the differences between the commercial and sport fishing boats, skiffs, yachts, and tour boats that go by now and the type of traffic that would have existed either during early colonization or prior to it. Today, Sitka is heavily reliant on marine shipping; a barge run by Alaska Marine Lines (AML) comes in twice a week to deliver goods, including groceries. My car came up that way, and my furniture was shipped up on three pallets on the barge. AML containers sit at various businesses around town; the seafoods processing plant, the city cold storage, the grocery stores, among others. Again, the only way to get here is by boat or plane, and all the shipping containers arrive by barge. There are no bridges to any other towns in southeast Alaska, and even communities on the mainland, like Juneau, are blocked in by tall mountains and do not have highway access to other places. As such, many boats headed north or coming into town from that direction passed by, or at least in view of, my father's house. Additionally, many tourists who fly in or who take larger cruise ships end up passing by as well on charter boats or boat cruises. There is a reason why the ferry system is called the "Marine Highway."

Sitka only takes up a very small part of the larger island of Shee. Much of the island is dominated by tall, steep mountains. There are no roads or trails that lead across them. In fact,

while Shee is about 100 miles in length, Sitka only has 15 miles of road from north to south. The downtown is located along the waterfront, and the airport is located on a smaller island, Japonski, which is connected by a bridge. While cruise ship tourism is a major contributor to the economy, fishing has historically been another economic driver. As such, the waterfront is central to the local economy. It houses three major harbors, the fuel dock, the seafood processing plant, and other waterfront businesses.

This waterfront area is known as the “Sitka Indian Village” or the Lingít village. It is the site of traditional clan houses that were eventually demolished and replaced by Euro-American style houses. During Russian occupation in the early to mid-19th century, there was a dividing line between the Russian town and the Lingít village. Relations between Russians and Lingít people were tense; Lingít oral history mentions cultural misunderstandings, violence, and assault (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Black 2008). There was also trade and intermarriage. In 1802, the Kiks.ádi clan (a Raven clan) expelled the Russians from Sitka. They returned in 1804 resulting in another battle. Due to a few strategic losses in this battle, the Kiks.ádi were forced to retreat, though they did not cede their control over Sitka (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Black 2008). Russian occupation continued after this, only to give way to American occupation in the late 19th century. Under the Russians, Lingít people were only allowed to enter the Russian area if they had converted to Russian Orthodoxy (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Black 2008). A guard house marked the dividing line, and a replica of it – the Russian Blockhouse – stands in the same spot today where it was recreated by the United States Forest Service.

The Blockhouse looms over the village, however, its doors are locked and it is a mere shell of colonial occupation. Its wood is carved with initials and other marks that mar its weathered and faded log siding. If one stands below the blockhouse, looking out over the water,

at the right time one might hear the resonant sound of a box drum drifting up from the Sheet'ká Kwaan Naa Kahidí. This is a performance venue in the form of a traditional clan house that hosts traditional dancing, among other events. Rather than being a mere shell, like the blockhouse, the Naa Kahidí is an active space of community gathering, lively and vibrant, with brightly carved panels on its exterior and an elaborate formline⁶ painted screen on the inside. It is a good feeling to walk by when drumming and singing can be heard from the inside. Lingít presence in the village is certainly not a specter, despite the many attempts to force Native people out of the area.

A major push in this effort was building out the waterfront and cutting off beach access in the village. Rather than the houses sitting right above the tideline, a road was built in front of them and waterfront infrastructure in front of that. Another major shift was the push for single family housing in the Euro-American style. This was meant to break up clan structures and assimilate Lingít people on multiple levels. Lingít people acquired land through allotment, and the Lingít way of passing down clan house stewardship differed greatly from American inheritance, which also required a set of legal hoops to jump through to maintain the ownership of the land and ensure it stays in Native hands. This has caused a great deal of confusion over allotments and ownership, often causing houses to fall into disrepair as the ownership becomes more dispersed and falls more out of sync with traditional clan notions of ownership.

Now, there is a project that has given Sitka's Clan Houses the distinction of being an "Endangered Historic Place" and seeks to rebuild clan houses starting with the Kiks.ádi Point House. The idea is to rebuild the house in a style that meets current community needs and blends tradition with functionality and innovation. It is less about the architectural integrity of the

⁶ This is the Northwest Coast Indigenous art style.

village and instead seeks to adapt to the current needs of the community. Much more could be written on this topic, and I will return to the idea of adapting traditional practices and incorporating new tools and technologies, including through Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance" or Native "presence" in the face of erasure, evoking adaptation to colonial circumstances (2008, 1). However, this brief description of the history is meant to lay the groundwork for understanding the current state of the Sitka Indian Village and its relationship to colonial history.

While the clan houses themselves are not currently a major hub, this part of Sitka is nevertheless an active area for the Lingít community. The Baranof Island Housing Authority (BIHA), and the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall (ANB Hall), as well as the Naa Kahidí are a few of these hubs. BIHA provides tribal housing assistance for citizens of the local tribe, Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA). The ANB Hall has been the site of much political organizing, as well as a place to host language gatherings, community meetings, and *ku.éex'* (memorial potlatches). This is the most important Lingít ceremony, and is part of the funerary process, occurring at the end of the mourning period and bringing a conclusion to grief. The Naa Kahidí hosts dance performances for their Tribal Tours guests in the summer. It also hosts events and a wide array of performances, both Lingít specific and not. The offices of STA and the regional tribe, Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit and Haida), can also be found in this area of town. The STA tribal office building mirrors the architecture of a clan house and looks out over the water.

Alongside the unique geographic implications of living on a rural island, certain aspects of these circumstances extend to both southeast Alaska as a region and to the state of Alaska.

Southeast Alaska is characterized by its island geography and water-based economy, transportation, and lifestyle. Alaska more broadly is quite diverse in its Indigenous populations and its geography. However, it is largely rural, with air travel being a common means of transportation, though some of the mainland is accessible by car. Common experiences do link Alaskans throughout the state, such as difficult travel experiences in the winter, and the high cost of living. As my own experience in Alaska is largely limited to southeast, I do not wish to make any false claims about living in other places. Ultimately, I wish to acknowledge the similarities while avoiding the image of Alaska as a monolith. Indeed, the isolated nature of much of Alaska means that local issues are often localized to the extreme and small geographic distance can nonetheless create vastly different realities.

Tribal politics in Alaska are another commonality within the state, and they look a bit different than in the continental United States, or as Alaskans call it, “the lower 48.” There is only one reservation in Alaska: Metlakatla, which is the Ts’msyen reservation. Otherwise, tribal governments are not tied to land through reservations. Rather, there are traditional territories where it is understood that tribes have jurisdiction, but they simply exist within the context of settler towns. For example, in Sheet’ká, the tribe is Sitka Tribe of Alaska and other towns/villages also have tribal governments: Ketchikan Indian Community, Douglas Indian Association, Organized Village of Kake, Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, etc. These generally align with various “kwáans” or villages that existed prior to colonization. However, there is also a regional tribe in southeast Alaska. Tlingit and Haida was created in order to receive compensation for land claims in the 1930s because, at the time, there were not federally recognized tribal governments. Despite the other village tribes being created through the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which was expanded to Alaska in 1936, Tlingit and Haida was able to

continue operations. It now has sovereignty⁷ in the region but defers to local tribes in each community. Due to the nature of its founding, those eligible can be citizens of both Tlingit and Haida and their local tribe, which is unusual for tribal enrollment. While one may have multiple tribal identities, it is typically only possible to be a citizen of one tribe.

Rather than reservations where land is held in trust by the federal government, in Alaska, land is owned by Native people through the Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs). The ANCs were created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. While the fight for land claims had been ongoing in the early 20th Century, the need to act was spurred on by the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay on the far northern coast of Alaska in the 1960s. The desire to create a pipeline forced the state to settle its land claims with tribes. As such, the act divided up land to village, urban, and regional corporations (Worl and Kendall-Miller 2018). There are village ANCs throughout the region. Shee Atiká is the urban corporation located in Sitka. Sealaska is the regional corporation for southeast Alaska and is based in Juneau.⁸ The corporations own land and often extract from it, for example through oil drilling, mining, and logging. The need to make money has been a limiting factor for corporations in the type of stewardship they can perform on traditional homelands. Shee Atiká sold a large portion of its land after it had been logged. Sealaska logged very extensively. They have now expanded into a number of other industries, including seafood, carbon credits, and government contracting. Indeed, many of the corporations have engaged in government and especially military contracting because of their designation as companies owned by minority groups who have an advantage in bidding for these contracts. Even during corporate events, shareholders often point

⁷ This is the notion that Indigenous peoples had self-governance and land relations since time immemorial before the arrival of colonizers, and that this right remains even in the face of ongoing settler colonialism (Duthu 2008).

⁸ I am a shareholder of Sealaska, Shee Atiká, and Goldbelt, which is the urban corporation for Juneau.

out both that this was a system that was designed to fail and that many corporate activities do not align with cultural practices and values. This corporate system allowed the US government to still access the land, either by buying it from corporations as was the case with Shee Atiká, or by accessing and freeing up resources on the land through the push for economic opportunity. While the system was perhaps intended to fail, the settler state would benefit either way by accessing these resources regardless of the success of the corporations. Additionally, this system further incorporates Indigenous people into settler colonial capitalism⁹ through its most basic function, as well as through government contracting.

Because of the separation of land and tribal governments, there are often an array of tensions within the system, especially between ANCs and tribal governments. It can be difficult to enact sovereignty and stewardship under these limited conditions, and there is a constant battle for resources that causes tensions as well. This unique system is, however, essential to understanding not only Native politics in Alaska, but all politics in the state. Tribal entities are major players in the state as Native residents make up almost 20% of the population, which is the highest population percentage of any state. Because of this, ANCs are often major economic players, for example in the North Slope region with oil. Additionally, many of these entities are united under the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), which has a great deal of lobbying power and is a state-wide organization. AFN was instrumental in passing ANCSA and has continued to advocate for Alaska Native rights ever since. Within this larger history, southeast Alaska has an

⁹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes that she had initially been wary to discuss capitalism because she felt she had “not spent enough time reading, thinking, and analyzing Marx” (2017, 72). She realized that her community’s elders had their own contributions to make based on their culture’s knowledge systems. I agree with Simpson that Indigenous peoples have our own intellectual histories that can contribute to this discourse without channeling those critiques through a Western scholar like Karl Marx. There are Indigenous scholars who do engage Marx – for example, see the work of Glen Sean Coulthard. However, this mode of analysis is not the main concern of my work. Discussions of Lingít people engaging in capitalism in complex ways will come up throughout the dissertation and I situate them within a larger Lingít framework of both resistance and adaptation in the face of settler colonial intrusion.

important role as many Alaska Native leaders were educated at Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka and because much of the model for AFN came out of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), which is still active in the state. The ANB was active in the fight for land claims, having won a settlement for southeast through Tlingit and Haida prior to ANCSA. It was, however, necessary to have a statewide coalition to fight for wider settlements, hence the need for a more wide-reaching organization like AFN. Due to their ability to spur collective action – at least to a certain extent – AFN continues to be an important organization, and politically influential among other tribal interests.

Native politics are often played out alongside the general statewide politics, or sometimes in smaller local elections. This is essentially a nested political system, with tribal and corporate politics that are more specifically relevant to Native people happening simultaneously (Simpson 2014; Dennison 2024). As such, the very nature of these political issues is scalar and exists as a network. While Alaska is a large state geographically, it has a small population, and people are often interconnected through these various organizations, governments, and corporations. This drives both positive collaborations and deep-seated tensions. It also deeply impacts the way that climate change is discussed within the state, and the way that it is projected *onto* the state from the outside.

These external views of climate issues – for example by conservationists – often refract Indigenous perspectives, utilizing them towards various goals. Different interest groups within and outside of the state may focus on various aspects of conservation, but their missions tend to align with these narrower interests. These interests often do not align with Indigenous worlding, which reaches far beyond the mere desire for “preservation” of Alaska’s lands and waters. Alaska Native relationality is far deeper and requires a much more long-term orientation, both to

the past and the future. For example, Lingít understandings of balance and reciprocity are not focused on any on species or any one relationship. Rather, this is a holistic perspective that takes larger systems into account, orienting towards living among all our relatives. It is these perspectives that I consider in unpacking common assumptions about climate change.

Introduction

The first summer of my field work, I went out on the boat with my family. We were just outside of Sitka in a typical southeast Alaska landscape, with islands all around us. We were essentially traveling down the middle of a long and somewhat narrow channel. There were smaller mountains on one side and a whole lot of green everywhere. The sides of the mountains were covered in evergreens, with some visible dead trees obvious against the rich green. Some rock also peeked out through the trees. My father was at the wheel, and we were headed past an area with a waterfall trickling down the cliffside. He looked over and commented to me that the waterfall was visibly running less than usual. It was a very dry summer – at least by the standards of southeast Alaska – and it was reflected in the landscape. For those who are familiar with the land and waters, evidence of climate change is everywhere. About twenty minutes later, as we got closer to Sitka, two enormous cruise ships came into view, tied up at the town's cruise dock. In the summer, cruise ships are also a typical sight in southeast Alaska.

While I did not specifically connect these two sights – the reduced waterfall and the cruise ships – at the time, they are intrinsically bound together in the story of climate change in southeast Alaska. Tourists flock to Alaska to see an untouched wilderness, but cruise ships burn fossil fuels and majorly impact air and water quality. Their presence in the region also has ties to larger global capitalist trends that are major drivers of climate change. After all, cruise tourism is a billion-dollar industry. Seeing the tangible impacts of climate change alongside a cruise ship is not unusual in southeast Alaska. The impacts are felt deeply in place, and they are also strikingly visible, at least to those intimately familiar with the land.

Climate change is regarded as an issue of planetary concern that constitutes an existential threat to humanity at large (Chakrabarty 2021). Scale and ubiquity make climate change easy to ignore. For some, it becomes palpable when an extreme weather event makes the news. For others, climate change is felt when this extreme weather descends on their own communities. In the aftermath of climate disaster, these events fade from the minds of all but those who are living them (see Bonilla and LeBrón 2019). This hyper-mediated and large-scale view of climate change allows many people to project environmental change to “somewhere else,” somewhere far away. While this “out there” location might change depending on the most recent weather-based disaster in the news, one place where climate change is often “located” in the public imaginary is Alaska.

Because Alaska is framed as “the Last Frontier” it is a site of intense discussion and offloading of environmental discourse. It is associated with images of climate change, for example, polar bears, glaciers, and melting sea ice, which adds to this perception. The state relies heavily on oil extraction that contributes to environmental changes, as well as on tourism, which uses an immense amount of fossil fuel as an industry. Meanwhile, people seek out Alaska as a pure and untouched wilderness that is simultaneously too vast to experience these changes, and that is also the exact place where their fears are projected. This focus on Alaska's scale and relationship to concepts of “Nature” make it an ideal case study for a discussion of climate change. My focus on southeast Alaska allows me to consider these issues on the regional and local scale, and alongside Lingít knowledge and place-based specificity.

In southeast Alaska, it is both easier and harder to ignore climate change. The region is predicted to be a climate haven, with increased rainfall rather than drought and lower risks of sea

level rise. Compared to hurricanes and rampant fires, the increased risk of landslides is concerning, but generally more contained in potential destruction. At the same time, inconsistent fishing, herring spawns, berry seasons, salmon runs, and other changes are immediately noted by locals, and Lingít history offers a deep window into the past to the abnormality of these events. Seasonality is deeply felt in a place very reliant on local foods, and so changes to that seasonality are also noticeable. That is not to say that there are not climate change deniers who live in Alaska. In the words of a family member: “Now that climate change is happening, it’s going to be the start of a new ice age.”

Even so, Lingít people have been adapting to a changing climate with a cultural emphasis on the importance of these adaptations since time immemorial. As stated in the Tlingit and Haida Climate Adaptation Plan, which was written by Kenneth Weitzel (Teikweidi):

The Tlingit & Haida people have been responding and adapting to a changing climate for thousands of years. Preparing for continued and accelerated change is not something new, but a continuation of the holistic natural resource and culturally driven approach that has kept the Tlingit & Haida people a vibrant and growing community. (Weitzel 2019, 42)

Within this long history, Lingít worlding is created and enacted, even in spaces that may outwardly appear to be colonized, Western, and capitalist. These interventions are not new, but they are in dialogue with broader climate change discourse and with settler colonialism in ways that require further attention. To this end, my project is broadly instead interested in three things: 1) how Lingít people have historically adapted to change and how we continue to adapt in a current moment of climate change; 2) how Lingít knowledge is being discussed and utilized in projects focused on climate research, adaptation, and mitigation; 3) the ways in which climate change discourse/issues become a space for White settlers to erase/co-opt Indigeneity and ignore

tribal sovereignty in the name of “better futures” for southeast Alaska. I argue that due to the long history of Lingít presence and adaptation in our homelands, we hold relevant knowledge of our changing region, and also a unique cultural approach towards change that has served us well in a shifting environment for thousands of years. Even in the face of settler colonialism and climate change, our way of life has endured and adapted. Indeed, I argue that this cultural continuum requires specific attention in order to center a place-based approach to climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, which is key to addressing pertinent Lingít environmental concerns.

In order to set up some of the problematics within which this dissertation sits, the introduction seeks to provide an overview of some of the literature and discourse on global climate change and the way it operates alongside settler colonialism. I then address some of the major arguments within environmental academic discourse that I reject, and some of the potential pitfalls with academic discussions of environmentalism and Indigenous peoples. The point of this review is not to be comprehensive regarding the totality of debates on these subjects, but rather to provide the needed context for the way these debates come into play or are undermined in my field site of Sitka, Alaska. Next, I will provide some intellectual and methodological context for my own contributions. I focus broadly on the major themes and orientations of the dissertation, as well as my reasoning for the type of information that is and is not included. This discussion is followed by a chapter overview that lays out the theoretical interventions and case studies.

Climate Change and Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is a specific type of colonialism that has (in)famously been defined by Patrick Wolfe as having a goal of “the elimination of the Native” (2006, 387). Essentially, while

the general goal of colonialism is resource extraction and labor exploitation, the goal of settler colonialism is to replace the Native population with the new population, labeled as “settlers.” While Wolfe contends that any non-Indigenous person is a “settler,” many Indigenous/Indigenous Studies scholars have troubled and nuanced the idea of who does and does not constitute a settler (Byrd 2011; Day 2015). I will refer mostly to “settlers” and “Indigenous” people because the intricacies of different forms of arrival in what is now known as the United States is not the focus of this project. Many of the conflicts I discuss are largely between Alaska Natives and White settlers. I will refer to Alaska Native people either specifically with that accepted term, or sometimes as simply “Native” or as “Indigenous.” These are all terms used in Alaska, and, when appropriate, I refer to specific tribes. Regarding “settler colonialism,” for my own purposes, I follow Mailee Arvin’s¹ definition, specifically the way she highlights its exploitation of land and ongoing temporal state. As Arvin explains,

Its power usually operates simultaneously through economy (the turning of land and natural resources into profit), law (the imposition of the legal-political apparatus of a settler nation-state, rather than an indigenous form of governance), and ideology (culturally and morally defined ways of being and knowing resulting from European post-Enlightenment thought) and desire for a cohesive cultural ideology. (Arvin 2019, 15)

As illustrated by this definition, settler colonialism works along several vectors.

¹ Arvin is Native Hawaiian and is cited across several chapters. This is certainly no coincidence. Given that Hawaii and Alaska both have a “unique” status as non-contiguous states, they are often grouped together. Another commonality is that, in each case, the Indigenous population is in a different position than Native people in the contiguous US. Native Hawaiians do not have state or federal recognition and therefore lack the protections that Alaska Natives do have. Even so, the unique geographic and political positions of each state do lend some interesting sites of comparison and analysis.

One specific course is that of environmental destruction/climate change/global warming. This is the idea that humans have impacted the planet in such a way that conditions are changing and warming. This is partially because of CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions that are changing the atmosphere and making it warmer. However, environmental changes extend to pollution, increased weather events, species extinction, and much more. There is no perfect term to encapsulate these ongoing changes. I switch between terms like climate change, environmental change, global warming, and environmental destruction, though I do not specifically think any of these terms are the ideal term. I have heard these terms used at various points in the field work. Each comes with its own socio-political implications, either obfuscating the seriousness of these changes, or not accounting for the full extent of their impact. Perhaps no term – and certainly no English term – can fully capture the extent of this phenomenon. I am choosing to use conventional language because that is also the way that people in community at my field site discuss the changes they are experiencing. I choose to use several imperfect terms in the hope that the surrounding context will convey the deeper nuances of my engagement with ongoing changes in our environment and, more specifically, on Lingít Aani.

Now that I have individually defined both “settler colonialism” and “climate change,” I will describe the way that my work imagines the relationship between these two concepts. To my mind, they are inherently interrelated. In his book, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* (2005), Charles Mann describes the environmental destruction wrought by early colonizers in the Americas. Later generations of settlers arrived in this changed landscape and assumed that the continents were an untouched wilderness. Mann argues that this perception was false; Indigenous people have always shaped their environments, though not in an inherently negative or harmful way (2005). When European diseases decimated Indigenous populations –

both through unintended and intentional violent spread of disease with genocidal intent – they also decimated people’s ability to upkeep traditional homelands. Mann theorizes that much of the landscape was intentionally cultivated, but after the start of colonization and the accompanying genocide of Indigenous people, there were far fewer people to tend it. Thus, it took on the appearance of the “wilderness” that early settlers perceived (Mann 2005). This was a massively destructive time ecologically as one must imagine massive collapse of ecosystems continent-wide, followed by intense colonial extraction and habitation.

Settler colonialism has always been about presumed access to land, necessitating eradication of Indigenous populations by a variety of means (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Arvin 2019; Liboiron 2021). Through the use of theorists like John Locke, settlers created justification for their theft of Indigenous lands, especially spurred by the idea that Indigenous peoples were savage primitives, too close to nature to have any sense of property or ownership (Barker 2005). Locke argues that ownership is created through specific types of labor, for example, farming. Land, he argues, is used more productively under this system of labor. Indigenous communities were not perceived to perform this type of value-adding labor and were thus assumed to have no rights to property or land ownership. This perception eased the theft of Indigenous lands by justifying settler use as “more productive.” Locke’s writing was part of the Enlightenment and intersects with the early development of Western scientific thinking and with settler colonialism (Vining et al. 2008; Barker 2005). Both of these concepts have also greatly influenced US policy from the very start, including through domination of the environment through colonization. The desire to conquer has also created the desire to create hierarchies, with humans at the top. This hierarchy of humans and animals has led both to racial prejudice and prejudice against other-than-human relations that are seen as lesser (TallBear 2019). As such, Euro-American notions of

“civilized” humans as separate from nature was a key tool in the conquest of the Americas first through land theft and later through subjugation of Indigenous Knowledge (Watts 2013). This separation allowed for easier exploitation, reliant on an understanding that land was a “resource” rather than a relative. As settler colonialism is also reliant on the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the settler culture, environmental knowledge was also lost and/or treated as inferior, further entrenching extractive colonial ideas about Indigenous homelands (Watts 2013; Carroll 2015).

These extractive and damaging practices were not simply a byproduct of settler colonialism, but actually a weaponized and integral aspect of its long-term warfare. For example, on the Great Plains, buffalo were slaughtered as a means of cutting off access to food and essential components of the lives of Indigenous peoples in the region (Vellino 2020). This changed not only ecosystems but also social dynamics. Some have argued that the ties between bodies and the land also constitute another site of violence; violence done on the land and on Indigenous bodies becomes intertwined and interchangeable, resulting in intergenerational trauma and cultural shifts regarding gender and sexuality (Simpson 2017). In Alaska, an example of this was the aggressive fur trade started by Russian colonizers, which decimated sea otter populations first in the Aleutian Islands and then in southeast Alaska (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Black 2008). The desire for sea otter pelts led to Russian presence in Sitka, resulting in mass destruction of the sea otter population and documented examples of sexual and gender-based violence (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Black 2008). This immense population crash, followed by a boom in sea otter populations, in part due to the passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972, has caused disruptions to subsistence activities, according to community members. These acts of violence and destruction on land/bodies in turn ripple through time, being felt in

different ways at different times across generations and into the present and future. Through violence on many different lifeforms and on the land, settler colonialism has impacts on a vast scale, both geographically and temporally that is not contained to a singular event or even a set of events, but that is rooted in the past, felt in the present, and projected into the future.

Settler colonialism was environmentally destructive from the start, and the Euro-American worldview that co-evolved with this system was primed for further destruction as technology continued to advance. The desire to quantify and record emerged in the US context especially post-World War II and into the Cold War. This time period spawned a new age of scientific inquiry and funding specifically designed to aid the military. As defense became a top priority, so too did the earth sciences, which came to be known as early as the 1950s as the environmental sciences (Doel 2003). Emerging contemporaneously to the environmental movement and research like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), environmental science was focused largely on global systems, oceanography, meteorology, and testing for nuclear contamination (Doel 2003). This resulted in the creation of research infrastructure that has, in turn, contributed to and shaped current climate change research (Masco 2010). I am most interested in the implications of the military's involvement in the realm of science and research. According to Ronald Doel, scientists at the time conformed to the desires of their funders – the US military. This, in turn, reinscribed the desires of the US empire. As such, the foundation of environmental science constitutes a body of knowledge that is fundamentally shaped by settler colonial interests and imperial expansion dating back to initial westward expansion.

The structural origins of the US having a standing army – something viewed with suspicion following the American Revolution – has its roots in the time period known as the “Indian Wars.” Ongoing settler violence in pursuit of territory and sovereignty required trained

soldiers to be at the ready rather than relying on dispersed state militias (Birtle 2003). Tensions surrounding territory and control continue to this day in the form of settler occupation of Indigenous lands and continued imperial actions beyond the borders of the so-called United States. Despite the desire of Western science to present itself as objective, it is not in fact value neutral. In the case of the environmental sciences developing post-World War II, scientific inquiry was rooted in the settler colonial and imperial values of the military.² This influenced what types of questions were being asked, the type of knowledge being valued, the language being used, and of course, the type of projects that were funded (Doel 2003). This structure was based around what was useful to the settler state, and the implications of this can still be seen today. Things that do not fit within these structures – for example, Indigenous Knowledge – have been constantly ignored or forced to fit into a specific format that matches existing knowledge systems. Conflicting values are also an issue, with control over what constitutes a valuable scientific contribution dictated by settler perspectives, which, in turn, do not align with Indigenous worldviews.

The emphasis on scientific control has largely shaped much discourse about the environment, climate change, and American political life since the second World War. As Joseph Masco argues, emphasis on US military power allows a veil to be drawn over the risk of climate change (2010). A culture of planetary crisis emerging from the Cold War has emphasized the knowability of the planet through scientific study of the earth and atmosphere. These studies targeting nuclear fallout provided the models and funding to also study climate change. Yet the US has nevertheless continued to refuse a shift in its thinking about these changes, instead focusing its power on defining risks to expand the national security state (Masco 2010). With this

² An example of this is climate modeling and monitoring based on nuclear experimentation (Masco 2010).

emerging awareness of the planetary, combined with the impacts of industrial capitalism, has come an awareness of the profound negative impacts that humans can have on the planet, and both a sense of power and helplessness depending on the perspective (Doel 2003). These emergent forms of discourse – control, nuclear warfare, a fragile planet, and human supremacy – have all influenced the way climate change is discussed in policy, academia, and in the public media. Indeed, it has continued to shape settler colonial relations regarding environment, as nuclear power is billed as a “clean” energy source that has, in fact, continued contamination and genocide on Indigenous lands (Montoya 2022). These discourses are also dependent on settler colonialism via the larger structural systems that seek to acquire and maintain land and perpetuate settler governance over that land.

Rejecting the Planetary

With that relationship in mind, it is necessary to refute and move away from some of the existing literature before I move into my own theoretical grounding. In my discussion of previous conceptual frameworks, I detail how the problem of scale engenders misunderstandings of Indigenous cultures. There is no shortage of literature on the massive global impacts humans have had on the environment. This form of systems thinking is related to an emergent idea of “the planetary” in the 20th century, alongside the realization that humans can exert massive impacts on the global environment. As industrial impacts and pollution became more apparent, research began to explore these impacts, and various measures were put in place to combat them. Even as changes were implemented, the world grew more reliant on fossil fuels (Jaeger 2018).

In opposition to many Indigenous epistemologies (knowledge systems) that do not have separate concepts of “Nature,” Euro-American culture focuses largely on the separation of “Man” and “Nature,” especially in so-called civilized society. Various lines of discourse began

to emerge about the state of the climate; some wanted to ignore the problem, for example, the Gaia Hypothesis claiming that the system would self-regulate (Lovelock and Margulis 1974). Others sought control, also through systems thinking that would allow humans to engineer themselves out of these issues (Taylor 1988, Doel 2003). With a sense of “shrinking wilderness” and the “end of the frontier” beginning in the mid to late 19th century, there was panic in the United States over the very idea of “nature,” with some perpetuating the idea that nature is pure and inherently separate from humanity (McKibben 1989). While this line of thinking has received critique – most famously from William Cronon, who argues that wilderness itself is a human creation (1996) – it remains a common perception that humans are “bad” for the environment.

This is perhaps best exemplified in “Anthropocene” thinking, which is based on this idea that humans are “unnatural.” It assumes that all of humanity is to blame for the choices and actions of the privileged few. This is a common critique of the Anthropocene (Yusoff 2018; Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016). Indigenous scholars have also addressed the fact that the overarching nature of this model ignores Indigenous stewardship and epistemologies that reject Western systems (Whyte 2017; Todd 2015). Finally, the narrative of apocalypse coming from the Anthropocene is also temporally discordant with Indigenous experiences (Whyte 2018). The assumption that apocalypse is something imminent rather than something already experienced is rooted in a Euro-American settler perspective. Indigenous authors have argued that settler colonialism is an ongoing apocalypse for Indigenous peoples (Donnelly 2018). As such, critiques of the Anthropocene include scalar critiques of both timescale and cultural universalism. For many Euro-Americans it may seem as if this is the most existential threat to their way of life. This crisis narrative is paralyzing and incites a sense of listlessness about the situation. The

Anthropocene features heavily in scholarly and public consciousness about climate change. But the focus of this dissertation is not on critiquing the Anthropocene or offering an alternative mode of thinking, something I have done elsewhere (Allen 2024). Rather, I want to focus on the idea of scale itself and the way it features in narratives of climate change and settler colonialism. Oftentimes, scales are based on arbitrary settler colonial markers, like the nation or the state of Alaska. This erases place-based specificity, both in the source of various environmental issues and in potential mitigation and adaptation efforts that are localized regionally or even to a single community. By contrast, place-based solutions align with much older histories and forms of Indigenous Knowledge that exceed the bounds of the settler colonial system.

Despite Euro-American framings that human impact on ecosystems is extractive or harmful, there are many examples in different Indigenous cultures indicating this is not inherently the case. For example, in Lingít herring harvest, branches are placed in the water. The herring spawn on them and some branches are removed by harvesters and the eggs are eaten. Rather than reducing the hatching rate of herring, this process cultivates the spawn. Placing branches in the water provides herring with good spawning grounds; non-viable eggs are often the ones removed as they are laid the thickest and are the best for eating, and harvesters always leave a percentage of the eggs to hatch (see Thornton 2019). A similar example is described in Robin Wall Kimmerer’s book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Kimmerer describes a thesis project she suggested to a student, which looked at different harvest methods to determine their impact on sweetgrass. The project received pushback from the department, with other scholars firmly believing that harvesting the plants would inherently harm them. However, the project’s methodology was firmly rooted in Traditional Knowledge: “If we use a plant respectfully, it will flourish. If we ignore it, it will go away” (Kimmerer 2013, 159). Ultimately, it became clear that

harvesting, no matter the method, helped the plants to thrive, indicating that humans can be *part* of an ecosystem and contribute positively. Humans need not only be external to those systems or have solely negative impacts.

Even while nuance must be introduced in the direction of acknowledging the complexities of non-Western lifeways, harmful stereotypes can also emerge from taking this to its extreme. In direct contrast to the notion that humans are inherently harmful to the environment is the stereotype of the Ecologically Noble Indian, as Paul Nadasdy writes (2005). This image of Indigenous people as “one with nature” is harmful in the way it paints Indigenous people as primitives. At a basic level, these terms enforce the stereotype that Native people are inherently “environmentalists” and close to nature.³ Environmentalism and Indigenous peoples thus have a complex and often antagonistic relationship (Nadasdy 2005). Native people and environmentalists often clash, for instance, over fishing rights or the practice of whaling (Nadasdy 2005). Additionally, some conservationists subscribe to the idea that any human influence on the environment is detrimental. Native people are thus thought to live in perfect harmony with nature, or, in other words, to have no impact on their environments. This is not the case. Native people have always profoundly shaped environments, but not necessarily in a detrimental way (Middleton 2011; Carrol 2015). For example, the traditional practice of prescribed burning drastically changes the ecosystem but also helps to prevent larger and more

³ The term “Ecological Indian” was coined in a book titled *The Ecological Indian* (1999) by anthropologist Shepherd Krech III. The book argues that Native people intentionally positioned themselves as ecological Indians as a means of recuperating sovereignty and identity, thereby projecting this identity into the past. Krech argues that Native people have no inherent claim to environmental awareness, citing resource extraction on reservations and capitulation to economic stressors (1999). Penobscot scholar Darren Ranco solidly deconstructs this argument, pointing out that, essentially, the historical context of colonization is missing. This not only influences the way that Native lands have been used and extracted, but also leads Native people to sometimes actually mobilize the stereotype of the Ecological Indian to better protect those lands and waters. Ranco argues that the Ecological Indian is sometimes an important tool in land and water protection, allowing communities to emphasize dimensions of their relationships to homelands that would otherwise be ignored by Western science (Ranco 2007).

devastating forest fires (Long et al. 2021). However, this nuance is sometimes lost in these debates, and Native people are criticized when they do not fit within this impossible and historically inaccurate metric.

Within environmental discourse, nuance is key, especially regarding these diverse cultural and historical contexts. The same is true for discourse about climate change. In recognizing the importance of “Indigenous Knowledge,” there is a desire for a monolithic epistemology that may then be applied universally. This framing loses sight of place-based specificity that is important when tackling local issues. Much of climate change discourse is at risk of creating a singular monolithic form of Indigenous knowledge because of the tendency to universalize all aspects of environmental change. I argue that attention to the local – and specifically the Indigenous – perspective is key to climate mitigation and preparedness, shifting not only the types of response, but also the very way we discuss this phenomenon.

Haa Kuusteeyi and Adaptation

For Lingít people, having lived on our lands for over 10,000 years, change is nothing new. Lingít people have weathered changes throughout time, making climate change part of a longer history rather than a unique world-ending catastrophe. Stereotypes about Indigenous peoples as environmentalists emerge in conjunction with climate change discourse in the public that exists solidly within the settler perspective and imagination. For this reason, an entirely different orientation is required to consider climate change from an Indigenous perspective. In order to do this work, I focus on a number of themes that are directly related to Lingít worlding. These include several Lingít concepts, various forms of scale, survivance, and adaptation as a cultural value.

There are many Lingít concepts and values through which one might orient oneself culturally. Many of these themes will come up at various points throughout the dissertation, but two concepts that are most thematically relevant are “haa kuusteeyí” and “haa shuká.” Haa kuusteeyí refers to “our way of life” or “our culture.” This is not just about what one does in life, but also how one goes about things.⁴ This is the foundation of doing things in a “Lingít” manner, and it need not only be through enacting ceremony or doing “traditional” activities, but can also refer to the values and manner with which all aspects of life are approached. Haa shuká refers to “ancestors,” but can also refer to the future (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1987). It means those who came before us and those who will come after us, thereby bypassing Euro-American notions of linear temporality. Haa kuusteeyí is still enacted even in spaces that appear to be settler colonial, Western, and capitalist. Haa shuká disrupts scalar and geographical boundaries of those settler times and spaces, thereby illustrating the continuum of Lingít worlding even in the face of ongoing settler occupation.

The theme of scale is one that resurfaces throughout this dissertation. The temporal logics of 10,000 plus years or, as many Indigenous peoples will often say, “since time immemorial,” is vastly different from the geographic time of settler presence in the region, and also much of the European-centered thought-world. In relation to this longstanding Lingít presence, much of European cultural history is comparatively recent and limited. Settler occupation on Lingít Aaní is even more recent, starting in the 1700s. This dynamic emerges throughout the dissertation as settlers lay claims and form investments based on this limited, settler colonial timeline. Oftentimes, this takes the form of erasing and/or co-opting Indigeneity in order to more firmly assert land claims, a practice made possible only by appealing to a history that begins with

⁴ This definition comes from various conversations in community.

European settlement. In other words, this is not merely about temporal scale, but also about various geographic scales and interventions. While “climate change” as a concept is often associated with the planetary scale, Lingít worlding is centered on Lingít Aaní (Lingít homelands), as is Traditional Knowledge associated with these homelands. Lingít Aaní is understood as the various kwáans throughout the region. There has been some internal migration of the Xaadas and Ts’msyen people, and their current territory in Alaska is the traditional territory of specific kwáans. Largely, Lingít Aaní is associated with what is known as the Tongass National Forest, and is often discussed in conservation through that vector. The state of Alaska presents another relevant scale within policy and political discussions, but one that does not have meaning within the longer Indigenous presence in the (vast) area. Attention to Lingít perceptions of time and space have existed long before the onset of colonization and continue to stand in opposition to systems that universalize and erase difference and complexity.

In addition to utilizing these – and many other – Lingít concepts, this dissertation also takes up the concept of survivance developed by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor. While I briefly defined this term in the preface, I will expand on my use of it and its role in the dissertation now. My early introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies was under the instruction of Tuscarora scholar Vera B. Palmer, whose pedagogy draws heavily on the work of Vizenor. As such, my own thinking has also been heavily influenced by this specific scholarly tradition. This dissertation is by no means a dissertation *about* survivance. However, it is a dissertation that focuses on how survivance is lived and experienced in the Lingít community.

Because I was introduced early in my academic career to Vizenor, I have been thinking about survivance and Lingít culture throughout the course of my fieldwork. Vizenor’s conception of survivance includes a form of adaptation that builds on systems that existed prior

to colonization. This resonates deeply with my own understanding of Lingít forms of adaptation. They are not new, but they have been pushed in new directions due to settler colonialism, and more recently due to climate change. This framework is merely a way to support and draw out those Lingít specific frameworks, and to better understand how they are situated within broader Indigenous experiences. While Vizenor’s own work is focused on literature, his conception of survivance has cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural implications (Henry 2023).

In my understanding, survivance intersects with other forms of sovereignty and self-determination. Sovereignty is an important concept in tribal governance and in Indigenous Studies. The word comes from the European tradition, often traced to the writing of Thomas Hobbs. Nevertheless, there has been a great deal written about sovereignty in Indigenous studies (Barker 2005; Simpson 2014; Coulthard 2014; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Kauanui 2018; Cattelino and Simpson 2022; Duarte 2017; Lovett et al. 2019). In Federal Indian Law and in much academic literature, the term relies upon the notion of inherent tribal sovereignty. This concept stems from tribal sovereignty having its roots in Indigenous self-governance prior to colonization (Duthu 2008; Barker 2005). The term sovereignty is, in turn, often used in community, especially when discussing tribal governments, and it is deployed to various ends.⁵ I view sovereignty as self-determination stemming from self-governance since time immemorial. Survivance fits into this as the manifestation of how sovereign authority is enacted in the current moment. Adaptations have occurred over time to ensure that tribal sovereignty remains viable, but the core principles remain.

⁵ For example, Joanne Barker writes in her book *Native Acts* about the legal complexities arising when sovereignty is used in ways that reinscribe forms of discrimination. In the court decision *Martinez v. Santa Clara*, the Supreme Court upheld tribal sovereignty, even in the face of gender-based discrimination. Barker writes “As many have observed, the serious ethical dilemma that has resulted from the Martinez decision is that civil rights complaints against tribal governments are remanded back to the same governments for review” (2011, 144). The way that sovereignty is deployed in community is complex, and these discussions often pose their own challenges to community dynamics.

I also understand survivance as standing in opposition to a vision of Native peoples as “frozen in time” and to the assumption that we are/have been “primitive” (Fabian 2014; Baker 1998). Instead, survivance establishes the ability to move forward, remain lively, and adapt as a longstanding *aspect of* tradition, rather than “tradition” being an impediment to change. In my experience, anthropology as a discipline assumes that Indigenous peoples see “traditions” as static. Within the Lingít community, change is vital to histories and ceremonies. This larger paradigm then resonates with the importance of adaptation within Lingít culture specifically. As will be discussed more in future chapters, adaptation and trial and error are key components of Lingít cultural continuity.

Survivance is not a key framework in all of the case studies presented in this dissertation, but it does influence much of the discussion in a general sense. Because the history of adaptation is such an important one, this thread will be woven throughout the case studies. Also important to note with regards to survivance is a refusal of the metrics of “purity” that are so often applied to Indigenous cultures. Survivance sits with the messiness of colonization and of Indigenous resistance to those systems. What it looks like to continue cultural activities in that landscape, especially in the face of changing environmental conditions, is a process that requires compromise, strategy, and creativity. This is not to say that such an engagement is the only way, or that the interventions described here are the limit of what is possible. Rather, I attend to specific ongoing examples to illustrate that Indigenous strategies are already in existence and that their scope and reach extends beyond the Euro-American approaches to climate change as a planetary issue. I do not mean to set limits on forms of Lingít engagement, but I am also not interested in ignoring work that is ongoing just because it exists within systems of settler

colonialism and capitalism. My concern is the liveliness of Lingít worlding even under but also beyond this set of constraints.

Theoretical Orientation

I first need to lay out some terminology and my orientation towards engaging with Indigenous epistemologies. Oftentimes, knowledge held by Indigenous communities is discussed, shared, and examined outside of the context of the community. This requires generalizable terms to distinguish Indigenous epistemologies as a specific *type* of knowledge. There are a number of terms that have been used in this context, including: Indigenous Knowledge (IK), Traditional Knowledge (TK), Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Indigenous Data (ID), and Indigenous Science. The article “Of Course, Data Can Never Fully Represent Reality” by Marissa Elena Duarte et al. illustrates how some of these terms coincide more with certain fields or topics. For example, TEK is associated with environmental studies and often alongside matters of governance. TK appears also in relation to environmental issues, but less in reference to governance. ID is a newer term with far fewer references, such that its uses do not show a strong pattern.⁶ And IK has less strong associations and can thus be understood more as a paradigm “rather than a discrete subject or discipline” (Duarte et al. 2020, 172). Indigenous Science is mentioned by Duarte et al. but not subjected to the same analysis as the other terms. As such, I turn to Max Liboiron, who writes the following of Indigenous Science: “Indigenous sciences are done by Indigenous peoples, full stop” (2021, 124). Liboiron goes on to say that the way Indigenous Science looks in practice is “an expression of Indigenous sovereignty of Indigenous ways of producing knowledge on Indigenous Lands, by Indigenous

⁶ I will discuss the notion of ID in future chapters in relation to Indigenous Data Sovereignty, which focuses on the ability of Indigenous communities and Tribal Nations to record and store data about their citizens (Lovett et al. 2019). Data has often been extracted or wrongly taken from Indigenous peoples, and this model emphasizes the sovereign rights of tribes to have final say about their data.

People” (2021, 124). I uplift this particular term because it is commonly used by Indigenous peoples in southeast Alaska.

In this dissertation, I often use “Indigenous Knowledge” as a more neutral term that, as Duarte et al. suggest, is a paradigm rather than a specific subject. I will occasionally use TK, but generally in specific reference to the culture: i.e. “Lingít Traditional Knowledge.” I appreciate the sovereign claims of Indigenous Science, but it is not a term that I use. I am more concerned with the specific methodologies and modes of thinking that emerge from Lingít culture than claims to validity of that knowledge, even if that can be a strategic move in some cases.⁷ On the similar note, I do not use the term TEK, but I do appreciate the way it gestures to what Nicholas Reo details as the relationship between values or morals, experience, and practice. Reo argues that TEK informs and is informed by morals and values, which all come together in Indigenous epistemologies, requiring a *holistic* understanding of the knowledge system (Reo 2011).

When I first began my field work, I intended for this project to more specifically consider and record the type of knowledge that could be classified as “TEK.” I set out to consider both the infrastructural contexts within which this knowledge was being utilized and discussed, such as tribal governments and Native-run non-profits and the knowledge itself. I planned to speak with knowledge bearers and to understand their perspectives on climate change both now and

⁷ I want to draw a distinction between Indigenous Science as a project of sovereignty and the notion that scientific fact or scientific thinking is an inherent paradigm rather than a cultural construct. The desire to proclaim Indigenous Knowledge systems as being “scientific” runs the risk of validating the notion of science as an inherent good rather than questioning the cultural frameworks on which these knowledge systems rest. Lingít knowledge in a broad sense developed independently from Western scientific thought, so attempting to fit that knowledge system (or any other Indigenous epistemology) within the framework of Western science will always create excess that simply cannot and in fact should not fit. While the term Indigenous Science can sometimes be useful to make certain concepts legible or to compare certain ideas in the same way as TEK, users of the term must be careful not to let it slip into an implicit validation of the universality of Western science, the very notion of “science,” and the concept of “scientific thinking.” While I wish to be critical of the settler systems within which these terms circulate, I appreciate their usefulness in certain contexts. Strategically deploying a term like Indigenous Science can absolutely support sovereignty as a political project, but it need not become an ultimate metric by which Indigenous Knowledge is judged.

historically. However, as I began the aspect of my field work in tribal government spaces, especially, I realized that there were many tribally run projects that were already seeking to record this knowledge, and specifically, to enact Data Sovereignty over this information. While I would of course have elected to store information with the tribes and honor the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, I still felt that sharing this information within the wider academic community was not necessary for the wellbeing of the community and was a worse option than having community-oriented and community-run data collection. As a result, I moved away from this aspect of my research and decided to focus more on the structural systems at play that draw from this type of data towards the goal of climate mitigation and preparedness.

I made a similar decision about keeping information in community regarding the cultural histories I discuss. The basis for the Lingít worldview is arguably found in our oldest stories, the Raven Cycle. Raven is a trickster figure who created human beings and shaped the world as we know it, but who also makes a great deal of mischief. I look to the Raven stories for several interrelated reasons. The first is that because they are shared by all clans and are the oldest, I think they best represent what could be considered a “Lingít” worldview rather than a Kaagwaantaan worldview or a Deisheetaan, etc. – in other words, a specific clan – worldview. The notion of a unified Lingít identity is arguably a colonial construct, but the shared linguistic and cultural basis allows for at least a broadly constructed unity even without the invention of something like Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska as a shared political entity. The clan perspective, and more specifically, the house perspective is extremely vital within Lingít culture, and I want to note that those aspects will be largely absent here. This is a complex topic because much of this knowledge, as well as physical clan houses, have been forcibly removed due to settler colonialism. Additionally, clans and clan houses own their at.óow

(clan property⁸), which includes crests, stories, and physical objects. I went into this project knowing that I would need to approach the clan stories with care. While I could obtain permission to use stories for my dissertation, I worried that making these stories accessible in academic spaces would result in them being used or cited by other scholars who actually do not have permission to use them. This stance was solidified when I read “Visiting as an Indigenous feminist practice” by Eve Tuck et al. I am specifically interested in the following quote:

Instead, we keep the details of the cosmologies that inform our understandings of visiting offstage. We actively engage them, refer to them, relate to them in the sections below, but we do not recount or divulge them. In doing this, we keep the specificities of the cosmologies that inform our work out of the pile of knowledge that academia is always trying to collect. At the same time, we write in a way that aspires to be legible to members of our communities who also know these big stories about where everything in the universe is coming from and going toward. (Tuck et al. 2022, 3)

With this in mind, I enact a form of refusal (Simpson 2014) in which public stories shared by all clans are made available but other stories are gestured to without betraying intimate detail

⁸ On the subject of property and ownership, it is worth noting that the Lingít concept is well-established and well-documented (Worl 1998; Thornton 2012; Goldschmidt, Haas, and Thornton 1998). While at.óow – including songs, stories, and crests – has been noted as one place where ownership is clearly delineated and strictly enforced, clan-based ownership is the basis for a great deal of social life in Lingít culture. For example, hunting, fishing, and gathering spots are the “property” of specific clans to harvest from and to care for, even when some of these areas are now “owned” in the Western legal sense by other entities. I draw attention to this to illustrate three specific points about Lingít “ownership.” The first is that the clan ownership system is not based on dominion over the land as is the case with the Western legal system, but rather on collective use-rights that are based in respectful relationships to not harvest too much and to maintain balance. The second is the collective nature of the clan system, which has a different emphasis than the Euro-American system that often focuses on individual ownership. Third, I want to note that while certain aspects of ownership have broken down due to the imposition of settler colonial governance and due to shifting political organization via the introduction of tribal governments and tribal corporations, this ownership is nevertheless still thought of as legitimate and relevant in many cases. Despite a loss of knowledge or protocols surrounding this type of clan ownership, many in community do still follow these guidelines, and certainly take note when others do not. As such, while one might argue that the Western legal system has superseded the clan system, it is a far more complex dynamic. One might instead say that a number of contested types of ownership have been layered on top of the clan system, but that, for many Lingít and Alaska Native people in the region, the clan system is in fact still the primary vector through which ownership and/or use-rights are understood.

through the confessional register of ethnography. As such, the Raven Cycle forms the main historical and theoretical background for the dissertation.

The concept of ethnographic refusal is an important framework important throughout this dissertation. Audra Simpson theorizes forms of refusal in relation to the history of ethnography with her own Mohawk community, refusal of the state by that same sovereign nation, and her own positionality as a Native anthropologist. She indicates that part of her work on sovereignty and on taking that as a serious mode of engagement is to refuse the temptation towards the static and the “traditional” that is so often the focus of ethnographic work on Indigenous peoples.

Simpson writes,

Indeed, sovereignty matters, as a methodological issue in and of itself, but such mattering also engenders other ethnographic forms: namely refusal. And this form of refusal is not to operationalise nor to genuflect to recent formulations of alternative methodology such as “radical indigenism” – something that is neither radical nor indigenous but rather, in the name of “tradition,” structuring yet another expectation of a culturally “pure” indigenous subject. Rather, it is my proposition that to think about “sovereignty” – a construct which is always a bestowal and as such is deeply imperfect but critical for these moments in Indigenous/Settler-State relations – is to think very seriously about needs and, basically, involves a calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in. (Simpson 2007, 72)

This idea of what the reader “needs to know” – enacted by Simpson’s own refusal to write about certain topics – resonates with Tuck et al.’s assertion that some information is for the community and need not be repeated within academic spaces. I assert a blend of these standpoints as part of my own framework. Throughout this dissertation, I do frame several discussions from the

perspective of a Lingít worldview. However, I refuse to engage with an ethnographic style that makes the ceremonial and cultural “traditions” of an Indigenous community its narrative basis. Geertzian “thick description” and deep ethnographic exposition are not included in this dissertation. This is very much by design. I refuse to make my own relatives and community “other” by writing as if I am baffled at the newness of my experiences. The way that I experience my own culture is not fodder for anthropology, so those elements will not appear in my writing. Similarly, those cultural elements are a theoretical grounding for my argument, but they are not the direct object of my analysis. Instead, I choose to analyze both the interaction between settlers and Alaska Native peoples and forms of Lingít adaptation within a settler colonial system that reflect longstanding cultural traditions.

Methodology

My orientation to Lingít theory/worlding undermines the typical academic dynamic, drawing instead from Indigenous methodologies of relationality (Kovach 2010; Wilson 2008). It is the Indigenous perspective and orientation that is assumed as normative, while colonial interventions are viewed with an ethnographic lens of skepticism and critique (see TallBear 2013). My ethnographic research is based on participant observation and interviews. I also interrogate various sources, including travel writing, novels, corporate entities, and federal agencies, not to consult their authority, but to interrogate their place within the settler colonial project. This is, however, not to assume a lens of purity for that same Lingít theory. I emphasize that worlding is an ongoing and negotiated project, which is proven by the very Lingít interactions with these same corporate entities, federal agencies, and literary traditions. The theoretical work that is being done – analyzing colonial systems/entities from an Indigenous

perspective – has been an ongoing project since the arrival of settlers in what is now known as the Americas. This is simply my own rendition of that critical lens.

This methodological choice was, in turn, reflected in the process of choosing which events to write about and with whom I chose to speak. I mostly spoke with working professionals and even spoke with several non-Indigenous or non-Lingít employees of various tribes and organizations. This is not to say that my interlocutors who are Lingít or Indigenous do not hold Indigenous Knowledge. In fact, I am arguing the opposite. Haa *kuusteeyí* is just as important within these professional spaces as it is at a *ku'eex'*. I seek to honor that by focusing on the ways that culture shows up throughout different aspects of life, and not only as embodied by certain members of the community who are deemed “Native enough.” Often within academic texts and spaces, there is a dismissal of Indigenous people who are not “culture bearers” or elders. The presumption that only people with certain legible characteristics have anything to share about the culture is both disingenuous to lived Lingít experience and limits understandings of who or what is legitimately Lingít to the dictates of a colonial, anthropological imagination. I reject this framing, drawing from Dian Million’s concept of “theory from life” to bring everyday experiences to the forefront of my work.

To project a sense of purity onto these experiences is to assume that purity ever existed in Indigenous cultures, which traded, traveled, and intermarried far and wide.⁹ To be Lingít today is to be simultaneously walking in different worlds. There are as many ways to engage with our culture as there are Lingít people. No one can do it all, and I have chosen to explore a variety of perspectives that intersect largely with tribal government, non-profit spaces, and, to a certain

⁹ Also see “Afterword: Meeting the Land(s) Where They Are At: A Conversation Between Erin Marie Konsmo (Métis) and Karyn Recollet (Urban Cree)” for further discussion of the colonial implications of “purity” (Konsmo and Recollet 2018).

extent, corporations. People in these spaces also engage with other aspects of culture in and outside of work. Perspectives vary greatly on what engagement with community looks like. Within the messiness of this variety, my fieldwork sought to address this gap by being grounded in a Lingít vision of the world, as has already been implied by my discussion of the Raven Cycle. As such, I take up an understanding of Lingít “theory” as something that has existed since time immemorial. Despite this word gesturing to a Western philosophy and academia, conceptions about how the world works and our role in it as human beings is not limited to Western thought. Leanne Betasomasake Simpson writes of theory in the Nishnaabeg context, explaining how it is relational, it shows how to live one’s life, and it is active. She writes, “‘Theory’ is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice” (Simpson 2017, 151). Additionally, Vanessa Watts writes, “[I]t is not that Indigenous peoples do not theorize, but that these complex theories are not distinct from place” (2013, 22). This embodied and place-based form of theorizing is thus an iterative process and, indeed, can be quite distinct between communities or people. As such, this is also not to imply purity of Lingít thought; the idea that Indigenous cultures are “pure” and “untouched” is a colonial fiction. Nevertheless, Lingít understandings of the world prevail, and this is the orientation that informs my larger methodology.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One elaborates on my understanding of Lingít worlding and intellectual thought through three main categories: the Raven Cycle, elder speeches, and theory in practice. The Raven Cycle provides historical basis and illustrates some of the oldest examples of adaptation in Lingít culture. These theories continue to unfold in more recent history, specifically via adaptations in Lingít pedagogy in the 1980s. This plays out in a series of elder speeches, which I draw on to illustrate some of the cultural relationship towards adaptation under settler

colonialism. I similarly discuss some of the ways that haa kuusteeyí, drawing from cultural values, histories, and teachings, emerges in the workplace. This includes tribal governments, corporations, and other professional spaces. Attention to these spaces is important in acknowledging ongoing climate change mitigation and prevention work as it occurs in community, but also in refusing narratives of purity that only allow for stereotypical engagements with culture and value systems.

Chapter Two takes the larger lens of Alaska and narratives that are told about the state in relation to climate change. With arctic regions, melting sea ice, and polar bears, Alaska is often seen as the poster child for climate change campaigns (Smith 2025). I discuss this through the lens of “climate proxies” (Pringle 2025), which serve as a way to represent a process that is not directly visible due to its physical and time scales. I argue that Alaska itself becomes a climate proxy, allowing climate change to be pushed off to the arctic, thereby allowing people to ignore the ongoing changes. Southeast Alaska is a good place to illustrate external views of Alaska. The region does not fit the typical image of an arctic wasteland, but it has melting glaciers and plenty of wildlife. Because it is further south, it is also visited by the most number of tourists. Additionally, Alaska is viewed both as “pristine nature” and “untamed wilderness,” stereotypes that contribute to its allure for tourists and settlers. This dichotomy has also allowed it to be a place for massive resource exploitation and extraction. As such, I argue that Alaska is imagined as a tragic case where climate change is felt and also where a future of climate change is imagined. Southeast Alaska is both incorporated into and separate from this imagined future at various scales and moments in time.

I then move into three different case studies that reflect aspects of climate change in Sitka and in southeast Alaska more broadly. In Chapter Three, I discuss tourism in Sitka, specifically

through a failed ballot proposition for a cruise ship passenger cap in May of 2025. While the settlers in favor of the proposition focused largely on issues like subsistence and their “way of life,” I argue that this was largely a performative measure meant to bring them closer to a sense of Indigeneity, meanwhile also distancing them from the ephemeral experiences of the tourists. Similarly, the timescale of tourist presence every summer is experienced differently by Indigenous peoples who are viewing it from within both a 10,000 plus year presence on the land, and through the experience of settler colonialism. However, the larger implications of a changing climate and of the negative impact of tourism on the environment is also felt differently by Lingít people who are concerned with the health of the land for our future descendants. By contrast, settlers are concerned more with immediate issues like air quality, and tourists themselves are concerned more with on-board issues like reducing plastic waste, or are oftentimes seduced by the greenwashing efforts of big companies. Lingít people have also been dealing with and marketing to tourists for well over a century and, arguably, since the very arrival of Europeans in the region. This historical practice has shaped current engagement, for example, the type of art marketed to visitors. These different temporal and spatial scales intersect in issues like whether or not to place a cap on cruise passenger numbers, illustrating a myriad of different investments.

One of the major pushes right now concerning cruise tourism is increased water and air quality monitoring in communities. Monitoring and data collection projects are common among tribes in the region, and these projects become part of the case study in Chapter Four, where I delve into the phenomenon of research and research funding in southeast Alaska. With increased concerns about climate change comes an increase in the need for scientific study about these topics. While Traditional Knowledge and histories tell us much about our environment, that information has been collected and added to for countless generations. Current environmental

changes are fast and unpredictable, pushing tribes and other organizations to partner with Western scientists and utilize the tools of Western science as needed. While there are a number of tribally-based projects that are by and for community, for the most part, external researchers have little knowledge of how to properly work in community. I share my experiences working on a project to educate researchers about protocols, and explain some of the issues with overly simplified models that funding agencies prefer. In this chapter, I focus specifically on the National Science Foundation and the model of “co-production,” which is meant to further incorporate communities into research design and execution. I argue that the model of grants-based funding does not allow for meaningful engagement with Indigenous relationality and values, and that co-production itself is premised on a doomed offer of recognition that in fact simply reinforces settler colonial power dynamics. Nevertheless, examples of tribal engagement with research illustrates that these tools can be useful with more intentional community engagement.

In the final case study in Chapter Five, I investigate another tool that, through community engagement, offers some utility to work within settler colonial systems. This chapter considers “Transformative Scenario Planning,” its history, and its usage in southeast Alaska in a regional planning project that took place in 2024. I was a part of the scenario planning team for a regional network that ended up producing the “Possible Futures for Southeast Alaska” document. The document lays out four future scenarios for Southeast Alaska between 2025 and 2050. Initiated by the CDFI Spruce Root, there were over thirty contributors region-wide, including several who are Lingít. The planning process involved contested claims to the future of the region, including some back and forth over settler inclusion within Indigenous issues. This hinted at a desire for hybridity (Arvin 2019), resulting in Indigenous-specific futures being largely left out of the first

scenario drafts. However, by establishing a Native-specific category within the scenario building process, tribes and corporations were incorporated into the document as their own distinct entities, thereby refusing settler hybridity and settler moves to Indigeneity. I argue that the engagement by the Lingít participants was an example of ancestral futurism that is grounded in the long Lingít history on our land. This theme of Indigenous futurism is reflected in the conclusion, which focuses on a Youth Summit held in 2022, and on the potential for other youth and future-oriented projects that reinforce principles of haa kuusteeyí and haa shuká.

Chapter One: 10,000 Years of Lingít Worlding

At the 2023 Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) Retreat, the assembled attendees heard a rendition of “Raven Brings Fire” told by a board member of the Community Development Financial Institution, Spruce Root.¹ In this story, Raven sees lava from an underwater volcano and wants to retrieve it and bring it for all beings to use. He does not want to go himself and tries to convince various other birds to go, finally getting Hawk Owl to venture out. Hawk Owl tries several times unsuccessfully, fearing each time that his large and impressive beak will be burnt off. Raven convinces him to try one last time and Hawk Owl makes it back, though his beak is reduced to a stub. This story is one of many examples of needing to try things multiple times before finding success, as was explained to the retreat attendees. This important cultural value includes needing to be creative and innovative, thereby accepting the need for multiple attempts. Though, of course, Raven seldom does so with any risk to himself. This story is also a part of what is referred to as the Raven Cycle, a series of stories in which Raven shapes the world as we know it through various (often instructive) misadventures.

The telling of “Raven Brings Fire” at the SSP retreat was an example of Lingít history and knowledge being learned from and applied in everyday practice. These stories are not relegated to the past or to anthropological texts. They are still being told and utilized by our people in the everyday. While the SSP is a largely Native-run and Native-focused organization, it is not a tribal government or more traditional clan structure. Even so, this story was brought into that space and shared as a means of conveying Lingít values that have, in turn, shaped the values of the SSP itself.

¹ The Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) is a regional collective impact network focused on building capacity and relationships in southeast Alaska. Spruce Root is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). CDFIs provide financial services within underserved communities and are certified by the Department of the Treasury (“What it means to be a CDFI” Spruce Root). Spruce Root is the parent organization of the SSP.

This chapter focuses on the importance of oral traditions in the Lingít cultural worldview, and the way that this oral literature serves as the basis for haa *kuusteeyí*, our way of life. These traditions continue to be relevant, not only in ceremony, but also in everyday life, even in the face of ongoing settler colonialism. Haa *kuusteeyí*, I argue, is not only something to engage with in ceremonial practice; it is also enacted and expanded upon in all aspects of Lingít life. I refer to this lived and evolving cultural orientation as “Lingít worlding.” While “worlding” has been defined in a number of ways in science and technology studies, (post)colonial studies, and beyond (for example, Haraway 2008; Spivak 2003; Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020), for my own purposes, I draw on Joseph M. Pierce’s book, *Speculative Relations: Indigenous Worlding and Repair* (2025). Pierce defines worlding as “the enactment of relational thinking in the context of Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies. To uphold the relational principles of kinship is to ensure the proper ordering of the world” (2025, 1-2). This requires an understanding of Pierce’s definition of relation(ality), which is as follows: “Relations constitute ways of understanding and enacting bodily, spiritual, and affective dispositions through which both individuals and communities mobilize the rights and responsibilities of care” (2025, 6). The proper ordering of the Lingít world draws on a long intellectual tradition held in Traditional Knowledge and in our oral traditions and histories. I will also refer to these interrelated and lived cultural practices – haa *kuusteeyí* – as the Lingít thought-world. This is meant to indicate the relationship between the way that the world is ordered through relationality and kinship, and the way those relations are acted out in various cultural practices and in everyday life.

While Lingít worlding/the Lingít thought-world has many components, I am choosing to focus on three – often interrelated – themes. They are: 1) the Raven Cycle, 2) Lingít oratory, and 3) lived theory. The Raven cycle is the historical foundation that forms the basis for a shared

understanding of the world. Oratory, generally in the form of public speeches, draws on and contributes to this shared understanding of the world. Speeches are rich in metaphor and allusions to cultural principles and are also often used to assert certain ideas about how the world does/should work. Both Raven stories and oratory contribute heavily to Lingít worlding. Finally, drawing on Dian Million's conception of theory from life, I illustrate how the ideas and values established in the Raven Cycle and in oratory are brought out in everyday life. In some cases, this knowledge might be used in relation to living on the land or gathering food or other supplies. However, Lingít people also use this knowledge to guide their personal and professional lives, like at the SSP retreat. The existence of Lingít worlding even in the face of climate change and in spaces that initially appear to be solely part of the settler colonial world illustrates the new and evolving ways that Lingít worlding remains pertinent within a settler colonial lived reality.

This chapter is meant to set the theoretical and intellectual stage for the rest of the dissertation, and it is very intentionally doing so by drawing specifically from the Lingít worldview. Anthropologists (and other scholars) often apply the work of Western intellectuals to their field sites.² They bring in external intellectual thought to understand what is going on in the places they observe. Despite the utility of external thought in some cases, this oftentimes omits the thought-worlds of their interlocutors. Researchers often ignore the place-based

² This observation arises specifically from an experience I had in a class reading Lisa Stevenson's book, *Life Beside Itself*. Stevenson is a non-Indigenous anthropologist writing about Inuit experiences with the tuberculosis epidemic (1940s-60s), and the suicide epidemic (1980s-today). Throughout the text, Stevenson relies heavily on scholars like Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud. What stood out to me at the time was her reliance on Benjamin and Freud in a discussion of dreams. In class, I pointed out that Inuit people have their own understandings of dreams and their meanings. It seemed strange to me to rely on these theorists when talking about Inuit youth. I was told that my intervention was indicative of the Ontological Turn and was a) not worth discussing and b) was in fact insulting to Inuit communities – as if being analyzed through the lens of Benjamin was the highest form of honor. Of course, I am not Inuit, so it is not for me in this specific instance to litigate the merits of Stevenson's analysis from an Inuit perspective. However, being Lingít, I would be deeply disturbed if a scholar were to take such an approach to my community, especially when applied to such a form of community trauma. With this in mind, I seek an alternative approach that honors the work of Lingít people who theorize our own worlding external to the works of established white male settler colonial hegemony.

epistemologies at play, resulting in misinterpretations of what they observe, and sometimes even sharing things that are not theirs to share. This can sometimes even be an internal impediment, when certain Western thinkers seem to have a strangle hold on key ideas. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes that she always felt hesitant discussing anticapitalism in her work because she felt she had not spent enough time thinking about Karl Marx. However, she identified this as “cognitive imperialism” and writes, “Indigenous peoples have extremely rich anticapitalist practices in our own histories and current realities. I think it is important that we continue the work of our Ancestors and our elders in critiquing and analyzing capitalism...and its impacts on us from our own perspective” (Simpson 2017, 72). In each case, Indigenous thought becomes secondary to the Western canon and is sometimes even erased entirely.

Extractive scholarship about Indigenous communities is common and well-funded. It has also been critiqued extensively by Indigenous scholars. Vanessa Watts writes about the tendency of settler academics to abstract Indigenous histories, making them out to be mere myths. She writes, “Our understandings of the world are often viewed as mythic by ‘modern’ society, while our stories are considered to be an alternative mode of understanding and interpretation rather than ‘real’ events” (Watts 2012, 22). When Indigenous thought has been given attention by settler scholars, it is still often abstracted. Watts gives the example of the trickster figure of Coyote being taken up in the work of Donna Haraway as “a *process* of boundary implosion” (emphasis in original, 2012, 28). According to Watts, this results in Indigenous histories still being understood as “an abstracted tool of the West” (2012, 28). Similarly, Métis scholar Zoe Todd critiques the way that academia refuses to contend with its colonial legacy (2016). She argues that climate change is largely associated with the arctic, and even as Inuit activists have greatly influenced and shaped this discourse, their contributions are often ignored. While

academic trends and disciplinary paradigm shifts are informed by Indigenous Knowledge, no credit is given to actual Indigenous thinkers (Todd 2016). She writes,

[W]hen will I hear someone reference Indigenous thinkers... [w]ithout filtering ideas through white intermediaries – apologies to the vast majority of my anthropology colleagues – but by citing and quoting Indigenous thinkers directly, unambiguously and generously. As thinkers in their own right, not just disembodied representatives of an amorphous Indigeneity that serves European intellectual or political purposes, and not just as research subjects or vaguely defined ‘collaborators’. As dynamic Philosophers and Intellectuals, full stop. (Todd 2016, 7)

Todd argues that the balm to this is to cite beyond and outside of these Euro-Western traditions, generously and often (2016). In the same vein, Watts asserts that Indigenous history and thought must be taken on its own terms through connection to land and attention to the non-human world (2012). I seek to do both, orienting my own theoretical approach around Indigenous thinkers and letting Lingít worlding speak for itself, without further intermediaries.

Rather than following an anthropological orientation rooted in this history of appropriation, I frame this chapter through the Lingít worldview as it emerged in a specific historical and cultural context. This form of Lingít worlding will be traced through Raven stories, Lingít oratory, and lived theory. I argue that Lingít worlding has been a continuous, living, and ongoing form of world-making that has existed since time immemorial and that continues today, adapting as needed in the current moment of settler colonialism and climate change.

The Raven Cycle

Raven is depicted often in art and stories due to his important cultural role. In Lingít culture, Raven is a creator and shaper of the world, a crest shared by half of all clans, and a

trickster figure who does a variety of ridiculous (and entertaining) things. Lingít artist Alison Bremner prominently features Raven in much of her work. In one formline painting, as listed on the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology website, Raven is shown holding a large weapon, and the piece is titled “How Raven Accidentally Wiped Out the Dinosaurs.” It is meant to continue and expand on Raven stories, in a playful way that is aligned with the trickster’s own actions. In another painting on the Stonington Gallery website, “Malibu Raven,” Raven wears sunglasses and high heels, and is meant to represent the fact that Lingít people used to travel as far south as California to trade. Each of these artworks calls on the larger body of Raven stories, while also adding their own playful and contemporary twists, even as they reference historical events. In this way, they are quintessential examples both of Raven’s own actions and of the form taken by Raven stories. They reference and build on one another, and on temporal ambiguities that arise in their telling. Storytellers may reference colonialism or contemporary events while discussing historical events that happened before the world even existed as we know it.³ Similarly, both of Bremner’s artworks reference things more recently introduced in Lingít Aaní; the gun and high heels. These paintings also show the continued liveliness of Raven stories and of Raven himself as a figure. It is not simply that people continue to reference and tell these stories, but also to reconfigure and expand upon them.

These artistic references are inspired by stories in the Raven Cycle, which is our most ancient history as a people. The Cycle tells of Raven being born, being almost killed by his uncle, and how he went on to shape the world and eventually create people. Alongside historical

³ For example, when Shaadaax’ Robert Zuboff is talking about Raven bringing salmon to the people, he references the fact that “The White Man, he come around. He say we got to have permit.” (This version of the story was included in an early manuscript of Dauenhauer et al. 2025). These are temporally distinct incidents but illustrate contemporary issues with state issued permits. This is then related to Raven’s own attempts to make fishing easier for himself and, by extension, Lingít people.

information, the Raven Cycle also provides insights into various cultural values, as well as characteristics of Raven – both as a figure and as a bird. This information serves as the basis for cultural practices and cultural conceptions, for example, about responses to large-scale environmental disasters. Due to the importance of this cultural knowledge, I am grounding my understanding of Lingít worlding in the Raven Cycle. I chose these histories for three main reasons. First, these stories are public and, because they are not clan property, it is more appropriate for them to be shared.⁴ Second, these stories form the basis of Lingít thought – and haa *kuustee’yí* – because they are the oldest and most widespread. While the culture is very dispersed and many traditions are passed down within clans and house groups, meaning there is not historically a cohesive “Lingít culture,” Raven stories are generally shared among all clans. Third, these stories are deeply rooted in both change and the natural world. Indeed, land is arguably the most fundamental part of this and, by extension, so are its inhabitants. The orientation towards land provides a great deal of environmental knowledge, and information on how past disasters are perceived and understood.

The Raven Cycle has a specific series of events, though different storytellers may tell different versions or often abbreviated versions that rely on the knowledge of the listener. In order to convey the basic structure, I tell an abbreviated version that will work through the major events and timeline. I draw on *Yéil Kundayaayí: Adventures of Raven*, edited by Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Richard Dauenhauer, Will Geiger, and Jeff Leer. This is not meant to be a

⁴ I have heard a number of different opinions about how to treat stories in relation to what Nora and Richard Dauenhauer call “oral copyright” (1987, 28). They state that anyone can tell a story and need only acknowledge the clan who owns it. Despite having heard similar things in academic contexts – specifically the idea that once a story has been published in a book, there is no need to ask permission to use it – I have also heard from trusted sources that in order to publish a story in an academic context, one must always obtain explicit permission from that clan. Per Tuck et al. (2022), I seek to avoid further circulation of clan stories in academic and non-Native spaces. As they write, “In doing this, we keep the specificities of the cosmologies that inform our work out of the pile of knowledge that academia is always trying to collect” (Tuck et al. 2022, 3). Thus, I have chosen to largely focus on Raven stories that do not belong to specific clans.

definitive telling of the story, and any mistakes are my own, either in interpretation or telling. The experience and the breadth of these stories could never be fully conveyed in English or in writing. I preface with this simply to say that this is a pale imitation of the real thing; this telling is ultimately about function over form. Storytelling is an incredible craft, and this is a mere sketch.

This story begins with Raven's maternal uncle, Yookis'kookéik. He was a powerful man who controlled the tide, and he ruled through force and aggression. Some say that he made the whole rest of the world his slaves. Yookis'kookéik did not want his sister having children. Every time she tried, he killed the child before it was born. Finally, Láx' (Heron), told her to swallow a stone and that stone would grow into a child, and so Láx' was Raven's father.

Raven's mother was able to give birth to a baby and sneak it away from her brother. This child was Raven. When Raven was a little older, his uncle nevertheless tried to kill him. Yookis'kookéik set multiple traps for Raven. Each time, Raven escaped.

Finally, Raven's uncle got so angry that he called forth a great flood. Raven helped his mother escape by dressing her in the skin of a duck. Raven himself flew off into the sky and eventually stuck his beak into the fabric of the sky and stayed there while the waters receded. Yookis'kookéik thought that Raven and his mother were dead because of the flood.

After this, much of the world had been wiped clean by the wave, and Raven needed rest and food. He wanted a place to land and ended up landing among the bull kelp. Bull kelp can form large, hardened rafts, which proved perfect for Raven to rest. Soon, however, he wanted to return to the mainland, so he had Sea Otter help him by throwing pebbles and sand into the

ocean to create islands. This is how the Aleutian Islands were formed. Raven would fly a little and then rest on one of the new islands as he grew tired. In this manner, he made it home.

Sometime after this or perhaps on the way back, Raven looked out to sea and saw fire coming up from under the water. He did not wish to fly so far, so he asked all the creatures if they would fly out there for him. After being refused over and over, he asked Hawk Owl, and, appealed to his pride, convincing him to fly out. Hawk Owl had a long beak, well suited to carrying a branch. Hawk Owl flew out with a branch clamped in his beak, but dropped it on the return journey, saying the fire burned his beak on the way back. Again, Raven appealed to his pride and complimented his speed and strength. Finally, Hawk Owl flew out and made it all the way back, but the branch burned his beak down to a stub, which is why owls have short beaks.

Eventually, Raven decided he wanted to bring daylight to the world. He saw some people who told him where the daylight was being kept. A head man had it at the head of the Nass River. Raven went there and turned himself into a down feather so that the daughter of the head man would swallow him, and he could become her baby. But the people in the house noticed and threw the feather out. Raven tried again and this time he turned into a pine needle so he would be swallowed more easily. Indeed, the young woman swallowed the pine needle and though she felt it go down and tried to cough it up, she could not. As such, she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby, and her father loved this child that was actually Raven. As grandparents do, he gave the boy anything he wanted. Raven would cry and cry until he was allowed to play with the box that contained the stars. As he was playing, he opened the box and the stars all flew outside. Then he did the same with the box that contained the moon. And finally, he played with the box of daylight and, when the smoke hole of the head man's longhouse was open, he transformed back into a raven and flew out through the hole. As Raven flew across the sky, daylight

transformed the land. And as daylight broke, some people were scared, and they fled into the ocean. They became sea animals. Others were scared and fled into the forest, and they became beings of the forest. Then finally, some people stayed where they were, and they were human beings. And this is why we treat all beings with respect because we are all related and we all have spirit.

While other scholars may choose to focus on the intricacies and symbolism of these texts, I am more interested in the broader strokes of knowledge held in these stories. This is about constructing a sense of the Lingít world for the sake of interrogating present-day understandings of climate change and settler colonialism, not about a close reading of these as literary texts. As such, while some specific elders and iterations are cited in my analysis, the larger framework I am constructing will draw from my own retelling of the story. The Raven Cycle provides information on how to live. This includes moral instruction, practical advice on how things are done, as well as larger theoretical notions of how to live in a world of constant change.

The Raven Cycle includes a number of negative role models. While Raven sometimes serves in this role, there are other figures that are even more obviously the antithesis of Lingít values. The first is Raven's uncle, and another is the head man of the Nass who steals and hoards all the light in the world to himself. In each case, the acts are based on moments of bad relationality. Raven's uncle wants control over the whole world, and the head man refuses to share daylight with the people. In each case, it is up to Raven to undo this selfish act and free these pieces of the world for all beings. This reflects cultural beliefs about sharing as a form of wealth and status in community.

In addition to lessons on values,⁵ Raven stories also provide factual information about Lingít practices. For example, in Kuchéin Frank Italio’s telling of “Raven and Daylight,” there is a description of the highborn daughter giving birth. She is at first meant to give birth over a pit lined with martin skins. While the pain goes away when she sits over the pit, indicating the position to give birth is correct, the baby still would not come. Finally, they send for an elder, described as “unfazole” and she says the pit needs to be lined with moss, not martin skins, indicating that this is the proper lining for the birthing pit. Indeed, once the moss is in place baby comes quickly and with little pain (Dauenhauer et al. 2025, 147-148).

The Raven Cycle also provides theoretical approaches to living with constant change. Raven flees the great flood by flying upwards to escape. In later stories, humans took a similar approach in another great flood that occurred in more recent history. Oral history and physical evidence (in the form of alpine cairns and other stone structures) suggest that Lingít people fled both into the interior and into the mountains to avoid the rising waters (Hunt et al. 2016). When it was safe, people returned to old village sites or migrated to new ones, like how Raven returned home and rebuilt after his own experience in the flood. There are also even more recent clan histories depicting smaller-scale floods and subsequent migrations, though I will not go into details on these stories. Other stories tell of migration due to environmental changes with glaciers, or other events like huge storms blowing canoes off course. The theme of environmental impacts is common and old, given its appearance in the story of Raven and his uncle. Such stories inform the ongoing discussions of climate change, given the long history of adaptation and innovation in the face of similarly massive changes.

⁵ While the stories include important lessons, this is not to say that Raven is himself a paragon of moral values or someone who always acts perfectly. We can learn from Raven’s mistakes, and we see that no being is above flaws, which is also a common theme in these stories.

In a slightly more indirect way, these same principles have been used in adaptation to settler colonialism. Throughout this dissertation are examples of Lingít people adapting to and utilizing new settler colonial ideas, materials, and structures. The themes of constant change, adaptation, and perseverance all show up in the Raven Cycle, and have helped inform Lingít responses to settler colonialism. As the world changes around Raven, he seeks to make his own changes, aiding his own needs and journey. He adapts himself when needed – for example, by sticking his beak into the sky – but also adapts his surroundings – for example, by creating the Aleutian Islands to make his way home. Change and adaptation go hand in hand. As environments and homelands experienced changes over the generations, Lingít people also adapted as needed.

However, this is not always a smooth process. A theme in Raven Cycle is the need to attempt things multiple times, rather than expecting success on the first try. In Daanaawaak Austin Hammond’s version of “Raven and Fire,” he states, “This is the Tlingit perspective: it is only on the third time that we listen closely” (Dauenhauer et al. 2025, 471). When you ask a third time, many feel called to do as you ask. Repetition is essential to finding a solution. Raven also tries multiple times to be swallowed by the Head Man’s daughter. He tries first as a downy feather and only succeeds as a pine needle on his second try. Even then, the young woman still tries to cough and puke up the needle, though she is ultimately unsuccessful. Raven also must release multiple different boxes before he releases the sun, therefore completing his task. Raven tries and experiments with different plans until he is successful. Similarly, Lingít people have had various responses to settler colonialism, and while suggesting that any have been “successful” is perhaps inaccurate, these various courses of action have certainly yielded a range

of adaptations that have allowed us to continue our cultural practices and live continuously on our homelands.

Opening the Box of Knowledge: Active Engagement Not Cultural Preservation

This section considers adaptation that is rooted in an important form of Lingít oratory: speeches. Here, I consider the way that several elders are constructing and explaining their worldview, specifically in response to settler colonialism and the importance of continuing cultural practices. I will first explain the practical cultural importance of this form of oratory, then go into detail about the context of the specific speeches I am considering. This is not meant to be any sort of linguistic analysis or close reading of the speeches. Rather, I am drawing out some key themes that emerged from the 1980 Sealaska Elders Conference and that continue to influence engagement with culture to this day.

This form of oratory is dependent on an exchange between the two moieties. When a person of one naax gives a speech, there is generally a response from the opposite naax to assure balance. This can be observed in the setting of a *ku.éex'*, but also in public ceremonies, conference openings, and any number of other events taking place on Lingít Aaní. While this form of oratory is now less prevalent due to the decline in speakers of the Lingít language, it is still generally followed as a cultural protocol. This is not something that people simply do but is in fact something that people train for extensively (Marks 2025). It requires great skill in the language and the ability to draw “on various resources to connect to other interactions, ancestors, space, and time,” as well as using “objects of literacy recognized by Tlingits” to connect through time and space with ancestors and clan histories (Marks 2025, 48).

One example of such an exchange outside of the *ku.éex'* context was at the Sharing Our Knowledge conference, which was held in Sheet'ká in September of 2024. The conference is, in

part, a clan conference meant to bring people together from around the region to discuss culture and clan business. It is also partially an academic conference. The welcoming ceremony is an important part of the conference, allowing the local clans to welcome their guests and enact any outstanding business as needed. It is, essentially, a moment where cultural protocols are front and center, outweighing the more bureaucratic aspects of the conference. At the 2024 conference, the Sheet'ká Raven clans began and shared some speeches and songs, calling out to the Eagle clans in attendance. Next, the Eagles spoke, called out to the Ravens, and shared some of their clan songs. In each case, the moieties called out to other clans in their speeches to show their presence and support. When each clan name is called, those present call out, indicating that they are present and uplifting those of the opposite moiety. This approach is considered to be balanced and, especially in a *ku.éex'* setting, there can be a much more elaborate call and response. However, there are more casual events wherein such protocols are present, and this welcoming ceremony was an example of these protocols in practice.

When we consider the way our elders and ancestors have influenced and continue to influence us, it is essential to consider their thought as the groundwork for our current moment, like at the Sharing Our Knowledge conference. These practices and protocols are still in existence, though sometimes in a diminished way, given the impact of genocide and cultural genocide on our people. While many elders have passed and fewer people speak Lingít fluently due to assimilation tactics of the US government, there is – fortunately – a wealth of knowledge to draw from in the form of recorded speeches from various cultural events.

One such event was the first Sealaska Elders Conference, which was held in Sitka at the Shee Atiká Lodge in 1980. This conference led to the founding of Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) as elders expressed their exhaustion with trying to continue Lingít cultural practices alone.

There was an exchange of oratory at this conference, all in Lingít, that has since been translated to English and published. The conference was structured largely around students from the Sitka Native Education Program (SNEP) who performed clan songs and dances for the assembled elders. They were led by their teacher, Kaal.átk' Charlie Joseph, who also gave explanations and speeches in between the performances. SNEP, founded by Isabella Brady in 1974, continues to this day and is designed to allow Lingít children to learn cultural knowledge as part of their schooling and as an after-school activity. All the children are taught together, rather than being divided by clan, which was a drastic change from the way that Tlingit pedagogy had previously functioned (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1989). Prior to colonization, children learned from those in their clan and specifically learned songs belonging to their clan and sometimes their father's clan. Kaal.átk' was aware that some elders may not approve of this shift in pedagogy and addresses it in his speech (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1989). However, the elders in attendance spoke in support of the students and, as a result, many clans borrow the Kaagwaantaan songs that Kaal.átk' taught because they were taught to the younger generations and have therefore been remembered.

In between student performances, elders in attendance exchanged speeches. From these speeches, I want to highlight the theme of needing to interact with and live our culture, and that ancestral support exists for this type of engagement, even in new spaces created in response to settler colonialism. The speeches followed the pattern of call and response between Ravens and Eagles, and a number of skilled orators were in attendance. Lines and concepts from these speeches are often referenced in community and in messaging and branding for SHI, for example the “container of wisdom” or “box of knowledge” in reference to cultural revitalization. The speeches also contain cultural references, instruction, and mentions of clans and stories. They are

largely focused on how the culture was being forgotten and how there is potential to adapt to new conditions under settler colonialism.

In one speech, George Davis Kichnáalx highlights a theme of the conference – our knowledge is there and need only be opened up and awakened – that inspired the “box of knowledge” metaphor. He says, “This is why we will open again this container of wisdom left in our care” (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1990, 315). He also speaks of “unwrapping” the language and culture of “our mothers’ grandparents” and “our mothers’ maternal uncles” (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1990, 315). This reminds me of a distinction my father, L’ux Shakee Robert Allen, always makes any time someone brings up the idea of “preservation” in relation to our culture. He says, “You preserve something that is dead.” Our culture is not dead, so there is no need to preserve it. Instead, we live our culture. Even though much of the discourse around Indigenous Knowledge in Western settings is of both “loss” and “preservation,” the “container of wisdom” metaphor offers us an alternative. The knowledge is not lost because it is right there, sitting in the closed box. And it does not need to be “preserved,” like in a museum where the box sits behind glass and is gazed upon but not touched. Rather, the box requires engagement. It needs to be touched and opened. The container is not something stagnant, but something alive that can be opened and with which one can interact. In this speech, the elders are calling for an active (re)engagement with culture. And this is done through adaptation to the new contexts for learning and praxis.

It also suggests that adaptation has always already been accepted and supported by the ancestors. Throughout the speeches, K̄aal.átk’ gestures to this ancestral connection by noting that his father’s spirit helper is with his grandchildren (the students). He also says, “the spirit helper of my grandfathers has already joined the Alaska Native Brotherhood” (Dauenhauer and

Dauenhaer 1990, 321). Here, K̓aal.átk' is saying that the spirit helper can be and is already in new places. This includes the Shee Atiká hotel, which is where the conference was held, as he goes on to say next. This suggests that there is something inherent about the role of the spirit helper in these spaces. It is not that the ancestors and the spirit helper had to be invited in or invoked; the spirit helper was *already* there guiding and helping the current generation. The ancestors therefore support activities like ANB and SNEP. The venue is not important; rather, it is about the work being done and the knowledge being communicated.

Elders like K̓aal.átk' imparted that we as a people must adapt and that we have *always* adapted. At the conference, adaptation was evident in this new form of teaching. But similar adaptations have taken place in tribal governments, harvesting, and weaving practices, among other things. Many cultural practitioners now teach outside of their clans or family lines so as to spread cultural knowledge and keep it lively. For example, Chilkat weavers traditionally taught within their lineage, but with a decline in the art came the need to expand beyond this. As a result, Chilkat weaving is a thriving art form with many classes and students. Even more extreme adaptations can be found in efforts to Indigenize finance and business, which will be discussed more in later chapters. In these cases, the idea that we have a legacy and responsibility from our ancestors plays out in more abstract ways and may be discussed in terms of values. Even so, the idea that the spirit helper can join ANB and be inside the hotel, which was owned by a Native Corporation, suggests that the work and legacy of the ancestors can indeed be found in these places. As such, these become not only necessary means of survival within the settler colonial system, but embodiments of cultural engagement that can carry forth ancestral knowledge and spirit beyond a sense of desperation and towards a sense of grounded presence in cultural belonging.

These speeches tell us something about the way Lingít people view culture, change, adaptation, and settler colonialism. The idea that cultural practices must shift and change as dictated by external circumstances is instilled within the sentiments expressed by the elders. The ancestors not only provide their blessing but also help to guide cultural changes. The oratory indicates something continuous within Lingít culture: adaptation. It is shown by Raven in the Raven Cycle, and it can also be seen in the actions of current leadership as they adapt and “Indigenize” where possible. This will be the focus of the next section, specifically with the consideration that some of the people currently in leadership were the mentees of these elders or were mentored by their students. I see a continuous through-line from the thought processes/epistemologies/theories that are established in the Raven stories, that are then in turn discussed in these recorded speeches, and finally, that are being taken up now in tribal governments, corporations, and non-profit spaces. In the old stories, Raven and Lingít people responded to large environmental changes. In the speeches at the Sealaska Elders Conference, elders respond to settler colonialism and the changes caused by it. Now, Lingít people are responding to environmental changes caused by climate change, which is also related to changes brought by colonialism worldwide and settler colonialism in what is now commonly known as the United States. In this way, all of the past issues faced have actually served as a form of preparation for the current moment. Or, in other words, we already have the tools needed to think through these situations. And this is exactly what people are doing as they are guided by Traditional Knowledge, the teachings of elders, traditional values, and the lessons in our histories. All these things act as a guide in generating current climate change solutions.

Lingít Worlding in Action

There are many different approaches to living haa *kuusteeyí*, or “our way of life,” under settler colonial capitalism. Haa *kuusteeyí* is about how you do things, not just about what you do. I have heard people in the community discuss wanting to live their values in all aspects of their lives, not only when doing something that may be viewed as “traditional,” like harvesting foods and medicine or weaving. People are using, developing, and adapting the tools of our ancestors in their everyday lives and careers.

Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million has written about “theory from life,” or the idea that we make theory as we go about life and in places often not recognized by the academy. She writes, “Theory, theorizing is, as I have argued in other places, a verb, an action. I think that theorizing is something that we do plainly every day, in any moment where we make a proposition about what is happening and why” (Million 2014, 32-33). Million writes of the connections between times and people, especially within the Native experience. She writes, “I feel a desire to feel/link these experiences that is stronger than any knowledge I might have of the value of their historical ‘specificity.’” (Million 2014, 31). This interconnected web of stories is not dissimilar from Lingít oral tradition, with the stories constantly referencing and building on one another. However, such an engagement with relational webs is not merely limited to oratory, or to those people dubbed “culture bearers.” I witnessed theory-making in interviews, at gatherings, and in practice at different organizations. And, indeed, as Million argues, this type of theory can emerge in a variety of spaces: “I am exceedingly aware that our stories, whether they are told from painful secrets in an AA meeting, as traditional oral performance, or those we tell each other in these academic settings, are powerful... We engage in questioning and reformulating those stories that account for the relations of power in our present. That is

theorizing” (Million 2014, 33). Repeatedly, an orientation emerges towards adaptation and the continued relevance of our culture and values in the challenges faced by Lingít people today.

As discussed in the introduction, my interviews and the events I attended were largely focused on the non-profit and tribal government sectors. Because of this, I spoke with people who were seeking to bring their cultural values and haa kuusteeyí to their daily lives and workplaces. This was a different orientation than when cultural protocols and practices are deployed in a ceremonial context or even in a harvest or artistic practice. While cultural values and explicit protocols are essential in ceremonial activities, there is not an implicit need to bring these elements into the workplace. Indeed, even something like a tribal government forces a compliance with Western systems of governance, not always lending itself easily to enacting haa kuusteeyí. However, the very fact that people continue to draw upon these values in Western spaces illustrates the way that haa kuusteeyí is enacted. While the rest of this dissertation explores instances where lived theory emerges, here, I want to give a few brief examples to illustrate theory in practice as it emerged in my field work.

Education is an area where Lingít Traditional Knowledge is being brought in, even in the Western-style classroom. I heard about this both for programs run by Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) and in the Juneau and Sitka school districts. In both cases, there is an emphasis on stories, cultural knowledge, and environmental knowledge to get students interested in learning and to teach in a culturally responsive fashion. In the Juneau school district, elders have been brought into the classroom to share songs, stories, and knowledge, which also reflects very old systems, wherein elders share certain things with the younger generation, allowing for cross-generational learning. SHI has a “STEAM” program – Science Technology Engineering Art Math – that emphasizes active learning through cultural practices. For example, learning about math through

weaving, or learning about science through looking at forests and their interconnected nature. This program has run classes through schools in Sitka and has some online classes that are region wide. They also have a summer program for middle and high schoolers. These programs draw from both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing but also emphasize the importance of cultural values and practices in their approach to learning. This is one way to emphasize theory from life, allowing students to practice their culture actively while learning about a variety of subjects, resulting in a more holistic form of education.

Another example of Indigenous Knowledge being brought into Western-influenced settings is the work of the Tlingit and Haida Indigenous Stewardship and Environmental departments. They focus largely on co-stewardship projects, as well as bringing Indigenous Knowledge to the management of traditional homelands. When I met with leadership, it was under the former organization wherein the department was “Native Lands and Resources.” At that time, in the fall of 2023, there was a major push for more research and more data collection to better facilitate Indigenous stewardship and protect homelands. There was a desire to have this information available and presentable in a way that would be legible and therefore credible to outside entities and Western science. For example, the tribe collects water samples from rivers that could be impacted by transboundary mining, thereby establishing baseline data. The tribe was also working on co-stewardship projects with the Forest Service, seeking to steward traditional homelands. Some of these projects will be discussed in future chapters, but I want to emphasize here the desire to bring values and knowledge into projects that would otherwise be focused on viewing homelands as “resources”; indeed, even the name change to “Indigenous Stewardship” reflects an orientation to relationships with lands and waters, rather than mere

management or extraction. These practices are enacted, accordingly, at the research and policy level.

One final example of lived theory relates to Alaska Native Corporations. Corporations are another Western – and in this case explicitly capitalist – space that are also deeply relevant to Native life in southeast Alaska. My father, L’ux Shakee, served on the board of Sitka’s local urban corporation, Shee Atiká, for six years and as board chair for three. L’ux Shakee decided to run for the board because the corporation had sold a large percentage of their lands, seeking to make money as the corporation struggled financially. Along with many other shareholders, my father was very upset by this decision and wanted to ensure that our homelands would not be sold again the future. As board chair, part of his work included efforts to redefine the board culture, including refining the mission statement and values. The way values were discussed and presented during this project was quite revealing. The consultant who worked on this project suggested creating a set of Native values to go alongside the corporate values. However, the board determined that Native values had already been incorporated into the existing corporate values. Specifically, board members emphasized the teachings of elders like Kaal.átk’ Charlie Joseph, who was on the Shee Atiká board early in the corporation’s history. Indeed, L’ux Shakee emphasized to me multiple times that, while people imagine the corporate and traditional worlds to be separate spaces, important cultural leaders like Kaal.átk’ had just as much of a hand in running and influencing the trajectory of the corporations as they had in cultural revitalization. This shows that not only are Kaal.átk’s teachings present in a variety of spaces to this day, but that the thought worlds of each are not so separate. Rather, haa kuusteeyí can be enacted in both spaces, just as Native values can be already present in corporate values, and spirit helpers can have “already joined the Alaska Native Brotherhood” (Dauenhauer and Dauenhaer 1990, 321).

Conclusion: Living Haa Kuusteeyí

As with other intellectual lineages, people have been adding to and interpreting Lingít worlding since it came into existence. However, rather than relegating this task to only a select few, I want to illustrate that we as Lingít people engage with, enact, and create new thought based on the legacies of our ancestors in the everyday. These ideas are not meant to be relegated to the classroom or the library, but instead to be spoken and lived in relation with others. Similarly, I argue that although the engagement with our thought-world may change, different forms of engagement are still valid and still add something to this living culture. To stagnate is to decay, and Lingít people know this and choose to change, to live, to continue to walk in our ancestors' footsteps.

Our oral history, specifically the Raven Cycle, lays the groundwork for haa kuusteeyí, illustrating how to live well in our homelands through Raven's successes and failures. Our elders and ancestors have told and interpreted those ideas, especially in a shifting and changing settler colonial world, as is seen in the elder speeches about the Sitka Native Education Program. Lingít people take up those ideas and continue to interpret them in the present moment of settler colonialism and climate change, as illustrated by the work being done at SHI, Tlingit and Haida, and Shee Atiká. People have different points of entry but actively incorporate these ideas and values into their work. To enact haa kuusteeyí, we must consider *how* we do things. This includes traditional activities, but it also extends to daily life. For example, traditional Alaskan Native values in the workplace are also something set out by employers and valued as workplace culture by Alaska Native employees. As we have experienced radical and oftentimes catastrophic change, the way we enact haa kuusteeyí has shifted and adapted. Our daily lives, tend to look quite different now than they did prior to colonization; nevertheless our way of life continues,

even within these new daily rhythms. Rather than climate adaptation as a set of technoscientific tools, the Raven Cycle provides the basis for how to live in order to adapt, which is embodied by the principles of haa kuusteeyí.

Within these more recent systems, there is a great deal to contend with, specifically regarding the way that settlers envision and interact with Lingít homelands. While Lingít epistemologies are essential for understanding Lingít responses to settler colonialism and climate change, a different orientation is required to understand settler responses to the environment. In the next chapter, I will dive deeper into the environmental constructions of “Alaska” as a state. Although not often focused on southeast Alaska, these constructions have great impact on Lingít Aanii. These temporal and geographically scalar perceptions often contrast greatly with the place-based Lingít approach I have laid out in this chapter. Both forms of worlding are essential to understanding the interplay between settlers and Lingít people in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

Chapter Two: Alaska: Native Homeland and Settler Construct

Alaska inhabits the public imagination as an exceptional geography suffused by myths and stereotypes that sit at odds with its ordinary realities. Anecdotally, I have encountered a range of external associations with Alaska. Some remark on images of its “dreamy” landscapes. Others are shocked by the lived realities of Alaskan weather and environment and are surprised to learn that bear and boat safety are topics covered in school. Most assume that Alaska is an icy tundra throughout the entire state. The reality is that the state takes up an area that is equivalent to almost one fifth of the continental United States, with vastly different regions and environments. Alaska exists within a particular cultural imaginary, partially idyllic place of beauty, and partially wilderness, though those two do not necessarily stand in opposition to each other. That duality is taken up when thinking about climate change: Alaska is, on the one hand, “savage” – one of the “last wild places” – and, on the other hand, a place of harmonious beauty that ought to be preserved. This understanding influences the affective experience of living in Alaska and greatly misrepresents various aspects of the nation’s 49th “state.” However, the idea of Alaska as a continuous and unified political entity is purely a settler fabrication. For Alaska Native people, this concept is not meaningful. Each tribal community has its own homelands and that is the scale at which land relations are understood. For Lingít people, this is expressed as *haa aaní*, our homelands.

Referred to as the “Last Frontier,” Alaska’s wild beauty is perpetuated in popular culture, from *Deadliest Catch* and *Northern Exposure* to *True Detective: Night Country*. One especially famous example is James A. Michener’s 1988 novel, *Alaska*. Spanning deep geological time up through colonization and the 20th Century, the novel plays into a number of familiar tropes. Michener frames Alaska early on as follows: “So Alaska must be viewed as having two

characteristics: great beauty but also implacable hostility” (Michener [1988] 2013, 26). He strongly emphasizes that those who wish to live in such a place must be tough and determined in order to survive:

Alaska would always call forth the best in a small handful of daring men and women, but those who did not relish the contest or who refused to obey the harsh rules which governed it would find the bitterly cold land repellent and would flee it if they could retreat before it killed them. (Michener [1988] 2013, 17)

He further reflects on this theme in a later chapter about the Gold Rush, and specifically the immense physical challenges undergone by miners due to the geography of Alaska. Michener’s framing reflects stereotypes held externally about the type of people who live in Alaska, as well as stereotypes that many non-Indigenous Alaskans have about themselves.

Living in Alaska is viewed differently than living in the “lower 48.” It requires a special dedication, and perhaps even a special skillset. As Michener writes of Alaskans, “They would be people who lived close to the unrelenting land both because they had to and because they reveled in the challenge” (Michener [1988] 2013, 26). Some settlers who live in the state share and play into this stereotype. Ts’msyen scholar Forest Haven writes that settlers participating in subsistence seek to “prove” their Alaskan identity¹ through this activity. “For settlers, it’s become a way of validating their identities as persevering Alaskans who have ‘tamed’ the last frontier (and its Native inhabitants) by using the wild resources of the land to feed themselves and their family” (Haven 2022, 142). The feeling of being a “real Alaskan” is tied up with

¹ There is also a misconception that people are paid to live in Alaska, which supports the idea that it is a difficult place to live, while also interrupting Michener’s romanticized notion of the daring adventurers who take up residence in the state. The Alaska Permanent Fund was established as a fund in which to deposit oil revenue to be invested, rather than spent on state finances. In 1980, the legislature voted to distribute dividends to qualifying Alaska residents, thereby distributing some of this revenue directly to citizens (apfc.org n.d.). In recent years, it would certainly not be enough money to entice anyone to face the high cost of living in Alaska if they had no other desire to live in the state.

activities on the land. Settlers are able to survive in this “hostile” environment, proving that they belong, and these stereotypes are a draw for some residents.

Given Alaska’s large cultural footprint, the way issues are represented outside of the state can sometimes be unhelpful when looking at place-based issues and solutions. This chapter focuses on these tensions; I aim to lay out some of the history that has led to these perceptions, from the Alaska Purchase to more recent events like the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill in 1989. I will consider Alaska’s place as a “frontier” to be extracted and a “wilderness” to be preserved, and the contrasting and overlapping perceptions from within and outside of the state through a comparison of climate “proxies” (Pringle 2025) and my own conception of “climate talk.” Finally, I will consider the ways that Indigenous Knowledge circulates in institutionalized spaces as a form of experiential knowledge that I argue stands in opposition to the settler constructions of Indigenous lands.

From “Seward’s Folly” to “The Last Frontier”: Alaska in the Public Imaginary

Initially, there was little public support for the treaty with Russia that signed over ownership of Alaska to the United States. When it was sent to the Senate for ratification in March of 1867, many senators did not want to confirm their stance given that public views were mixed. Indeed, the public was initially shocked by the sudden announcement of the intended purchase (Bailey 1934). Public scrutiny arose, in part, because Americans imagined the region as an arctic wasteland, too wild, uncivilized, and frigid to be brought into the union (Charlton 2019b). While these concerns almost prevented the purchase, they did not disappear even after the treaty was signed, leaving Alaska in a state of cultural flux that was influenced first by the travel journals of wealthy tourists, later by the letters and accounts of hopeful miners in the

Alaska Gold Rush starting in 1896, and eventually by reactions to oil extraction (Charlton 2019a; Kollin 2001).

Infamously referred to as “Seward’s Folley,” much of the journalistic pushback on the purchase stemmed from a feud between then Secretary of State, William H. Seward, and editor of the New York Tribune, Horace Greeley (Bailey 1934). Seward served as Secretary of State between 1861 and 1869, and his interest in Alaska was largely due to his expansionist politics. He was also very unpopular at the time due to ongoing criticism of President Andrew Johnson’s administration and its handling of the aftermath of the Civil War (Bailey 1934). As a result, Seward’s role in the Alaska Purchase and the purchase itself became the subject of much ridicule. Ryan Charlton writes about the public opinion as shaped by the excess of political cartoons, arguing that the Johnson Administration was attempting to cover up its failures in the Reconstruction Era. Alaska was the “ice” to cool down the nation, as President Andrew Johnson warred with Congress over Reconstruction, wanting to show leniency to the defeated south (Charlton 2019b, 27). The cartoons mocked Seward and depicted Alaska as an arctic wasteland of frozen islands, inhabited by polar bears, that had no economic value, and only savage Native inhabitants unsuited for Americanization.² Indeed, cartoons poked fun at the notion of “civilizing” the Natives, who were often depicted beside seals, walruses, and polar bears, indicating an animalistic status unworthy of consideration as human (Charlton 2019b).³ Others posited that the Russians were swindling US lawmakers, though all the while still presenting racist images of Native peoples and an abundance of polar bears (Charlton 2019b, 29).

² Note that I am choosing not to include these images. Many include racial stereotypes, and because the images themselves are not essential to understanding the political climate in which they were created, I do not feel that they need to be further reproduced.

³ This, of course, also assumes an inherent hierarchy of human and non-human animals that is largely antithetical to many Indigenous epistemologies. This allows the perpetuation of racism through hierarchy that props up the settler colonial project (see TallBear 2019).

Despite these harsh public critics, the American populace was not necessarily opposed to the purchase of Alaska (Charlton 2019b). Given the long-term expansionist mindset that precipitated the colonial push west, frontier-oriented growth was assumed to be the natural state of the US at the time. For many, the Alaska Purchase was an indication that things were returning to normal in the aftermath of the Civil War. Alaska was viewed as the next logical step in creating what would eventually be an American *continent*, expanding into Canada as well. Prior to the purchase, expansionists assumed that British Columbia would also join the United States, thereby connecting Alaska to the rest of the union and solidifying its place in the nation as a geographically contiguous landmass (Charlton 2019b, 25).

At the time of the treaty negotiations with Russia, little was known by most Americans of Alaska and the arctic. One of the major chores of those in favor was convincing lawmakers that Alaska would positively contribute to the US as a new territory. Massachusetts senator and American expansionist, Charles Sumner, played a key role in the vote in favor of the treaty. Having conducted a great deal of research himself, Sumner delivered a three-hour speech to Congress on April 8, 1867, laying out his findings on Alaska and the ways in which it could be advantageous to the union. This included access to minerals, timber, furs, and fisheries. Sumner also spent a great deal of time explaining that some parts of the state – Sitka being his example – have much milder winters than some European and American cities, with extensive temperature and seasonal comparisons (Sumner 1867, 30). Sumner also spoke of vegetable production and the potential for cattle ranching in the new territory (Sumner 1867, 33-24).

According to Charlton, this was, in part, meant to address the concerns of some that Alaska would not fall into the yeoman ideal of America (2019b). Access to more farmland had been much of the historical impetus for expansion and was a logical selling point to lawmakers.

It would also contribute to a sense of American unity, harkening back to President Thomas Jefferson's view of small-scale agricultural production as the ideal structure for his vision of democracy. However, despite being billed as "the New England of the Pacific," agriculture failed to manifest in the new territory, as critics of the purchase were quick to point out (Charlton 2019b, 24). This led to arguments from some that the American people had been tricked into the purchase. Another disappointment was when British Columbia joined Canada in 1871, dashing hopes of a continental United States spanning to the arctic, and further solidifying Alaska as an odd outlier, rather than a vision of continental unity (Charlton 2019b, 25).

Curiosity about Alaska was nevertheless rampant despite these economic shortcomings. In the years following the purchase, tourism became a growing industry, one that had not been foreseen by Sumner and Seward. The industry expanded largely due to a boom in the genre of travel writing, which stirred up interest and served as a guide for new travelers. Starting largely with the writings of conservationist John Muir, the travel genre re-cast Alaska and the North as a place of great beauty. Muir's work, including *Travels in Alaska*, has inspired many settlers (and tourists more generally) to make the journey north, and still has cultural impact today (Kollin 2001). Muir also inspired a number of other tourists to write about their own journeys in the aftermath of the Alaska Purchase, either in published works or simply in diaries and letters (Campbell 2007).⁴

Indeed, Muir's writings are practically unavoidable when looking at cultural perceptions of Alaska (Kollin 2001, Campbell 2007). His comments emphasize the natural beauty of

⁴ Muir was extremely racist towards Indigenous peoples and is not remembered fondly by the Lingít descendants of those he met on his travels. He is, however, a favorite among settlers in Alaska in his (largely misleading) enactment of the frontier lifestyle. In mentioning him, I do not mean to further solidify his ubiquitousness when talking about Alaska. Rather, I simply acknowledge his role in setting the tone for a tradition of cruise ship tourists writing about their Alaska vacations (Kollin 2001). Muir would likely contest his own status as a cruise ship passenger, but given that his routes largely matched those of other ship passengers, it is an apt description of his brief sojourn in Alaska.

southeast Alaska, while also solidifying its untouched status as something worthy of preservation. His accounts were even made into a travel brochure that then inspired other cruise ship tourists to partake in the delights of the Inside Passage⁵ (Kollin 2001). He also fits into a lineage of “gentlemen scientists” who wrote about Alaska and its terrain and geology, creating openings for other travelers and researchers in the future (Campbell 2007). These men, while deeply privileged, could nevertheless assert their masculinity as they traveled and “discovered” the land. This, in turn, assuaged fears of dwindling masculinity and life in the city that were rampant at the time (Campbell 2007). This narrative of “discovery” went hand in hand with racist depictions and interpretations of Native people. Muir himself thought Native people in general were dirty and “unnatural.” He did find Lingít people slightly more pleasing, yet still primitive and naïve (Muir 1915).

As it became clear that the journey to southeast Alaska was usually a smooth one, a slew of Gilded Age tourists descended upon the territory, especially the Inside Passage in southeast Alaska. This route combined the relative ease of protected waters with both the stunning vistas of glaciers and the “savage allure” of Lingít villages, kutéeyaa (totem poles), and “curios.” Tourists wrote of their journeys in letters and journals, as well as in published accounts, adding to the general mystique of Alaska, while also painting a particular image for those back home (Campbell 2007). Their writing also, perhaps inadvertently, reinscribed Euro-American cultural hegemony. Those on a leisurely journey to Alaska could draw a clear line regarding their class and economic status. They could experience “wilderness” from the comfort of the steam ship, allowing them a taste of life beyond the city and all its social concerns. They also, through their disgust with the way that Lingít people appeared and lived, reinscribed various cultural norms of

⁵ This refers to the protected waters of southeast Alaska, making travel much safer and easier than on the Outer Coast or in open waters.

their “civilized” state. They gladly went into villages and homes, indulging their curiosity regarding the “savages,” recording their observations while always maintaining their own sense of propriety and cultural superiority. They were also happy to endlessly consume and collect the goods sold by Lingít people. A trip to Alaska became a bragging right, able to be contained and – more importantly – displayed on the shelf to remember and to share (Campbell 2007).

As the tourism industry grew, so too did accommodations and routes, catering specifically to upper-class passengers. Other infrastructure also grew up around these visitors. In fact, Robert Campbell argues that tourists opened the way for miners during the Klondike Gold Rush (2007). Alaskan tour guides and traveler accounts helped to instruct, shape, and prepare miners for what they would find upon arrival in Alaska (Campbell 2007). Within the public consciousness, the surge of settlers during the Gold Rush was what solidified Alaska as “The Last Frontier,” cementing the notion of hardy individuals braving an unforgiving wilderness. This narrative mapped cleanly onto other American stories, like the California Gold Rush and the image of the Wild West mining town.

The discovery of gold in the Yukon also could not have occurred at a more politically and socially opportune time. The United States had been embroiled in a debate over tying monetary value to a precious metal. Some argued for silver, some for gold, and some for both (Morse 2003). Gold was more readily available in the US due to the California Gold Rush in 1849. Ultimately, the Gold Standard won out in 1873, timing out ideally with the discovery of more gold in Alaska in 1896. This also coincided with a period of economic downturn and unemployment in the 1890s, meaning that many were out of work and seeking any financial gains available (Morse 2003). Additionally, this moment coincided with the cultural conception that gold has intrinsic, “natural” value. Kathryn Morse argues that the choice to venture into the

so-called Alaskan wilds and mine it was seen as a *natural* choice (2003). Furthermore, abandoning industrial forms of production and wage labor was tantalizing to many men. The gold rush offered men “a remedy for feelings of physical weakness, boredom, and the general lack of vigor associated with urban life and industrial work” (Morse 2003, 120). This cultural and economic pressure went alongside tales of striking it rich that were largely blown out of proportion. As Morse writes, many assumed they would simply happen upon gold, when in reality a great deal of labor and indeed, capital, were required and did not guarantee a return on the investment (2003).

Rather than an easy cash flow, prospective miners were faced with an arduous journey north, and an immense amount of manual labor hauling their gear over one of the mountainous trails – most famously the Chilkoot Pass in northern Lingít Aaní – to get to the Yukon. Many wrote home or wrote in diaries of the grueling nature of the journey, including the difficult terrain and physicality of its nature (Morse 2003). Letters and accounts in magazines, as well as fiction narratives like Jack London’s 1903 novel, *Call of the Wild*, reinforced this image. While the gold rush may have been a new era of economic opportunity in Alaska, the image of Alaska as a frozen wasteland was not so easily shaken. As travel narratives had certainly given Alaska the reputation of beauty and a worthiness to be protected, these Gold Rush narratives solidified the image of Alaska as an unforgiving wilderness.

Even so, the prevailing meta-narrative of the gold rush was one of national good. Morse discusses Jack London’s 1900 article in the *North American Review of Reviews*, explaining that, to London’s mind, despite the economic loss and individual struggles of many miners, the Klondike Gold Rush was worth it. This contributed to a view of American progress based on the works of Frederick Jackson Turner and his “frontier thesis,” which centered the frontier as

essential in American democracy. This line of thinking celebrated “the broader victories of technology over nature, and of civilization over primitive savagery” (Morse 2003, 196). From London’s perspective – at least, according to Morse – “The miners were necessary participants in the much broader and more important process of bringing civilization to the frontier. Failure and loss were necessary sacrifices to that civilized future” (Morse 2003, 196). This perspective of both the hardships faced by miners and the larger narrative of the “Last Frontier” all thus contribute to the mythology of “Alaska.”

In the aftermath of the Gold Rush, a few industries emerged – mainly fishing and timber harvest (Haven 2022). However, in 1968 in Prudhoe Bay, oil was discovered, and Alaska’s status as economically useful to the United States was solidified beyond a doubt. This was troubling to some, for whom the oil industry did not match the frontier aesthetic of Alaska’s past. The widely popular journalistic account, *Coming into the Country* (1977), by John McPhee is an example of such a reaction. McPhee viewed the oil industry (and specifically Native involvement with it) as tainting the so-called “Last Frontier” with modernity (Kollin 2001, 168). McPhee laments that in the 1970s, Native people had come to be known as “stockholders.” This is because of the creation of Alaska Native Corporations. To solve the land claims issues brought about by the need to build a pipeline through Alaska, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was passed in 1971, as was discussed in the Preface. McPhee specifically disdains what he calls “Brooks Brothers natives” for their business attire (1977, 153). Native people in business wear clearly did not fit with McPhee’s vision of quaint and primitive Indigenous peoples. Similarly, corporate oil jobs did not fit with McPhee’s romanticized perception of Alaska as a rugged wilderness.

Despite such objections, the public view of Alaska was generally a boon for the oil industry. Susan Kollin writes that companies used the American view of Alaska as an endless

wilderness to drill without much pushback (2001). The scale and remoteness of Alaska was keenly felt by the American populace, and it was believed there was little reason to worry that the drilling would interfere with such a vast wilderness. This all changed with the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound. Alaska was, at the time, being upheld as the last holdout of American wilderness. This was an important cultural claim for American identity, and the spill was thus a shock to the public (Kollin 2001). In American discourse, it placed Alaska, perhaps for the first time, in a place of precarity. Its beauty and wilderness status threatened, this was the first tangible marker (at least to many non-Indigenous people) of human-driven changes to the Alaskan environment. Whereas many Alaskan enterprises had in fact had a tangible impact on the environment for years – sea otter fur and the near-extinction of otters, clear cut logging, overfishing, and mining, to name a few – this was the first time that those in the lower 48 were exposed to the potential downside of endless extraction. The last bastion of wilderness was under threat, and so too was the American identity and “Last Frontier” narrative that went with it. Because the histories of these various cultural identities are so strongly tied to land and environment, they are susceptible to the instability inherent in an era of climate change. Indeed, climate change itself has become ubiquitous in the cultural perception of Alaska.

Alaska and Climate Change

The Exxon Valdez oil spill represented a shift in the public view of Alaska. This exposed the vulnerability of ecosystems, even those in a supposedly pristine wilderness. Additionally, as discourse on climate change expanded, images of polar bears (already long associated with Alaska) on melting sea ice became synonymous with global warming. Melting permafrost and glaciers all continue to contribute to this image. However, each of these examples represents disparate environments contained within the settler fabrication of Alaska as a monolithic

geography. There is no singular place where these environments occur side by side. As such, just as the scale of Alaska once elided its vulnerability to something like an oil spill, it also complicates the very ability to imagine climate change, even as it is used as an example constantly in art and media. Sebastian Groes writes of this phenomenon in relation to human creativity, artistic expression, and the public imagination of Alaska. Groes argues, “Alaska embodies the ambiguities, paradoxes and challenges to the human imagination that climate change is putting to us: veering between a realistic register and a mythical discourse, the US state is symbolic of a wider experiential and representational gap” (2017, 977). Essentially, Alaska’s scale is unimaginable, and yet its very size contributes to the fascination of the public imagination. Similarly, the scale of global climate change is unknowable, and thus its representation is not straightforward. This facilitates the need for what Thomas Pringle (2025) calls a “climate proxy.” Alaska both becomes known externally through climate proxies and is itself often used as a proxy.

As Pringle puts it, “Proxy is a term that describes climate data’s representational structure, as proxies stand in for past climatic conditions without being, in themselves, evidence of a climate” (2025, 35). This applies to scientific measurement like ice cores or tree rings, but it also extends to media and mediations of climate change. “Through contextual cues like captions, editing, or narration, the actual image of a starved polar bear *must be made meaningful* within climate change discourse to either signify global heating, to deny that heating, or otherwise” (Pringle 2025, 36, emphasis in original). Pringle identifies population growth as his object of analysis but identifies other proxies in media like the polar bears, glaciers, and rising sea levels, all of which are associated with Alaska.

The association with polar bears can be traced directly to anti-Alaska Purchase political cartoons that depict icy islands overrun with the bears. This association remains, though rather than evoking a savage wasteland, in the age of global warming, it now brings to mind the tragedy of the majestic polar bear walking among melting icebergs or starving on an iceless landscape. Rather than something to be ridiculed or feared, they have become a proxy for climate change, signaling a need to “preserve” this “pristine” landscape. The “Last Frontier” no longer represents only an empty land for human expansion, but instead a wild place that needs to stay wild. As a result, the “Last Frontier” in the 21st Century is utilized in two conflicting projects. The first seeks to utilize the frontier as a place for extraction, seeking oil and other resources. The second wishes to maintain the frontier as a nature preserve for flora and fauna. Alaska comes to represent climate change both in a way that enables it (economically) and that provides an impetus to stop it (aesthetically and morally). The state functions as a type of climate proxy, illustrating the global issues on a smaller scale; there is an irony to drilling for oil and in turn melting the surrounding environment that makes this drilling possible in the first place.

Climate Talk in Alaska

While much of this chapter has focused on external perceptions of Alaska, I will now largely be turning to lived experiences within Alaska that often contradict or complicate these external narratives. This will include some experiences that are unique to Alaska Natives, mainly the circulation of Traditional Knowledge (TK). This is a distinct form of knowledge that has been passed down and built upon over the generations. I will also discuss some experiences shared by settlers and Indigenous peoples, which I locate alongside a phenomenon I term “climate talk.” Climate talk refers to the way discussions about the changing environment circulate within the community, reflecting the affective experience of living in Alaska. This consists of

conversations, anxieties, and even rumors. The category of climate talk is not meant to undermine the validity of the observations made by residents that are external to institutionalized scientific study. In fact, my attention to climate talk seeks to make these observations legible as a form of climate change intervention on the local scale. This also does not deny the existence of climate proxies being utilized or viewed by residents of Alaska. Climate talk may be more grounded in the local scale, but not all instances of climate change are localized, so proxies still circulate in many instances. I am specifically creating a scalar distinction between these categories, and I will create a further distinction in relation to Traditional Knowledge, which – though it is a separate form of knowledge – sometimes contributes to climate talk.

The difference between climate proxy, climate talk, and Traditional Knowledge is a matter of geographic and temporal scale. Climate proxies are required to understand something with temporal distance; for example, an ice core as a proxy for past climatic events (Pringle 2025). They are also useful to those who do not directly experience changes in their everyday lives. Someone outside of Alaska cannot go out and witness the changing berry season. A climate proxy, like melting sea ice, is a visual that can convey this meaning beyond the local context. Climate talk is a much more localized form of discourse, based on the circulation of observations about ongoing changes in the moment. Traditional Knowledge is also local but is based on a much longer timescale and includes ancestral knowledge. Because of their shared local scale, climate talk and TK are interrelated. Of course, Indigenous people talk in community, sharing their observations, and, in some cases, their Traditional Knowledge. The sharing of TK is an iterative process based on past and present observations. TK exists alongside climate talk, but I draw this distinction because TK is a specific form and body of knowledge that is based in an important epistemological tradition. TK also reflects a much longer history of environmental

damages via settler colonialism. It reflects changes that were brought about by early colonizers, like the fur trade, as well as ongoing changes to ecosystems, like the shifting baseline for commercial salmon harvest. Rather than a focus only on recent changes, TK encompasses this longer history based on sustained presence on Lingít Aaní. Climate talk refers simply to the way that discussions and ideas about more recent changes circulate, and it is not a deep-rooted form of cultural knowledge sharing.

Due to its location and environment, climate change and global heating are generally on the forefront of people's minds in Alaska. As an economy based largely around land, these ideas are often discussed even when they are not directly named. For example, concerns over glacial recession in Juneau would mean that tourists would have a harder time viewing the Mendenhall Glacier. Shifting arctic conditions impact oil extraction. Cedar trees have been negatively impacted by warmer winters, causing issues with their root systems. Given the historic importance of logging as well as the ongoing presence of the Forest Service in the region, this concern is salient for many. Another constant concern is that Alaskan fisheries are collapsing, and while that is largely due to overfishing, other factors like ocean warming and acidification contribute as well. These changes have created anxiety and fear among commercial fishermen. Concerns are discussed in Board of Fisheries⁶ meetings and in more casual local settings.

In southeast Alaska, discussions of extreme weather often arise. Intense rains raise the concern of landslides. Almost every fall, there is at least one community impacted by a major landslide; most recently this includes Ketchikan in 2023, Wrangell in 2024, and Elfin Cove in 2025. In Juneau, warm summer weather and the melting glacier resulted in massive flooding in both 2023 and 2024. In the aftermath of the floods, those impacted shared stories of people's

⁶ This is a body that regulates fisheries in the state, including subsistence, sport, and commercial fishing.

belongings being caught in trees. Many were forced to move due to damp conditions and damaged houses. A levee system was implemented for summer 2025, and while somewhat effective, some houses still flooded. In August of 2024, I was in Juneau during one of these flood events to attend a Tlingit and Haida Youth Summit. The night it was predicted to happen, locals were buzzing about those in the flood zone and potential preparedness. The day after, the entire summit was disrupted as the venue was transformed into a shelter for displaced tribal citizens, and staff raced to do their part and respond to the disaster. For the community, this was not distant news of a disaster. It was something that reached the entire city of Juneau and beyond into the greater region, as friends, family, and coworkers were impacted.

In Sitka, a major landslide in 2015 deeply impacted the community as three local people were killed. Smaller landslides in the fall have not been uncommon in the intervening years. Throughout the seasons, talk of changing weather patterns are constantly on people's minds. Intense summer rain in 2025 brought on jokes about "June-tober," reflecting that rain is typical in the fall, but that it was an unusually cold and rainy spring and summer.⁷ As a result, people were concerned about berry harvest. Salmonberries – usually ripe in June – were not ripe until early-to-mid July, which also led to concern over a late or nonexistent blueberry harvest. By contrast, in August of 2025, salmon streams were running low due to intense sunshine and people were even able to catch tuna, which are usually only caught much further south. Similarly, in summer 2023, there was a near-drought, leading to low running streams. Island houses usually reliant on collecting rain required water to be brought in from town. Salmon streams running low also created talk of hungry bears and low salmon returns. These

⁷ Climate change has a profound impact on seasonality, and these perceived changes structure the way that people think and talk about the environment. The varying spatio-temporal experiences of seasonality represent a disparate yet shared experience of these changes (Dimick 2024).

inconsistencies lead to a general feeling of instability and an interconnected web of impacts throughout the ecosystem.

Lived local changes that constitute climate talk are felt differently than something that is experienced as a climate proxy, even when the event itself is the same. In the aftermath of the 2023 Juneau flood, a video of half of a house for sale circulated widely on social media. People outside of Alaska were confounded by anyone attempting to sell the mangled house, joking about the state of the real estate market. While chatting with some Juneau residents, I learned that in fact, the owners of the house had listed it as part of their insurance claims, needing to illustrate that it was not capable of being sold in its current state. I cannot verify the truth of this story, but as with other aspects of climate talk, that is not the point. The interplay between the aggressively anti-local scale of social media and the local scale of climate talk illustrates the way that stories and observations circulate on the local level as opposed to circulation in a much broader audience.

Place-Based Since Time Immemorial

Part of the distinction between settler constructions of Alaska and an Alaska Native approach is the relationship between people and land. For example, Lingít people do not think of our homelands as the state of Alaska. Our homelands are our villages on Lingít Aaní, the site of cultural activities for thousands of years. Despite having ongoing trade relationships with tribes in other parts of what is now the state of Alaska, Lingít people have a general understanding of what constitutes our traditional territory versus the traditional territory of our neighbors, and, within that, an understanding of what constitutes the homelands of certain kwáans and clans at a more granular level. It is not an understanding “Alaska” as an inherent unit, but rather a sense that Alaska is a settler concept that contains a variety of homelands including our own. Our

shared trade and colonial history links us with other Alaska Native people, but that does not negate the concept of Lingít Aaní, and often more importantly, the longevity of certain kwáans and the clans that constitute them.

Due to the ongoing relevance of the colonial construct of Alaska in the bureaucratic rhythms of the lives of Alaska Natives, there is a certain amount of common ground on which to build. One venue for this is the annual Alaska Federation of Natives⁸ (AFN) Convention. Talk of the climate took center stage at the 2023 AFN Convention, which was held in Anchorage from October 19 to 21. The convention is held yearly in either Anchorage or Fairbanks and attracts attendees from all over the state. In 2023, the theme was “Our Ways of Life,” so much of the emphasis was on sharing and passing on knowledge and protecting important cultural activities like hunting/fishing/gathering – what is often referred to as “subsistence.” As a result, much of the program included Traditional Knowledge being discussed and used to shape policy and actions by Native-run entities in the state. These observations are based not only on lived experience in the now, but also on ancestral knowledge that has been recorded and passed down for many generations. The changing environment was a consistent theme throughout the convention, and during a few parts, specific examples of Traditional Knowledge were shared.

AFN has had a complicated relationship to climate change discourse in the past, mainly due to the relationship between the oil industry and Alaska Native Corporations. The interests of the various entities have not aligned at certain points, leading some ANCs to leave the federation. For example, in 2019 a resolution was brought forth by Alaska Native youth about climate change, calling on AFN to declare a state of climate emergency (Hughes 2019). This resolution

⁸ The Alaska Federation of Natives is a statewide organization that helped facilitate the passage of the Alaska Natives Claims Settlement Act. They continue to advocate for Native peoples across Alaska at the state and federal level.

was stalled on the floor for over an hour as it was received poorly by Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC), which makes its money in the oil industry (Hughes 2019). While representatives of ASRC claimed their lack of support was based on not wanting environmentalists and interest groups opposed to hunting to get a foothold in Alaska, the youth in attendance were adamant about their fears for the future and the need for AFN to recognize these issues. The resolution ultimately did pass and, as a result, ASRC left AFN at the end of 2019 (Hughes 2019).

In the time since, other controversies have impacted AFN, and five other organizations have withdrawn. These withdrawals were, however, not due to the climate change controversy, but over subsistence.⁹ In fact, it was clear in 2023 that climate change was not a particularly contentious issue. While the recent withdrawals have led AFN to avoid controversial issues on the floor for discussion of resolutions – as was explicitly mentioned in 2023 Southeast Caucus meeting, which I attended – climate change was not one of these issues. I would argue this is the case for two reasons. The first is that after the incident in 2019, organizations that did not want to sign on to climate-based resolutions had to draw a line for themselves; leave AFN like ASRC or stay and stand behind that climate resolution and potential future environmental resolutions. The second is that the testimonies shared at AFN in 2023 were from people who hunt, fish, and gather. They were sharing their observations about changes on their land. These same people make up the organizations that are members of AFN, so the overall membership was clearly in favor of taking climate change seriously to address community needs. Much of the 2023 program

⁹ This includes ASRC, Doyon Corp., Aleut Corp, Tanana Chiefs, and Tlingit and Haida (McBride 2023). In 2025, Tlingit and Haida and Tanana Chiefs rejoined, signaling the need for Alaska Native unity in the face of a second Donald Trump term (Tribal Business News Staff 2025). With the exception of ASRC, all these withdrawals were (outwardly) on the basis of subsistence (Tribal Business News Staff 2025; Doyon Staff 2023). Aleut Corp's withdrawal was the result of a particularly brutal round of debate in 2022, wherein fishing bycatch in their region was blamed for the collapse of other regional fisheries (Vergen 2022).

was explicitly naming and addressing environmental changes, especially through the observations of elders and other attendees. Throughout the convention, presenters emphasized needing to protect land and waters, the importance and wisdom of Traditional Knowledge, and the need to protect subsistence, including ensuring that subsistence species are still viable going forward. During a forum on subsistence, participants mentioned that they are seeing climate change in action on the land, even if some people do not believe it is happening. They stated that the evidence on the land is undeniable.

The emphasis on Indigenous Knowledge as a way forward, or a solution to problems, was codified in several resolutions that were passed. For example, this is directly addressed in resolution 23-02, “Requesting the State of Alaska Incorporate Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge into Decisions Made by the State of Alaska Board of Fisheries and Board of Game,” and resolution 23-03, “Requesting Congressional Funding for the Incorporation of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Decision Making.” In both resolutions, the importance of TK is emphasized. This depth of knowledge has been accumulated over generations and continues to be accumulated by people as they go about their lives today, taking note of changes as they happen and progress.

In many cases, the examples of climate talk and TK at AFN could also be read as climate proxies. Fisheries suffer, sea ice melts, and game is scarce. These could all be measurable indicators of climate change that someone external to the local grounded place may experience as a proxy. However, these “proxies” are no longer “proxies” when they are experienced on the land. A hunter who sees changes to seasonal norms and the availability and presence of animals on lands their ancestors have been hunting for generations is, in fact, making the observations in real time and with the context of ancestral knowledge. This is not merely an indicator being

observed from afar. In southeast Alaska, a harvester noticing the subtle changes to cedar, berries, or black seaweed is observing those changes firsthand. Over many years or seasons, a harvester may become concerned if a change becomes a longstanding (and negative) pattern.

The way these experiences were framed at AFN reflects this lived observation and lived reality. We as Native peoples see the problems and the changes, and we have the knowledge and tools to figure out the next steps. This affective experience is different than that of settlers due to the longevity of Native presence. It is also different from external perceptions of Alaska that rely on proxies and stereotypes rather than deeply grounded and personal observations. This distinction is important because it reflects the different levels of engagement that circulate in “Alaska.” People external to the state and settlers in the state have a different mode of engagement than Alaska Natives, and all these different relationships to place shape the response to climate change. Because climate change (at least, as a cultural conceit) has been so deeply intertwined with Alaska, it is vital to understand some of the complex ways that this plays out for different groups of people. In future chapters, these perceptions of Alaska will also be relevant at various points, shaping the way that people imagine and relate to place and change.

Conclusion: Illusions and Realities

Given its status as both an icebox and a wonder of nature, Alaska was well positioned to become a flashpoint for climate change discussions and various climate proxies. Alaska has a somewhat mythical status in the American mind as a far-off northern refuge from the troubles of modern life. Its “dreamy” beauty and “harsh” landscape have long played into visions of the arctic and its role in American life. Climate change and various environmental “crises” have called into question the security of this natural sanctuary, thereby also disrupting its cultural

position. However, these narratives look much different from within Alaska, and especially from an Alaska Native perspective.

Rather than a far off and untouched wilderness, Alaska is simply home to Alaska Native peoples. There is nowhere to offput fears of degradation to homelands because Native cultures revolve around relationships to particular places and histories. Our homelands are not frontiers to be won but rather places of deep relational connection where our ancestors have been for thousands of years. The histories and accounts that have so delighted Americans since the Alaskan Purchase are the lived realities of our ancestors. My own ancestors were in the villages being so denigrated by Gilded Age travelers. My great-grandmother and grandmother worked in the canneries discussed in Michener's novel, and my great-grandfather was a miner in Juneau.¹⁰ These histories are personal. Changes to these places are therefore also highly personal. What others see as proxies, we experience within our lifetimes, or those of recent ancestors.¹¹

This dissertation also seeks to disrupt many of the assumptions and imagery that came about through the history discussed in this chapter. What we call Alaska is an extremely vast and diverse collection of places. It cannot be reduced to a monolith or a set of tropes. A place-based and cultural-based approach is therefore necessary in understanding the nuances and particulars. The rest of the dissertation focuses more directly on southeast Alaska, and specifically on Sitka. Southeast does not necessarily fit with the image of Alaska as an icy tundra, but it is ironically the part of Alaska most-encountered by tourists – both historically and today. The next three chapters continue to expand on the lived realities of climate change in southeast Alaska through

¹⁰ For more on this historical context see Juliana Pegues' 2021 book *Space-Time Colonialism: Alaska's Indigenous and Asian Entanglements*.

¹¹ This is not to say that other places in the US do not experience evidence of climate change every day. Extreme flooding and draught, bringing wildfires, as well as increased hurricanes and so many other examples are obviously climate change. This is simply to say that the arctic has long been a geography on which to displace societal fears, so these changes feel even more immediate in Alaska.

case studies about tourism, scientific research, and future-oriented planning. These chapters consider Alaska Native perceptions of and responses to environmental changes alongside the reactions of tourists, researchers, and settlers in Alaska.

Chapter Three: Whose Way of Life?: Cruise Tourism and Scalar Relationships with Environment on Lingít Aaní

Alaska's status as a place of great natural beauty and as “The Last Frontier” has always made it a popular destination for tourists. The previous chapter focused on the way that travel narratives helped to establish Alaska's role in the public consciousness, from John Muir to John McPhee. The ease of travel to Alaska has only increased, and so too have the sheer number of annual visitors, especially those who arrive on cruise ships. As seen in the way Alaska is positioned in relation to climate change, there is a dual impulse to extract from the vast “wilderness” that seems untouchable, while also wishing to witness and enjoy that same natural beauty. This drives a heightened tourism season (roughly late April to early October) in which small town populations might be doubled for eight to ten hours during the busiest days. This results in an uneven economic distribution over the course of the year; but tourism is also southeast Alaska's largest industry, and its fastest growing industry (SE Conference 2025).¹

Despite being an economic driver, tourism is not always a particularly *popular* industry. Locals resent tourists for invading their towns and many fear the impact of this economic model on local “ways of life.”² There are practical concerns over housing, as workers come in every summer from outside of the region to fill the demand for jobs, leading to short-term rentals that make for an unstable housing market. There is also an awareness in the region that the tourism industry is a major contributor to carbon emissions, and there are concerns over air and water quality, wastewater, and excess strain on local infrastructure from the influx of visitors. These

¹ I should note that my own family is invested in the tourism industry. My grandparents founded Allen Marine, a wildlife and whale watching tour company that operates in southeast. While that undoubtedly shapes my perspective, I have no direct involvement in our family business, so I do not dwell on it in this dissertation. Additionally, as of the completion of this dissertation, I work as the Sustainable Southeast Partnership's Regenerative Tourism Catalyst. This chapter was written before I started that position.

² This phrase has been utilized by non-Indigenous Alaskans, and, in this case, refers to settler perceptions of an “Alaskan way of life,” not Indigenous ways of being or the Lingít concept of “haa kuusteeyí.”

issues have been raised in towns across the region, with many towns and tribes forming tourism commissions and boards, seeking to address local concerns and economic needs. In Sitka, this culminated with a 2025 ballot measure to cap the number of daily and annual tourists at a certain level. The measure ultimately failed, but it highlighted concerns regarding both settler positionality in the region and the environmental impacts of cruise ship tourism. These concerns were largely centered on the experience of living in a “remote” and “beautiful” place, and the desire to keep Sitka for Sitkans.

The environmental concerns that are raised in local conversations are not the same as those felt by cruise ship passengers, or even by the cruise industry. As “green tourism,” “sustainability,” and other similar models have risen in the public consciousness, tourists themselves might experience a different side of the environmental equation. While some concerns are overlapping – air quality, fuel usage/vessel speeds, and fuel type to name a few – issues like waste reduction, reduction of single use plastic, and recycling are all issues that much more obviously impact the ships themselves and the passenger experience, rather than direct local concerns at ports of call. The environment of southeast Alaska itself is also affectively experienced much differently for the tourists; they see a beautiful place worthy of experiencing and perhaps even worthy of “preserving.” Otherwise, the “environment” of their cruise is largely on the actual ship. Tourists are concerned with issues for the duration of their cruise, not with ongoing local environmental concerns. Additionally, as a result of environmentalism in public discourse, there is a tendency towards “greenwashing” that is also prevalent in the industry. Greenwashing allows companies to advertise their sustainability efforts, without actually following up with tangible actions (Brito et al. 2024). The efforts – or lack thereof – within the

industry and by passengers does often intersect with local concerns, though, as I will discuss, their spatio-temporal scales generally do not align.

The previously mentioned settler concerns do not necessarily align with Indigenous concerns over tourism in the industry. As discussed in Chapter Two, Lingít people maintain a longstanding and ambivalent relationship with tourism. Ever since the early days of cruise ship tourism in the region, Lingít people have been participating in the visitor economy. This trend continues, with Native-run businesses, tribal participation in tourism, and ANCs engaging in tourism. This is not to say that all Alaska Natives or all Lingít people have the same relationship with tourism. However, this chapter will explore some of the historical and contemporary nuances of this engagement, as well as the different temporal investments. Whereas tourists are concerned for the duration of their vacation, settlers may be concerned about their own lifetime or direct descendants. Lingít people are concerned with cultural continuum in the long-term, reflecting our own *longue durée* relationship with our homelands. These concerns often have some overlapping themes, such as quality of life, but the deeper concerns with “environment” take on a different temporal scale in relation to *haa shuká*, or our ancestors and descendants.

One of the first times I witnessed an intense outpouring of tourism-based concerns was at Tlingit and Haida’s 2023 Southeast Tribal Environmental Forum (SETEF). Held in Juneau, the Forum brought together people from all over southeast to present on different projects and agencies involved with climate work. In various calls for comments, many brought up tourism. There were concerns over emissions – especially for ships docked in downtown that continue to run their generators for power while in port – and discussions of pollution, potential for spreading invasive species, unclean wastewater, and, finally, strain on existing infrastructure in towns meant for much smaller populations than those arriving on the ships. Emissions are an

especially immediate concern in Juneau because of the great number of ships (three to five large cruise ships per day) in the summer. There is also a distinct irony to the tourist appreciation of Alaska as an “untouched wilderness,” while also participating in an industry so reliant on oil. As was pointed out multiple times at SETEF, the ships themselves, smaller tour boats, and buses all rely on fossil fuels. Tourists approach melting glaciers, hoping to see them before they recede beyond view, all while adding to the greenhouse gases that have resulted in their melting. Alaska’s status as an “untouched wilderness” is reliant on the very same logics of settler colonialism that desire exploitation of land and resources leading to high emissions in the first place. It is a vicious cycle: wanting to see remote and “untouched” places before they “disappear” leads to increased desire for tourism and increased emissions (See Abrahams et al. 2022).

The ways that these discussions circulate in community are also heavily reliant on structures of what I am calling “climate talk.” As discussed in Chapter Two, climate talk focuses on discourse in the community, drawing attention to the issues at play, rather than focusing on the importance of the “factual” elements of the discussion. This is extremely relevant with tourism discourse because people have a wide array of complaints, and the data is not always available to back up these statements. This is not to say that they may not still be valid critiques of the industry, but they are nevertheless sometimes mobilized to very specific ends by critics of tourism. Given the economic entanglements, the positionality of the tourists, and the various settler and Indigenous perspectives, tourism is a complex issue with a variety of scalar particularities.

The first section of this chapter considers some of the problems with cruise ship tourism, and the way that the cruise industry and passengers perceive and address those concerns. Next, I

will discuss the recent “cruise boom” and a subsequent initiative in Sitka to create a cap for visitor numbers. The settlers who led this initiative aligned themselves rhetorically with Indigenous concerns and experiences to solidify their own relationship with land/environment and solidify their place in the region, while ignoring the complex Lingít history with tourism. I will unpack the nuances of this history to illustrate why Lingít people have a rather ambivalent relationship with the industry. Finally, I discuss the way that the creators of the cruise ban, despite aligning themselves with Indigeneity, are much more similar to the cruise ship tourists. This illustrates the way that temporal scales look different for Lingít people, both in relation to visitor numbers and environmental impacts. Ultimately, I argue that the temporal and affective component of tourism in southeast Alaska is experienced differently by settlers and by Lingít people, for whom tourism is intrinsically tied up with settler colonialism.

Corporate and Tourist Interactions with “Green Tourism”

Based on my observations in community, concerns about the cruise tourism industry include fossil fuel usage, impact on air and water quality, dumping of wastewater, noise pollution for marine mammals and other sea life, infrastructural strain, and general waste creation. Even with the cruise industry taking steps to reduce emissions, have better waste treatment, and reduce waste generally, these steps involve large infrastructural changes that are not immediate. It is much easier and tidier for large companies to engage in greenwashing. As Mónica Brito et al. suggest, while consumers may push for more sustainable and socially conscious changes, marketing strategies are much cheaper than actual change (2024).

Because of pushes towards green tourism, most of the large cruise ship companies have an “environmental impact” or “sustainability” webpage. For instance, the major cruise lines that sail to Alaska – Holland America, Princess, Carnival, and others – have web pages dedicated to

their “sustainability” efforts, but they are quite generalized and unspecific. They discuss impact on local communities as “positive” and use language like Princess’s website as of April 7, 2025 claiming they have “state-of-the-art, multi-million-dollar technology both on board and ashore,” and Holland America’s commitment as of the same date to reduce single use items “by 50%,” without giving any specific usage numbers. This vague language allows companies to indicate they are doing something, thereby easing consumer consciences, but without necessarily providing direct benefits to ports and communities. As Brito et al. write, “Efforts have been made to convey the idea of a sector that assumes its environmental responsibilities, doing everything possible to instill this idea in operators and those potentially interested in this type of travel. However, there is still a lot to be done to make this a reality” (17, 2024).

The needed changes are, in part, infrastructural shifts. For example, one proposed change to improve air quality in ports is to connect ships to onshore power. When utilizing shore power, ships are hooked into the municipal electrical grid rather than burning fossil fuel to power their generators. This does, however, require ports and ships to have the proper equipment and infrastructure to perform this function. Not all ships are equipped with the plugs necessary to do this, and very few ports have the infrastructure required (Brito et al, 2024). While there is an ongoing push to fit ships with the necessary equipment, build new ships with this capacity, and for ports to install this technology, it is not something that can happen immediately. This is also true for fuel alternatives, waste treatment systems, and plans to reduce single use plastic.

Smaller cruise ships, with a much higher price tag and more personalized experience, can adapt more quickly to the consumer desire for “green tourism.” I first learned about perhaps the most exclusive of these cruises one summer when out on the water with my father. We passed a tour boat filled with people in red jackets, and I asked why they all had matching coats. My

father told me they came from one of the high-end cruise ships, specifically one that was purportedly a hybrid electric ship. The ship was at anchor nearby, and he pointed it out to me. Its red trim matched the red jackets. Upon further research, this high-end company, Hurtigruten Expeditions, boasts two hybrid ships on their website, one of which, the MS Roald Amundsen, is the ship that completes Alaskan “Expeditions,” as the website called them as of April 7, 2025. The description of the ship proclaims, “Emissions are cut by sailing with electrical propulsion. Innovative sustainable technology reduces the ship's fuel consumption and CO2 emissions by 20 percent” (From their website, travelhx.com). Other promotional materials boast of single use plastic being banned on board and each passenger being given a reusable water bottle to limit plastic use. While none of these “green” changes are inherently bad, they do come with a steep price tag. Discounted prices in the fringe-season for 2025 were still in the \$7,000 range per person, with normal season pricing in the \$10,000 range. This is a much different market than the average large cruise ship passenger (more in the realm of \$1,500-\$2,000 for normal pricing) and having a smaller fleet of ships with longer and fewer sailings is much more amenable to adopting technology like electrical propulsion.

However, the actual impact of such changes is not necessarily felt by locals in the destinations. Cruises by this company and other higher end cruises are not much talked about in town, other than the occasional comment about the matching expedition jackets that are provided to passengers. Because the ships are smaller, they tend to cause less of a disruption to daily life in contrast to the larger ships. This is, at best, a neutral fact. Positive outcomes in the form of economic, social, or environmental impact are not specifically measurable. The potential for lowered emissions may have a broader positive impact, but the company is so exclusive that the singular ship does not have a huge impact on the larger industry. As such, it seems that the optics

of this company rests solely on the desire to appeal to their customers, not with a desire to appeal to locals and local businesses. Green luxury is for the consumer, not the local residents of the “exotic” destinations.

The scalar impact of cruise tourism is felt differently by ports of call versus by passengers. For consumers, small changes are often seen as adequate. However, ports are more specifically interested in emissions and wastewater. Some of these factors are monitored with regulations, like one set by the state of Alaska regarding how far out a ship must be before it releases wastewater (Diller 2025). A passenger might be worried more about cumulative emissions and plastic waste, whereas a port would be more worried about their air quality and localized pollution. While differing perceptions may be inevitable, it is important to note the disparities between the ways that large cruise companies advertise their product and the way that local communities experience their visits. Not to mention that sustainable practices on the ship do not reduce local emissions due to increased bus, small boat, helicopter, and floatplane traffic. The entire business of tourism is intertwined with the fossil fuel industry in ways that have various scalar impacts. However, the reality is that locals do feel these impacts differently than tourists and this needs to be accounted for when considering the way sustainability is being advertised to tourists versus the way it is being observed at port destinations.

Seeking Solutions: Small Town SOUL

Indeed, one major criticism of the cruise tourism industry is that it does not have much positive impact on local communities, with tax and other economic benefits going elsewhere, and of course the environmental degradation caused by large ships. These concerns are deeply felt in community, as is reflected in news coverage about the issue. In February of 2025, an article was published in USA Today titled “‘What is our Limit’: How cruise ships are impacting

Alaska’s environment.” The article mentions overcrowding as an issue, both in town and on sightseeing excursions (Diller 2025). As a result of such crowding, towns like Sitka have sought to cap the number of cruise passengers on different occasions. In Sitka, there has been concern over high-volume days where cruise ship passengers outnumber residents. Despite a potential assumption that more passengers equates with more money, the financial benefit on these high-volume days is not necessarily so clear cut. Indeed, a news story from local station Raven Radio in Sitka indicated that food truck vendors – who need only sell out and then be done for the day – appreciated extremely high traffic days. However, local stores found numbers to be overwhelming to the point that it did not positively contribute to their daily sales (Woolsey 2023). Concerns over high numbers lowering the quality of visitor experience ripple out into local concerns over quality of life and fear over visitor numbers growing even further, past the capacity that small towns can accommodate.

As a result of these complaints, there have been multiple attempts to create restrictions on the number of cruise passengers in Sitka, both daily and yearly. In December of 2024, an attempted ban passed via City Assembly and was allowed to become a petition, requiring 600 signatures to appear as a ballot proposition. The petition came about due to rising tourism numbers, which ballooned to over 500,000 visitors in 2024, far exceeding pre-pandemic numbers (210,000 in 2019 and only 158,000 in 2018). The proposal included limiting yearly cruise numbers to 300,000 passengers disembarking in Sitka, allowing no more than 4,500 passengers to disembark in one day, and a mandated one-day-per-week with no cruise ships. The proposition claimed to protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of Sitka residents. It also advocated to “protect Sitka’s rural subsistence status, small town character and way of life,” and maintain Sitka’s standards as an appealing destination. The proposition went to a vote and was rejected by

a 70-30% margin.³ Discussions about these topics played out in newspaper ads, letters to the editor, discussions among friends and family, community forums, and on social media. The creators of the petition, Small Town SOUL,⁴ had a number of concerns about tourism, which I am grouping into three categories: 1) quality of life, 2) concerns over subsistence, and 3) environmental concerns.

Regarding quality of life, Small Town SOUL's website states, "We are living here for a reason, with a purpose, and we will live here until we die. We are not transients driven by careers, we are locals..." (Small Town SOUL n.d.). The site also mentions having an unbalanced economy too focused on seasonal workers and revenue, lack of year-round housing for residents, "local identity," and community health and safety. Concerns include crowding and increased traffic on roads, trails, and waterways. Many advocates for a cruise tourism passenger cap (including Small Town SOUL) have expressed frustration with a policy that closed the main downtown thoroughfare, Lincoln Street, to cars during high volume days, claiming that it made Sitka feel like a theme park. While not specifically mentioned by Small Town SOUL, one common phrase that I have often heard is that locals "do not want to live in Disneyland."⁵ People also joke about roller coasters being built downtown for tourists and about how downtown landmarks should be repainted pink like the castle at Disneyland. A common phrase that people

³ This is likely due to cruise tourism being the only growing, as well as the largest, industry in southeast Alaska (Rain Coast Data 2025). Many small businesses were also against the ballot measure.

⁴ SOUL is an acronym for "Save Our Unique Lifestyle."

⁵ The critique of "living in Disneyland" resonates with Jean Baudrillard's conception of Disneyland as the ultimate simulacrum or "a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 2019, 1). The idea that Sitka could become an empty approximation of an Alaskan town is at the center of these fears. However, this construction of an "Alaskan town" also abstracts "Sitka" from Sheet'ká and from Lingít Aaní. Sitka was always a settler colonial fabrication, and the reference to Disneyland continues to displace this reality. Even within Baudrillard's own rendering, the reality of settler colonialism is ignored. As Jodi Byrd points out of deconstructionist and post-structuralist thought, "not being prepared to disrupt the logics of settler colonialism necessary for the *terra nullius* through which to wander, the entire system either freezes or reboots" (Byrd 2011, 17). Deconstructionists are prepared to deconstruct endlessly right up until they have to deconstruct the logics of settler colonialism.

say when discussing the way Sitka caters to tourists is that it is “like Disneyland,” or “turning into Disneyland.” The observation gestures to tension between the way cruise passengers experience a place and the experience of residents. While some tourists may (ostensibly) seek forms of authenticity, many stores that cater to them are often anything but, leaning into stereotypes or simply owned by outside entities. In Juneau, a whole section of downtown is corporate tourist shops, like Del Sol, that are only open during the summer. In Skagway, essentially the entire town shuts down in the off-season. Small Town SOUL explicitly says on their website that they do not wish to become like these communities.

Second are the concerns over subsistence, which stem largely from a desire to maintain Sitka’s subsistence preference. Rather than having a Native subsistence preference, Alaska has a rural subsistence preference that is based on the economic composition of the area and the composition of subsistence users. Only three areas are non-subsistence areas, including Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. Notably, these are the largest cities in the state, with Sitka being fifth in size. However, the economic opportunities of the town are weighed much more highly than the size, as laid out on Alaska Department of Fish Game’s website. Ostensibly, the fear is that a turn to the tourist economy will change the nature of Sitka’s economy and cause the state to rescind its rural preference. This was based, in part, on the fact that prior to 2025, Ketchikan did not have rural subsistence preference due to the volume of the tourist economy. However, their preference was reinstated, which indicates that Sitka – with a much smaller tourism economy – is likely not at risk.

Small Town SOUL’s campaign emerged in the midst of this state-level change, so their arguments relied heavily on evidence that Ketchikan’s tourism economy had stripped them of

subsistence rights. Even beyond a practical concern over continued access to subsistence, they also rely on the argument that subsistence constitutes a local way of life. Their website states:

It is important to us to maintain the legal rights to use the resources that Mother Nature has provided to keep the people well fed. “Subsistence” is a misnomer for this kind of cashless economy. Many of us go out and find food for the table, for right now or the coming winter. Those who are too old know that they won’t be forgotten. Sharing is a value that is practiced by the indigenous people here, and the newcomers have learned from this and benefit with body, mind, and soul. (Small Town SOUL n.d.)

Subsistence is framed as an issue of local identity that is shared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents. The Small Town SOUL group has rightful connections with and long-term investment in this place because they have “learned from” Indigenous practices and values.

The third category of Small Town SOUL’s campaign is environmental concerns. The Small Town SOUL website states “Cruise ships cause significant damage to our planet’s climate” (Small Town SOUL n.d.). They assert that environmental health is important to Sitkans as a general principle. More specifically, they mention discharge, air and water quality, lack of monitoring, and potential harm on subsistence for locals. They also mention that the Ocean Ranger Program – a state program monitoring cruise ship pollution – was dismantled. The program was a ballot measure that passed in 2006. There was an attempt in the state legislature in 2019 to end the program, which was subsequently defunded by Governor Mike Dunleavy, who slashed the program’s budget to essentially nothing (Rogers 2023). This was a controversial move by Dunleavy and received much attention in the discussions in Sitka about the environmental impact of cruise ship tourism and the need for increased monitoring. Small Town SOUL’s gesture to the environment also reflects larger concerns in the region over the impacts

that the cruise industry has on the lands and waters of southeast Alaska. For example, a 2024 documentary, *Cruise Boom*, directed by a Sitka-based settler filmmaker, Ellen Frankenstein, explores some community concerns over infrastructure strain, emissions and other climate implications.

Economic Entanglements: The Lingít Encounter with Tourism

Concerns over environmental issues are newer within the longer history of tourism, which is itself not a new industry in Sitka and southeast Alaska. Monthly cruises started as early as the 1880s, as described in Chapter Two. These cruises brought wealthy passengers seeking a respite from city life (Campbell 2007). Cruise tourism in general became especially popular during World War II as vacations abroad became unfeasible and people turned their eye to domestic destinations (Alaska Historical Society 2014). The industry as we know it today became popular in the 1970s, though it picked up vastly in the early 2000s, then crashed with the 2008 financial crisis, again in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and picked back up again as people returned to vacationing in the wake of the pandemic (Diller 2025). Within this history, Lingít people have often taken advantage of new economic opportunities.

Lingít artists have been making unique and creative pieces for tourist consumption since the start of settler colonialism. Personally, I have seen examples scattered at different museums and even antiques shops throughout the US. From woven spruce root teacups to carved silver spoons and beaded wall hangings, the tourist arts industry continues to thrive to this day. At the Harvard Peabody Museum, I even saw a round bag that was made from cut up pieces of a Chilkat blanket. The phenomenon of Indigenous artists making items for tourists, Indigenous imagery being appropriated in tourism advertising, and reproduction of Indigenous art have all been documented and discussed within academia (see Jacobs 1998 on the American Southwest

and Berlo and Jonaitis 2020 on the Northwest Coast). It is referenced here not to pass judgement on the quality of these items, but rather to illustrate that the history of tourism in relation to Lingít people is often an ambivalent one. Our ancestors saw an opportunity in tourism and they took it. Today, artists sell their work to tourists, as evidenced by the Native art galleries in Sitka, Juneau, Ketchikan, and other towns. While these stores do not only cater to visitors, tourists do represent a large percentage of the market. Some of these stores are owned by Native people, and there are Indigenous entrepreneurs who engage in other aspects of the industry as well.

As previously mentioned, tribes and corporations also engage in the tourism industry. Alexis Bunten wrote about STA's Tribal Tours company in her book, *So, How Long Have You Been Native* (2015), that discusses cultural tourism. The book presents a complex picture of the industry. On the one hand, it is a means of sharing culture and creating culturally relevant jobs. On the other hand, it is one in which Native people are exposed to ignorance and may be forced to "sell" their culture. There are additional roadblocks to this engagement, as, according to Bunten, Sitka is often "sold" on its history of Russian colonization because it was the capital of so-called Russian America (2015). This is reinforced by sights like the Russian Bishop's House, St. Michael's Cathedral, the Russian Blockhouse, and the Russian Dancers as central tourist attractions. Ketchikan is often the port sold as the "Tlingit" destination, which changes the types of excursions people want to embark on. Bunten describes how this inhibited the sale of tickets for STA's tribal tours and Lingít dance shows because visitors associated these things with Ketchikan. Given the extreme increase in cruise passengers in recent years, it seems anecdotally that some of these issues have decreased. While the Russian Dance show is still around, Tribal Tours busses can be seen frequently around town in the summer – featuring newly updated paint jobs no less. With so many passengers, almost all excursions seem to be in high demand. Even

so, stereotypes do tend to linger, and the history of Russian colonization out of context erases Lingít histories and colonial trauma.

Expanding tourism has also meant expansion by other Native entities. Shee Atiká runs Sheet'ká Treetop Adventures, a ropes course where visitors can climb and clamber among the trees. There is also a Native-owned gallery in town, Xút'aa Hídi, that sells Indigenous art and clothing. Several other stores also carry art and jewelry made by local Indigenous artists. This is to say, Native people have various commitments to the tourism industry in Sitka and are not necessarily the loudest voices against it. Xút'aa Hídi had a “Decline to Sign” poster in their window regarding the petition to reduce cruise numbers. Shee Atiká board's stance was also in opposition to the ballot proposition. STA has created a tourism commission as a place to voice citizen opinions on tourism. There is a desire for more sustainable – and even regenerative (see Fusté-Forné and Hussain 2025) – and culturally conscious forms of tourism, but there is no one “Native” stance on the issue, nor is there inherent agreement against the industry.

Differing Temporal Stakes: What if there is no cedar? What if there are no salmon?

Contrary to this largely ambivalent historical relationship with tourism, Small Town SOUL frames its relationship with Indigeneity as key to its anti-tourism stance. The group foregrounds “local” identity, references to the Lingít language, and invokes ties to Indigenous inhabitants. I refer to this move as a settler co-option of Indigeneity, and it appears frequently in the organization's materials. The “about us” page of the Small Town SOUL website states:

We are citizens of Sitka. We are a small island community of 8,500 on the outer coast of Baranof Island, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. This island was called Shee before first contact with the Russians, and Sheet'ka [sic] is the original name of this town.

We are diverse and have lived here for many years or decades, or we were born and raised here. We are immigrants, or come from families who have been living here for generations. We are glad to know that a quarter of our population is indigenous: Lingit [sic], Haida, and Tsimshian, or belong to other Alaska Native or American Indian nations. Our Lingit [sic] friends have told us their people have lived here since time immemorial, and science is catching up and confirming that this land has been inhabited for at least 10,000 years. (Small Town SOUL n.d.)

While there is a good deal of effort being made to gesture to Indigenous presence, the framing also makes it very clear that this entire campaign is written from a settler point of view. They state elsewhere that they are “grateful our Indigenous neighbors allow us to live in this place.” They are happy to allude to alliances with Indigenous “friends” and “neighbors,” but they do not directly engage with those people by including their actual thoughts on tourism. This co-option creates an assumed universal Indigenous acceptance of their stance without any attention to the larger complexities when it comes to the Lingit experience with tourism, historically and today.

The assumption that Native people must inherently be against tourism is rooted in pervasive settler assumptions. For one, there is the Ecological Indian stereotype: Tourism is bad for the environment. Native people are one with “nature,” ergo, they must hate tourism. This stance makes assumptions about the very notion of “environmentalism” and Indigenous “purity,” all of which erase Indigenous agency and the complexity of life under settler colonialism (Nadasdy 2005). This is not to say that Native people cannot rightfully be against tourism, but only that the blanket assumption is not representative of Native experience. In some places, there is a *more* unified Indigenous perspective on tourism. Hawai‘i is a good example of this (see Arvin 2019). Of course, there is still no singular stance, but because Native Hawaiians do not

have tribal governments – or even, like in Alaska, tribal corporations – there is less institutional structure to allow the tourism industry to contribute anything, even financially, to communities. As a result, many Native Hawaiian people call for people to stop traveling to Hawai‘i altogether (“Hawai‘i doesn't want visitors” 2023). However, taking that singular example and applying it to all Indigenous peoples is a form of universalism that does not fit well with Indigenous epistemologies, which are vast and diverse.⁶

Small Town SOUL mobilizes the assumed Indigenous alliance as a way to claim authenticity for themselves by way of implied Indigeneity. Not only do they claim to share a common goal with their Lingít neighbors, but also a “way of life” focused on subsistence and lessons learned from Indigenous peoples. Within their framework of “community,” there is no work being done to differentiate settlers and Indigenous peoples. They co-opt not only Indigenous agreement with their goals, but Indigenous identity as well. The settlers involved in Small Town SOUL are working to make it very clear that they themselves have a claim to “Sheet’ká,” to subsistence foods, and to the land and waters they are working to protect.

This deeper relationship to their environment and their “choice” to live in a “beautiful” yet remote place is framed as a type of perseverance that harkens back to the “frontier” lifestyle. They further solidify this through their claims both to the “subsistence lifestyle” and to a desire to protect Sitkans’ “unique lifestyle.” Settlers using subsistence to assert claims of ownership and naturalized presence has been written about extensively by Forest Haven. The notion that settlers have a right to subsistence has long been weaponized by settlers against Native peoples, with settler access and identification being prioritized over Alaska Native lifeways. As Haven writes,

⁶ The paradox of Indigenous economic engagement, especially through tribal gaming, has been discussed thoroughly by a number of scholars (see Cattelino 2008; Dennison 2024).

Knowledge and involvement with subsistence foods for many non-Native Alaskans is, like many Alaskan Natives, also a marker of identity. However, this identity is connected to the ideological formation of Alaska as “the last frontier,” and thus deeply bound up with settler temporalities, and narratives of perseverance and belonging in the face of a “wild,” vast, and untamable space. Further, such forms of identification with subsistence practices connect strongly to what it means for people to “be Alaskan.” While that is not to say that *only* those residents who are involved with subsistence consider themselves Alaskan, but it is to say that *all* those residents who adhere to the White settler perspective use their knowledge and practice of subsistence as a marker of their Alaskan identity. (2022, 137-138)

The move to “protect” Sitka’s rural status is also a move to “protect” its resident’s “rights” as Alaskans, and specifically as White settlers in the face of “invasion” by visitors who threaten their claim to Alaskan authenticity.

Ultimately, Small Town SOUL’s rhetorical slippage and use of the Lingít language suggests that their “belonging” in the region is the same as that of Lingít people. They claim that one of their goals is to “Restore the quality of life Sheet’ká residents have historically enjoyed on Lingit [sic] Aaní.” This statement indicates that the “residents” in question are of one “type.” There is a history of people living in this place and the settlers who take part in that history have the same claim to connection as Lingít people who have lived on this land for thousands of years. That is because this claim is specifically in *opposition* to tourists who are transient and unprepared to commit to making sacrifices to live in such a rugged and remote place.

These visitors are viewed as “silly” and “unprepared” for their Alaskan trips. They wear Ugg boots and giant parkas when it is 60 degrees out – a balmy summer day for Sitka. They do

not have adequate rain gear and wear disposable rain ponchos, marking them obviously “other.” This all stands in opposition to the “real” Alaskans who may be seen in t-shirts in 60-degree weather, and who have adequate rain gear for all types of weather. There is a certain pride that goes along with *not* being a tourist that also relates to the desire and ability to live in this “wild” place that the visitors are disrupting. This is not why these settlers chose to live in Sitka, and this is not the Sitka they know and love. Haven quotes a 1982 interview with a White advocate for settler subsistence rights. In it, he indirectly claims that preferences that favor Native people are unfair to White settlers, saying “Did we come here for this?” (McDowell in Haven 2022). A similar sentiment rings true with regards to settler anger at the cruise industry. They did not *come here* to live in a place inundated by tourists. They came here to “be Alaskan” and to enact this frontier “way of life.” They seek authenticity, in other words, authentic Alaskan identity edging on Indigeneity and their right to occupy the land.⁷ This is even more staunchly solidified by asserting the desire to protect Sitka’s “way of life,” which is a phrase often invoked in relation to Indigeneity, and that has direct ties to the phrase “haa *kuusteeyí*,” also translated as “our way of life.” The assertion of a Sitkan identity that could constitute a “way of life” is thus also a co-option of Indigeneity in contrast to the inherently nomadic status of tourists.

These residents stand in opposition to the invading tourists alongside Lingít people (who are inherently assumed to be allies). This places tourists in the role of colonizer and settlers in the role of “natives” who must defend their homes from interlopers. They presume Indigeneity via not only their actions in community, but also through a *shared* “trauma” of a new wave of “colonizers.” This also reframes the positionality of the settler and creates a category of “native

⁷ This is not to say that all settler-Sitkans feel this way, nor to say that it was even a conscious effort on the part of Small Town SOUL. Rather, I am identifying the structural components of settler colonialism that are replicated even in spaces that are ostensibly allied with Indigenous peoples. Indigeneity itself is appropriated by settlers in order to make certain arguments that are actually designed specifically for the benefit of settlers.

Alaskan” stemming from 19th and 20th century colonization rather than the temporality of time immemorial. It is not the *settler* presence causing disruption to Lingít lifeways and claims to land, but the tourists who oppose a united “Sitka” that encompasses “native Alaskans” – both settlers and Lingít people. These claims to belonging are so aggressive partially because they must cover up the temporal and cultural realities that tie settlers much more closely to tourists than to Lingít people living in Sitka.

The first colonizers and settlers arrived in southeast Alaska on ships, as do the tourists. Once, I was discussing the presence of rats on the island of Shee with some friends; I expressed that I thought they had arrived on “the ships,” by which I meant the colonial sailing ships. My friends thought I meant the cruise ships and were confused as to how they would get ashore and if that would be a health violation. We quickly cleared up the confusion, and it was quite funny, but it was also a case where the connection between these ships was obvious, even as the temporalities became blurred. Early settlers were similarly unprepared to live in this climate, having little knowledge of it in comparison to Indigenous populations with over 10,000 years of experience. And indeed, what is the several hundred-year history of settler presence to that 10,000-year history? In the *longue durée*, it is perhaps not so dissimilar from the few days tourists spend in the state. Tourists wish to see the beautiful, remote, wild places of Alaska, similar to what many settlers “came here for.” The only real difference is the amount of time and resources that longer-term settlers want to spend on their experience.

The impact as it is experienced by Lingít people is also more similar than settlers wish to imagine. For example, those opposed to tourism exclaim that they do not wish to live in a theme park, citing changes to the infrastructure of Sitka to accommodate tourists. The idea that the cityscape would be so severely changed for the sake of tourists is both outlandish and

threatening. The irony is that settlers do not see the ways in which the land and infrastructure has already been terraformed to their needs, desires, and to the ends of the settler colonial nation-state. The ways in which settlers transform landscapes for their own needs is well-documented (Harris 2004). In turn, the notion of “terraforming” is often discussed in relation to colonization in space, wherein planets are made habitable beyond or in replacement for Earth. Given this term’s relationship to climate change, particularly via geoengineering, it seems a fitting concept to bring into discussions of colonization on Earth as well. As Derek Woods writes, “terraforming became a means of understanding both what some humans *have* done to the earth system and what some *might* do” (2019, 7; emphasis in original). What settlers in Sitka *have* done is destroy the shoreline on which Lingít canoes used to land by building it out as an industrial waterfront and building it up to be a road rather than a beach. They also destroyed an important cultural landmark, Herring Rock, in the process. They built and got rid of a pulp mill, they logged extensively, and they created a vast network of roads connecting single family homes. The landscape has been remade in their image, but they fear the extent to which it *might* be changed again (into Disneyland, ostensibly) for the sake of visitors.

The inability to see and understand the changes that have already occurred relates to the differences in temporal experience between settlers/tourists and Lingít people. This resonates with Mark Rifkin’s assertion that “Native peoples’ varied experiences of duration can remain nonidentical with respect to the dynamics of settler temporal formations, indicating ways of being-in-time that are not reducible to participation in a singular, given time – a unitary flow – largely contoured by non-native patterns and priorities” (2017, 3). The narrative put forth in *Cruise Boom* and by Small Town SOUL insists on a unified experience of cruise tourism. It assumes that the way settlers experience cruise tourism is the same as Lingít people because

settlers live alongside us and have “learned” from us. I propose a reassessment of the intersecting temporalities that make up the felt implications of cruise tourism; its looks quite different within the timescale of 10,000 years.

This different timescale is also reflected in the impact of tourism on the land and waters. Both Small Town SOUL and tourists ostensibly have environmental commitments. To the tourist on an eco-friendly cruise, or even on a larger ship with each company’s “green” initiatives, the stakes of cruising’s environmental impact is only legible within the context of their own actions on their own cruise and ignores issues beyond the ship itself. To the settler residents who negatively experience the influx of visitors on any given “ship day,” the impact is a more regular, daily occurrence throughout the season. It is still centered largely on their own personal experiences. Small Town SOUL’s attention to environmental impacts ignored the scalar impacts of potential environmental degradation beyond Sitka itself. Their arguments leading up to the vote centered on the idea that capping numbers *in Sitka* would address broader environmental concerns. However, this ignored the fact that limiting numbers in Sitka would not necessarily reduce cruise numbers more broadly, thus doing nothing to address the larger impact of the industry. Within this, the use of Indigeneity as a vector for a settler political project erases Indigenous political projects and agency in the here and now. Indigenous issues and perspectives become a shield for settler concerns over immediate quality of life issues. By contrast, to a Lingít person, cruise tourism’s impact is set within a larger geographic and temporal scale with specific attention to how it could disrupt the future of our grandchildren’s grandchildren and the current and future viability of living on our land.

Indeed, this lack of attention to long-term impacts on Lingít Aaní reflects the status of settlers as inherently transient, despite some mobilizing three or four generations of residency as

a claim to legitimacy (Haven 2022). Young people who grew up in town will often leave to go to college and not come back. There is, however, often an influx of young people from other places who come for short term positions, for example through the Alaska Fellows Program,⁸ or who get work fishing, or at other local non-profits. I have heard anecdotally that those young people often stay an average of five years in Sitka. Those who stay longer may have children and move to be closer to family, often in the lower 48. This transient settler population resonates with Vine Deloria Jr.'s essay "For This Land." Native people have often been dispossessed of land because we are seen as "nomadic." Deloria points out:

Non-Indian Americans, not the Indians, are the real nomads. White Americans are rarely buried in the places they were born, and most of them migrate freely during their lifetimes, living in as many as a dozen places and having roots in and accepting responsibility for none of these locations. (Deloria Jr. 1999, 254).

Despite accusations that tourists have no business disrupting the lives of locals, those who are settlers have much more tenuous connections than they might realize or wish to admit. The language of the petition illustrates the way that these anxieties about being "Alaskan" rise to the top. It displaces the reality of settlers as recent additions to the land onto the even more transient tourists while also ignoring their mutual similarities, as well as eliding the different stakes for Lingít residents.

Ultimately, Small Town SOUL's claims to longevity and Indigeneity ignore the realities of settler colonialism, erasing Indigenous presence and settler atrocities. Their very claim to Indigeneity is predicated on not wanting to experience what they perceive to be the same thing

⁸ This program is for recent college graduates. It operates on a cohort model and places young people in positions at various organizations across the state. It caters largely to non-Alaskans who want to live and work briefly in the state.

that Lingít people have experienced in ongoing colonization; a threat to their “way of life” that is only present for approximately eight hours a day, six months out of the year. Given the more limited timescale of settler presence on Lingít Aaní, it makes sense that tourist invasion feels more immediate and disturbing. The documentary *Cruise Boom* relies on a countdown to the first day of the tourist season to create a sense of urgency and impending crisis. However, when the actual ships arrive, it feels rather anticlimactic because life goes on and there is no doom at the end of the countdown. As Kyle Whyte writes of what he calls crisis epistemology, “someone becomes so concerned with the *present* crisis as *new* that they question neither their own perspective nor where their perspective may derive its social origin” (emphasis in original, 2021, 4). The assumption of *unprecedented* (Whyte 2021) impending doom thus obscures the settler-specific relationship with cruise passengers. By contrast, for a Lingít person, there is no reason to view the start of the season as “unprecedented”; we live every day under a recently installed settler regime. Indeed, these settlers do not leave at the end of the day or the season. The apocalyptic event of settler colonialism is the reality in which we continuously live (Donnelly 2018). Banning tourists would not mean the end of settler colonialism, nor the end of the continued exploitation of our homelands.

Whereas the social pressures of cruise passengers feel less immediate and pressing for Lingít people within the larger settler colonial project, that same timescale deeply influences felt environmental impacts in a different way. In thinking about the viability of living on our homelands for another 10,000 years, people do have deep concerns about what would happen if there were no more cedar, or no more salmon. These are not simply concerns about what it means to be able to feel Alaskan or to live in a beautiful place that is rapidly changing. The stakes of this are generations and generations of cultural practices and knowledge that are in flux

with ongoing changes. These are relationships that have lasted thousands of years. As Lingít people will often say, we have been here 10,000 years and we will be here for 10,000 more.

Conclusion: Belonging in Question

For many residents, it seems as if cruise tourism is first and foremost a matter of quality of life rather than one of climate change. However, it is an issue that is always entangled in discussions of climate change and environmental degradation. If settlers and tourists alike seek Alaska for its remote setting and stunning natural features, then for residents, tourists will always be a threat to that sense of “untouched nature.” Such a construction of Alaska as “untouched” is, nevertheless, an example of Indigenous erasure. Casting tourists as an invading force is an erasure of histories of settler colonialism that are nonetheless ever present to Lingít people. The anti-tourism advocates wish to preserve Alaska as a remote place. But this raises a question: For whom ought southeast Alaska be preserved? For the nation-state, Alaska – and the Tongass National Forest – are for the American people. While cruise passengers come from all over the world, many are Americans, so by this logic it is also their “right” to see the state. For Alaskans, the desire is to preserve their “Alaskan” way of life and claim to a frontier identity. “Preserving” it for “Alaskans” naturalizes settler presumed access to Indigenous land, reinforcing settler notions of ownership and right. And preserving it for “wildlife” either casts Native people as wild savage animals or erases us fully from our homelands. Meanwhile, to continue living on our homelands, many Lingít people turn to tourism to fund the high costs of living in a “remote” place, with limited access to our traditional foods and other materials.

Being a settler “protecting” Sitka from tourists does not have the same stakes as a Lingít person existing alongside Sheet’ká as we have done since time immemorial. The stakes of a few months being busy in the summer as a potential reason to leave town or to “not recognize” one’s

community looks quite different than living and staying through immense cultural and infrastructural change over the course of several hundred years. The former places the stakes of environmental degradation as a sad and frustrating result of tourism that can be leveraged towards a political goal. The latter realizes that cruise tourism is merely part of a larger system of cultural genocide and land theft that relies on extraction and pollution as assumed access to Indigenous lands, leading to forms of bad relationality that comprise something we can understand as climate change.

This chapter has shown the very way in which different temporal and relational commitments to land play out in climate talk, in orientations to cruise tourism, and in orientations to land and place. While poor air and water quality may harm all residents, the rippling impacts of emissions and pollution are felt differently by Lingít residents who have a relationship to this land that spans countless generations. Cedar trees dying out due to changing temperature conditions or salmon, herring, and marine mammals being negatively impacted by cruise ships may be seen as negative by many residents – both those who support cruise ship passenger caps and those who do not. However, for Lingít residents, it is not merely about a net loss, but about the continued and unending onslaught against our homelands, our relatives, and ourselves. The often-ambivalent relationship between Lingít people and cruise ships illustrates how they are simply another row in the great tapestry of settler colonialism, which is itself but a few rows in the entirety of our existence in our homelands. As such, while the rippling effects of emissions and pollution may be even more deeply felt, the temporality of any given ship day feels somewhat less of a crisis. Even so, tribes are also taking proactive steps towards monitoring and researching potential environmental impacts.

Chapter Four: Fisheries Scientists and Other Friends: Scientific Study and Funding on Lingít Aaní

In “Anthropologists and Other Friends,” a chapter in the book, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. begins by writing, “Into each life, it is said, some rain must fall” ([1969] 1988, 79). In the context of Indian Country, he is talking about anthropologists and the “veritable stream” that arrive in the summer onto reservations in the lower 48 (Deloria Jr. [1969] 1988, 79). If this is a cyclical pattern on reservations, then certainly the “veritable stream” descending upon southeast Alaska is fisheries scientists. Their presence and influence are inescapable in a fishing community. Though truly there is no shortage of scientists in southeast Alaska, from ecologists to hydrologists, geologists, marine biologists, so on and so forth. With a rich and diverse ecosystem on land and in the water, southeast Alaska is an ideal place for any number of research projects. These projects are, however, predicated on access to, at bare minimum, Lingít Aaní, and oftentimes, a desire to access Lingít knowledge as well. Access to territory and knowledge is a matter of tribal interest, requiring much attention, infrastructure, and oversight. Most tribes like to stay apprised of research going on in their traditional territories. And there is frustration with the way that some scientists act in community and the miscommunications that can arise.

From an Indigenous perspective, settler colonial technologies, waste, and disruption require new tools of inquiry, often adopted from that same settler context. As such, research is driven all around by a need to track changes and find answers in rapidly changing circumstances. This is often supported by tribes in opposition to industry and its desire for extraction and lax environmental policies. This is also true of climate change issues like ocean acidification and changes to weather and temperature patterns. Within the settler colonial nation-state, these issues

are all highly relevant to tribes. Part of their job is to steward lands and waters, ensuring tribal citizens have access to traditional sites, territories, and harvest materials. External researchers are also interested in these changes, resulting in increased demand for access to Indigenous lands and waters. As a result, tribal and settler interests do sometimes align with regard to research and monitoring. However, the history of research in Native communities complicates the basis of these relationships.

Through dismissal of Indigenous Knowledge and the extraction of data, Western science and research has not historically had a good reputation in Indigenous communities (Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Liboiron 2021; Watts 2013; Todd 2016; Spice 2016). The history of Western science is rooted in extractive practices, which means that the research of non-Indigenous scientists has often been contentious for tribes. It has given rise to a legacy of unequal power dynamics, with fears that research will be used against the tribe or that information will be extracted and exposed without recourse. Indigenous peoples and lands have been treated as objects of scientific study, stripping them of all agency and power within the process. Data and scientific study have been historically used to categorize, divide, and dispossess Native peoples of homelands. Despite a desire for data and information on the changing world around us, many communities have a rather ambivalent relationship with Western science. Working with external researchers can be a major challenge due to issues of contested sovereignty and lack of communication.

This history also places a significant burden on tribes to have research policies and to vet potential researchers who seek permission to conduct their research. Research policies can be created by tribes to impose guidelines for how researchers must interact with community and traditional territories. This creates additional protections beyond the limits of an Internal Review

Board (IRB) that would not have tribally specific considerations in mind. However, as this does require additional staff labor and oversight, according to tribal government employees, many southeast Alaska tribes do not have specific research policies. Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) does have a robust research policy but lacks the staff to efficiently deal with the volume of requests. Additionally, many scientists do not know that they ought to ask the tribe for permission to conduct research within the traditional territory of a tribe. They also do not have familiarity with the tribal governance systems and therefore are not sure how to approach tribal leadership. They are also not necessarily familiar with Indigenous values, ethics, and cultural specificities that might change the way a researcher would approach and engage with scientific study involving a tribal community. This is not helped by the restrictions and standards of many funding agencies, which prescribe a set of requirements for working with tribal communities, but with very little regard for the on-the-ground realities of those tribal nations. Overall, scientists and the grant funding system are ill-equipped for meaningful research with Indigenous peoples, and this is no less true on Lingít Aaní.

As a Lingít researcher working in the region, I had heard of and observed similar issues throughout the duration of my field work. During the tail end of my field work, I became involved with a project – CaRE (Communication and Reciprocal Exchange), hosted at the Sitka Sound Science Center (SSSC) – that was working to address some of these issues through trainings for external researchers. My experience with that project provided further insight into some of the issues I address in this chapter, specifically with the National Science Foundation (NSF) and “co-production” as a model. While co-production has a variety of definitions across disciplines and contexts, this specific model of co-production is a methodology in which an Indigenous community helps design and execute a research plan alongside the settler researchers.

I will go into more detail about CaRE later in this chapter, but it is first necessary to trace some of the history of the NSF, and some critiques of the type of research it promotes. Because the NSF has historically awarded an immense amount of funding for research, and because of its prestigious position in the scientific community, it is an emblematic example of what Stephanie Daza calls “grants culture” (2012, 773). I argue that this funding system is oftentimes at odds with Indigenous values and worlding. The grant funding system is particularly salient because CaRE’s initial planning grant was funded by the NSF. Donald Trump’s administration was in the process of gutting the Foundation in the weeks prior to the pilot workshop, leading to a great deal of uncertainty and unease. While gutting the NSF has been very detrimental for the academic community, I still feel it is necessary to interrogate some of the underlying issues that have plagued the organization since its inception. This is particularly relevant to the way the NSF promotes and evaluates research with tribal nations.

At the CaRE workshop, co-production became a buzzword for an aspirational form of research that I argue holds the potential to undermine the workshop’s aim to teach about power dynamics and ethical research. Within the NSF, co-production is a model that has been held by some as the highest achievement when working with Indigenous communities. I seek to trouble this assertion, both through a discussion of the NSF’s desire for replicable models that simplify the scientific process, and through a consideration of the unequal power dynamics still inherent in co-production. Co-production and the NSF both desire clean and simple solutions to deeply complex and historically rooted power dynamics. This model is largely antithetical to Lingít worlding and thinking, which is based in dynamic change and experimentation. Even within these deeply flawed systems, Indigenous people continue to engage with and utilize Western science. I will consider a few examples of this in active community-based research/scientific

projects, specifically through the lens of Gerald Vizenor's concepts of survivance and transmotion. Ultimately, I argue that, in the face of a changing ecosystem, Lingít tribes and other organizations have utilized and can utilize the *tools* of Western science/research while continuing our own cultural practices of inquiry, experimentation, and adaptation. The difference lies in the Indigenous autonomy to choose and set the boundaries of that engagement on tribal terms. Additionally, these tribally-led endeavors are, most importantly, a continuation of Indigenous methodology and observations that have been ongoing since time immemorial.

The "National" is not Silent in "National Science Foundation"

Considering the way the NSF engages with tribal nations requires an overview of its history. During the second World War, scientific knowledge – particularly in the form of weapons development – became newly relevant to the federal government, resulting in further ties between universities and government agencies (Mazuzan 1994; Roberts 2009). In the post-war world, the government was interested in continuing this work, while also ensuring that the military alone would not fund research, and that universities would have more funding avenues available to them. The National Science Foundation (NSF) – originally the National Research Foundation – was proposed by senator Harley Kilgore of West Virginia. As NSF historian George T. Mazuzan reports, Kilgore supported applied research as well as basic research – that is, research for the sake of gaining greater knowledge, but without specific applied uses in mind – and advocated for geographically distributed funds (1994). Within the scientific community, Vannevar Bush was an advocate of such a foundation. Head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during World War II, Bush saw the benefit of this continued support. He laid out his plans in a report to President Roosevelt, though – in contrast to Kilgore – he proposed

supporting only basic research and based solely on merit, not on a geographically distributed model (Mazuzan 1994).

The NSF has attempted to address this original disagreement in a variety of ways throughout its history. While initially Bush's model won out, the NSF's approach has evolved over the years to address social justifications for allocating government funds to research. Applied research has been funded by the NSF since 1968, and societal benefits have been considered in the award process also since the 1960s, though only in the case of a tie breaker (Roberts 2009). NSF director France A. Córdova's introduction to the 75th anniversary edition of Bush's report, "Science – The Endless Frontier," discusses the societal benefits of the NSF, including expanding on "human capital" and "encouraging people from all walks of life" to apply for grants and to strive to "satisfy NSF's high standards" (Córdova 2020, vii). Córdova explains that the NSF has invested more in minoritized communities and women in scientific fields as the Foundation has grown, though always with a mind to the standards set by the NSF (2020). This straddles the line between Bush's desire for merit-only awards and a more geographically distributed model based on need. Another way the societal distribution has been addressed is through "Broader Impact Criteria" (BIC). After a few revisions in the interim, new rules for the BIC were added in 1997. These were meant to more explicitly address societal benefits and incorporate them more fully into the review process. Intentionally broad, the BIC include a long list of potential impacts with little additional guidance (Roberts 2009).

Due to their lack of specificity, the BIC have faced scholarly critiques, especially questioning their utility (Roberts 2009; Woodson and Boutilier 2023; Daza 2013). Indeed, Stephanie Daza discusses the way that BIC can be interpreted in vastly different ways depending on one's intellectual and political commitments (Daza 2012). Daza herself had interpreted the

BIC and the NSF's other "ethical components" as a requirement for an attunement to social justice. She discusses her experience collaborating on an NSF proposal and the tensions that arose. As Daza writes, "What became clear to me over the course of writing the proposal and analyzing the experience is that we did not all interpret NSF's policies as a charge (need) for social justice or if NSF's policies were interpreted as a social justice imperative, then investigators who disagreed with this could find ways to resist it" (Daza 2013, 588). The BIC's broad nature allows for a variety of "mis/interpretations," as Daza writes. She identifies larger structural issues in the way the NSF defines various metrics, modes of collaboration, and does little to resist technocratic interpretations that limit engagement with social justice and, more broadly, with critical theory. Essentially, the BIC are not specific enough to encourage participation in efforts towards social justice, and a passive stance that does not explicitly orient itself towards those commitments can all too easily escape without enacting any meaningful positive change (Daza 2013). Ultimately, they serve more as a means of gesturing to "progress" and to serve the reputation of the NSF rather than an actual move towards justice or inclusion.

It can be challenging to fit tribal nations into discussions of minoritized communities and racial inequity because Indigeneity is first and foremost a political category, not a racial one (Byrd 2011). It is debatable whether the project of the US settler state has room for the inclusivity of groups beyond cisgender heterosexual white men. However, there is a specific form of hostility in US policy towards tribal governments, whose very existence places US sovereignty and territorial control in question. This is because, as Kim TallBear writes, "Whether the settler state wants to farm, build a mine or a city, pump oil, or cordon off a national park, the 'resources' used to build these nation-states include the lands, waters, and other-than-human beings with whom Indigenous peoples are co-constituted" (2019, 24). The US gained its land

base through theft and genocide, and that colonial history is often celebrated within American culture, even in spaces that are ostensibly “inclusive and multicultural,” making Indigenous elimination an unspoken but unavoidable fact (TallBear 2019, 24). Indeed, Bush’s 1945 report is titled “Science – The Endless Frontier.” The use of “frontier” recalls this colonial history with a fondness, and Bush himself proudly admits that the frontier itself is inherent to American identity. He writes,

It has been basic United States policy that Government should foster the opening of new frontiers. It opened the seas to clipper ships and furnished land for pioneers. Although these frontiers have more or less disappeared, the frontier of science remains. It is in keeping with the American tradition—one which has made the United States great—that new frontiers shall be made accessible for development by all American citizens. (Bush 1945, 8)

This colonial language and characterization of science is quite fitting with the way that Indigenous communities have often been treated in research. Indigenous lands and sometimes knowledge are simply another thing to categorize, contain, and exploit.

“In keeping with the American tradition,” Native lands and knowledge should benefit *all citizens*, a notion that is antithetical to the way that many tribes view ethical research, data collection, and Data Sovereignty (Lovett et al. 2019; Taylor and Kukutai 2016). Essentially, Data Sovereignty advocates for tribal nations and Indigenous communities to have control over information collected about them, by them, and oftentimes about their homelands. This allows information to be shared in accordance with cultural traditions and avoids extraction and misuse of data. The notion that knowledge ought to be shared or generalized further is not necessarily an assumed good in Indigenous epistemologies in the same way it is for Western science (see

Liboiron 2021). The NSF was developed for the good of the settler nation-state, and it continues to be funded by federal dollars, thus resulting in its inherent entanglement with the project of US sovereignty. To justify its own sovereignty, the US settler state must subjugate the sovereignty of tribal nations. The US may be compelled to honor its trust obligation to tribes, but it will nevertheless always default back to its desire for colonial expansion to new *frontiers*.

Because the NSF is a part of the federal government, it has certain obligations to tribal nations per US law and treaty making. The federal trust responsibility is a powerful tool to force consultation with tribes, but is also a limiting and patronizing structure. In the case of the NSF, it puts specific pressure on the organization to serve Indigenous communities, while also placing the power in the hands of the NSF to set the terms of engagement. This dynamic parallels broader forms of engagement between the US government and tribal nations, wherein the US has often placed itself as a “protector” of tribes, while also continuing to force assimilation and steal land and resources (Duthu 2009, xxv). This unequal power structure, with the US in a position to steward and protect tribes, is replicated in the dynamics found in co-production, which is itself a model favored by the NSF. Just as the US government ostensibly acts in the best interests of the tribes, the NSF situates itself as a neutral party that stands for science, which is in turn also cast as neutral. In practice, the US government and the NSF act in the best interests of the settler project. No epistemology is value neutral, and that includes Western science. The NSF can set this as the “standard” and claim it is for the benefit of tribes, when in fact it is reproducing the same type of power dynamics that have always existed. This includes Western science being viewed as superior to Indigenous epistemologies. Despite the NSF’s purported desire for co-production, such an approach is predicated on a false promise that settler and Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies ought to be equal in the relationship. Settler epistemologies can

never be an equal partner in this relationship because settler worldmaking is predicated on the erasure of Indigenous worlds and Indigenous Knowledge is predicated on their very existence and continuance.

The Problem of Co-Production

Here, I introduce a specific example wherein the NSF imposed its own criteria and perceptions of “co-production” onto the same Lingít people it also sought to “assist.” This example draws on my experience at the pilot CaRE workshop that was held in Sitka in March of 2025. The project was a collaboration between the SSSC, Tlingit and Haida, and STA, and the outcomes included not only the pilot workshop, but also an evaluation to determine how to proceed in designing workshops and other resources in the future. This evaluation was done by a Native-run consulting company, Raven's Group, that specializes in Indigenous evaluation techniques. The workshop itself emerged from capacity issues faced by STA to adhere to their intensive research protocols, alongside an influx of research permission requests, also based in part on funding agencies requiring letters of support from tribes. The goal was to train scientists on these processes, and on basic principles of reciprocity and respect when working within Alaska Native communities. The workshop was designed to leave plenty of room for sharing and discussion. With more facilitators than participants, it was meant to feel like an open place for learning and discussion where no one person had all the answers, but the collective was able to demonstrate a good sense of the topics at hand. Shared meals and group discussions, as well as hands-on activities like making cedar roses, all contributed to this sensibility.

On the final day of the workshop, participants heard about the NSF review process for the Kutí Project, a research project funded by the NSF that involves the SSSC, Tlingit and Haida, and other local tribal partners. The Kutí project was funded in 2022 by the NSF for five years to

look at atmospheric changes – kutí translates to “weather” in English – and their impact in southeast Alaska (Conaway 2024). The project builds upon a Sitka-based project to create a landslide warning system after a deadly landslide killed three local people in 2015. Many other communities also face increased risk of landslides – there were major landslides in Wrangell in 2023 and in Ketchikan in 2024 – but the project accounts for other concerns that are also salient, such as coastal erosion in Yakutat and concerns over road systems in other communities (Conaway 2024). A major emphasis for the Kutí project is needing to work with communities to specify their needs and to establish what will be useful beyond the basic assumption that all communities struggle with landslides. Even the model of a landslide warning system and the factors of what that entails differs by community. The original project was designed with the needs of Sitka in mind, but this is not a one-size-fits-all model. As a result, the project seeks to utilize co-production to best work with and address community needs. By spotlighting this project during this workshop session, facilitators perhaps inadvertently highlighted co-production as an aspirational tool for attendees.

The emphasis on co-production as a replicable model made it an obvious tool for the visiting scientists to aspire to and consider. This was not intended as part of the workshop design; indeed, co-production was not a specific model discussed by the advisory group. However, based on the evaluation process, co-production was one model that did resonate with the participating scientists. Because this was an unintended aspect of the workshop, I think it is something that requires further consideration. Why was co-production so appealing to participants? I propose that it is, in part, because of the way co-production has been framed as an “approved” model in southeast Alaska due to its use for the Kake Climate Project (Figus et al. 2022). The purported success of this project (as something that some of the visiting scientists

knew about and that others learned about during the workshop) made it a desirable model to replicate. The examples of Kutí and the Kake Climate Project gave scientists something concrete to focus on, and co-production is a framework that is suitable to the structures rewarded by funding agencies, and, by extension, the larger demands of academia.

In her article, “Complicity as Infiltration: The (Im)possibilities of Research With/in NSF Engineering Grants in the Age of Neoliberal Scientism,” Daza both critiques the larger system of “neoliberal scientism” and “grant-science”/“grants culture” as a structure that has commodified research and further entrenched academia’s place within US imperial capitalism. As Daza argues, “*Neoliberal scientism* counts on research/ers to ignore, simplify, manage, and eliminate all the messy stuff that gets in its way. U.S. science and funding agencies are re/defining science accordingly” (Daza 2012, 773). Co-production is an excellent example of this “simplification.” Per James Scott, simplification makes things “legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation” (1998, 11). Making Indigeneity more legible and calculable has long been an aspect of the settler colonial project. In fact, anthropology as a discipline is a prime example of this, and that extends to other fields that are now seeking to record and incorporate Indigenous Knowledge. To get funded and stay on track, it is easy to fall into the rhythms of the larger system that emphasizes simplicity over relationality. In fact, this very issue was a topic discussed at the CaRE workshop. I do not bring up this move to simplicity to blame individual participants and scientists for their enthusiasm about co-production. Rather, I aim to critique the larger structural issues that co-production itself fails to challenge. I see the desire for co-production as a positive first step. It shows the desire for ethical engagement with Indigenous communities. However, it can only ever be a first step, not an aspirational model. We can and should push beyond co-production.

Co-production is a troubling framework because it purports to allow for place-based research, but it is itself a model that may not fit the needs of every community. Just because the model has worked with a specific set of people in Kake does not mean it is the right choice for Sitka, Hoonah, or Klukwan. A framing emphasizing co-production as having been “proven” for the region gives the impression that co-production can be replicated easily in any community, which in turn is attractive to funding institutions that desire simplicity (Daza 2012). Co-production itself ignores and simplifies existing power dynamics, attempting to address power on a case-by-case basis that does not address nor even account for larger systems of power. Co-production can be viewed as a settler “fix” (Jobson 2020) to the problem of research being done with, in, and around Indigenous communities. It allows research to continue, largely in alignment with the status quo, but while ostensibly remedying the tensions and pitfalls of traditional research. The framework is also desirable to settlers because it leaves them a place at the table while still appearing to be an admirable goal.

Indeed, co-production is discussed in NSF literature as the epitome of community-based work with Indigenous peoples. They are directly incentivizing researchers to use this framework, or at the very least, to aspire to something like it. The NSF’s Arctic Research Opportunities document reads:

Knowledge co-production with Arctic Indigenous communities is encouraged only when appropriate and must be strongly justified and supported in the proposal text and project budget. NSF identifies co-production of knowledge as the integration of different knowledge systems and methodologies to systematically understand the phenomena, systems, and processes being studied in a research project. In the Arctic, this often takes the form of Indigenous Knowledge holders and scientists working closely together to

address shared research questions, pursue shared methodologies, and agree upon appropriate outreach and data sharing activities. (NSF Arctic Research 2023, 16)

While the NSF only encourages co-production in select circumstances, its inclusion of this methodology as the most community-oriented approach does indicate that proper execution of co-production is an inherent good and a positive goal for researchers. In turn, the NSF sets and evaluates the conditions of co-production, despite being an external entity to the sovereign tribal governments with whom the co-production occurs. This very issue was demonstrated in the NSF reviewer response to the Kutí Project.

Part of the Kutí Project presentation at the CaRE workshop was a group discussion about the NSF review process. It was presented initially as the NSF having “problematic” perspectives that the Kutí researchers and staff struggled to understand and engage with in good faith. During the discussion about the project, many of the visiting researchers pointed out the need to listen to feedback, even when it is difficult. The presenters from the Kutí Project then acknowledged they eventually realized that they had made some mistakes and changes were needed. Essentially, this presentation was meant to serve as a case study for trying models like co-production, falling short, and attempting to do better. I do first want to acknowledge that I appreciate the project participants genuine desire to better incorporate communities into research. And, at its surface, this is a good message, and I think it was effective for the visiting scientists to hear. However, the NSF reviewers should not be let off the hook for the underlying current of anti-Indigeneity that was pervasive in their comments to the Kutí researchers and staff, specifically those who are Indigenous. During the presentation, it was clear that the Native participants on the project had been negatively impacted by this, and the Indigenous researchers in the room during the presentation also clearly picked up on this dynamic.

To summarize, the NSF reviewers had several critiques and requests for the project moving forward. Two that specifically stood out to me involved Native participation on the project. They requested involvement from “Indigenous scholars” despite there already being Native people on the project. This was viewed by the Native people involved as demeaning, suggesting that just because they do not have Western doctorates, they are not “real scholars.” They also requested a Native Principal Investigator (PI), despite one of the co-PIs being Native. The team admitted they could have communicated better, but this also could be seen as the NSF assuming Whiteness/adhering to stereotypical ideas about who counts as “Indigenous” rather than paying attention to the nuances of the situation. This casts Native identity as a quantifiable marker, specifically with the goal of asserting that the PI is “Native enough” to an external entity – the NSF.¹ It also hands over sovereign authority to determine citizenship/belonging to the NSF, and, by extension, the US settler state, thereby fundamentally undermining self-determination and community relationships. Both instances were clearly quite harmful to Native participants. Additionally, it seems there was some disagreement about the need for and form of the IRB, which made community members feel uncomfortable with the way they were required to interact with friends and family in relation to the project. It seemed to me as though Native participants on the project were questioning why the NSF should be able to tell us how to be in relation to our communities and why they should be able to determine the proper protocols within our communities.

¹ As Kim TallBear points out, asserting tribal identity to external entities “has become a necessary precondition for asserting rights to tribal self-governance and resources” (2013, 177). However, given the complex components that contribute to Native identity, assuming that Indigenous researchers must “play the part” to prove their authenticity as a PI simply illustrates the insidious ways that power dynamics play out in co-production, with the goalposts and standards always being set by Western science.

These issues replicate larger power imbalances within Western science and settler colonialism and are reinscribed by the conditions of the NSF. Within a framework like co-production, the “co-” requires a “self” and an “other.” A generous reading of co-production would acknowledge that, rather than Western science validating or uplifting Indigenous Knowledge, the two knowledge systems are purported to be equal, facilitating what appears to be mutual recognition. However, mutual recognition is not possible under the settler colonial conditions of these research projects. For the most part, in the context of Indigenous-adjacent research, the “self” constitutes the perspective of Western science, and the “other” is Indigenous peoples. This places the seat of power within Western academic systems. However, even if we are to swap the “self” to be the Indigenous perspective and the “other” to be Western scientists, there is still a troubling dynamic at play. By maintaining the self/other binary, there is always a seat at the table for settlers and for Western science/epistemologies.

Unpacking the failure of mutual recognition necessitates a brief overview of some of the critiques of a system of recognition, as derived from Hegel’s writings in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* on the master and the slave/bondsman. Hegel’s own dialectic is predicated on an *unequal* power dynamic between the master and bondsman. Indeed, the very inequality of this relationship is of great concern to Hegel in the way that recognition fails within the dialectic. Hegel’s example is a more abstract rendering of the false promise of mutual recognition, but other scholars have grounded this more concretely in colonial encounters. With regards to tribal nations, I am building on both Audra Simpson’s and Glen Coulthard’s readings of this dynamic and the way it relates to the recognition of Indigenous nations by settler nation states. Both Simpson and Coulthard build on Hegel via decolonial thinker Frantz Fanon, who takes Hegel’s dialectic and applies it specifically to the colonial context. Simpson writes that “Hegel’s is a

concern with the position of the slave, not the slave himself” (2012, 23). She explains that, by contrast, Fanon is interested in the subjectivity of the bondsman/slave, specifically in his rendering of “the slave as the black man,” who “comprehends the scene as one of objectification, and in this, the feeling of subjugation and the deep knowledge of its context” (Simpson 2014, 23). Simpson then applies this colonial subjectivity to the settler colonial context via state recognition. Recognition within the state – as Simpson writes, “seeing people as they ought to be seen” (2014, 20) – still includes this unequal power dynamic. Both Simpson and Coulthard ultimately reject the logic of recognition via refusal (Simpson 2014) and turning away from the state (Coulthard 2014). Through this genealogy, I want to emphasize the power dynamics at play, including the promise of mutual recognition that can never escape the pre-cast roles of master and bondsman.

Co-production begins with the false promise that Western science is treating Indigenous epistemologies as equal in the research process. Co-production imagines that science can see Indigenous Knowledge “as it wishes to be seen” (Simpson 2014, 20) and move beyond the very power imbalance identified by Hegel in the name of equal partnership. This promise of mutual recognition between two equal partners is, however, not based on any meaningful upheaval of the power dynamics identified by Fanon, Simpson, Coulthard, and others in the case of the colonizer/settler and the colonized/Native. While there is perhaps a desire for each individual research project to move beyond these external realities, there is no way to set the research apart from its external context. The basis for mutual recognition is predicated on a false promise that cannot be fulfilled in a meaningful sense. This dynamic also assumes the necessity of settler researchers, thereby both erasing the agency of Indigenous people as researchers in the present through the *longue durée* and denying the reality of Indigenous researchers who are trained in

Western scientific methods. It positions settler researchers as essential to this dynamic, rather than framing Western science as a tool that Indigenous peoples can – and oftentimes are forced – to use in the face of both continued settler occupation and the unpredictability of climate change that renders the longevity of our knowledge precarious in relation to ongoing changes.

CaRE was designed to push researchers to think about complexity, relationality, and ethical engagement even in the face of these unequal systems of power. Indigenous-based values are often antithetical to the larger system of scientific research, including grant funding. This includes simply having the time and resources to put into something like relationship building. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to allow for the time and space to understand and enact these values. This is especially true as researchers must also respond to the demands of their departments and funding agencies. An important counterexample that was touched upon during the CaRE workshop is the array of ongoing tribal research projects. Indeed, because Indigenous adaptation within these systems has been ongoing since the onset of colonization, several examples exist wherein Lingít peoples are utilizing the tools of Western science in service of our community needs.

Raven's Methodology, Survivance, and Transmotion

Indigenous projects require Indigenous tools and methods, especially in opposition to the systems put in place by grant funding and models like co-production. Daza argues that, in response to the NSF's and other funding agencies' push to simplify and quantify qualitative forms of research, researchers must keep research "strange" and "messy" as a means of resisting these demands, which she describes as "infiltration" of the system (2012, 774). A system of neoliberal scientism that is designed to simplify does not and cannot account for Indigenous relationality and community connections. In the case of Indigenous researchers, I would argue

that keeping research “messy” is an example of survivance, rather than just infiltration. In contrast to a model of simplified science, like co-production, survivance rests on the very basis of complexity over stagnation. Gerald Vizenor defines survivance as follows: “The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry” (Vizenor 2008, 1). On Vizenor, Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd writes, “What Vizenor leaves readers with is a mode of chance, tricks, and irony that are constantly in motion and constantly resisting dominance. Movement and complexity, rather than static dioramas of tattered clothes, Vizenor argues, provide generative strategies” (2011, 220). I want to draw attention to the state of motion that Byrd describes. Motion and action are deeply ingrained within the teachings of Raven, which themselves contain necessary tools.

Motion is exemplified in the story of how Raven created people. It begins with Raven wanting a little brother to do his bidding. He made a person out of a stone and told him to go fetch water. However, this first little brother was far too slow, so Raven tried again and made another person from a leaf. This little brother was much faster and pleased Raven. It is said that because people were made from leaves, they wither and die faster than the people who were made from rocks who lived for hundreds of years (Dauenhauer et al. 2025, 227-228).

Anthropologists Thomas Thornton and Sergei Kan have both written about this ontological distinction within Lingít culture. Thornton writes that change is at the heart of life on earth, so adaptation, growth, and transformation – as exemplified by the leaf – are all key to Lingít ontology (Thornton, Deur, and Adams 2019, 44). Kan writes, “[B]eing too much like a stone is against human nature” (2016, 61). Lack of motion – as exemplified by the stone – is thus linked

to elderly people and aging². Motion is linked to mortality, but also to youth and thought to be vital to growth and development (Kan 2016).

The emphasis on both creation and motion connects directly to Vizenor's own writing on the subject of transmotion: "Natives have always been on the move, by chance, necessity, barter, reciprocal sustenance, and by trade over extensive routes; the actual motion is a natural right, and the tribal stories of transmotion are a continuous sense of visionary sovereignty" (Vizenor 2010, ix). By design, Lingít people have always been on the move since our creation from a leaf allowed for quick movement and change. In turn, "the motion of creation" (Vizenor 2010, ix) is also predicated on failure and experimentation. Rocks did not make for good people due to their lack of movement. Raven had to try again in order to get the right combination for his needs, which in turn shaped the ontological necessity of motion for Lingít people. Through experimentation, Raven illustrates the need for change and motion. Now, Lingít people continue to favor motion/action/transmotion when dealing with experimentation, including the tools of Western science. For example, there are a number of research, monitoring, and community-oriented projects in southeast Alaska that employ the tools of Western science. These projects adapt to differing circumstances under climate change, serving as tools to fulfill a purpose. They carry on the monitoring work and systematic observation that has been done in Lingít communities since time immemorial. These examples embody transmotion in their function served to community, by identifying shifting issues in the region relating to climate change, collecting data, and monitoring ongoing change.

Stemming from projects in Washington State, a number of southeast Alaska tribes, including Tlingit and Haida and STA, have created Climate Adaptation Plans (CAPs) to address

² While this may read as oddly negative regarding elders, this is aimed more at delineating the different stages of life.

ongoing predictions, changes, and uncertainties in the region. Tlingit and Haida's was the original CAP that then inspired other tribes. Their CAP takes a larger regional focus, with the intention of providing a model for local tribes to delve into the specifics of their region. Tlingit and Haida's CAP describes the process as follows:

In December 2015, Tlingit & Haida and Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) initiated the help and support from the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP) to develop a specific workshop focused on southeast Alaska issues the SEATOR [Southeast Alaska Tribal Ocean Research] and Southeast Alaska tribes were facing. The workshop was well attended and the Tribes were able to develop a list of priorities through a vulnerability assessment through the consideration of both climate impacts variables and related environmental stressors that could potentially have the greatest negative impact on the community's resilience and subsistence way of life. The Tribes spent several days working together to prepare for developing a climate change adaptation plan (CAP) and collaborated with other Washington State Tribes that have already gone through the process. The SEATOR and Southeast Alaska tribes are relying on the high capacity and dedication of Tlingit & Haida and Sitka Tribe of Alaska to develop a template and southeast "prototype" CAP. (Weitzel 2019, 2)

Because STA is only based in Sitka rather than being regional, the CAP is specific to the area surrounding Sitka and the unique issues presented by its location and geography (Borneman 2022). General species of concern include salmon, halibut, yellow cedar, various types of berries, and shellfish. Changes to weather patterns like increased rain and landslides constitute additional risk factors (Borneman 2022). The idea is to identify information that is already known, while also identifying places where more information is needed. This can guide tribal priorities and

potential researchers towards the most important and feasible projects. This also allows for an outward and inward facing account of Tlingit and Haida and STA's research interests and climate-related concerns. Ideally, external scientists are then able to refer to these documents and align their research with tribal priorities.

Author of the Tlingit and Haida CAP, Kenneth Weitzel, told me in an interview that he included Traditional Knowledge in many of these descriptions, including things that he had heard in the community. When discussing shellfish, he included the saying "when the tide goes out, the table is set" (Weitzel 2019, 29). He included another similar saying in a passage about the importance of crab: "Since time immemorial our people have been harvesters of crab. Several species of crabs were eaten by the people who had access to them, so much so that there is another saying: '*in Tlingit Aani you have to be an idiot to starve*'" (Weitzel 2019, 39). While crabs are an abundant source of food, they are not a mere resource to be extracted. They are part of a larger social/kinship web that constitutes the Lingít world. These various cultural sayings gesture to these relationships. These and other instances of Traditional Knowledge all highlight the importance of place-based and community-driven inquiry.

For example, both red and yellow cedar are important species that are mentioned. A vital material practically and ceremonially, it continues to be used in various art forms, which is reflected in the CAPs. The emphasis on Indigenous perspectives is notably missing in a similar document produced by the Forest Service. The Forest Service manages much of the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska, which includes a vast number of cedar trees. In their publication, "A Climate Adaptation Strategy for Conservation and Management of Yellow-Cedar in Alaska," authors suggest that western red cedar performs similar "ecosystem services" to yellow cedar and could therefore be a potential replacement species given the more dramatic

decline in yellow cedar (Hennon et al. 2016, 126). However, culturally, red and yellow cedar serve different functions. Yellow cedar is softer and more pliable, so it is often preferred as weft in weaving, whereas red cedar is stiffer and is used for warp.³ In short, one could not be so easily substituted for another from an Alaska Native perspective. This place-based perspective is vital in research practices as well, illustrating the importance of climate change mitigation and adaptation and is attentive to culturally important species. The Tlingit and Haida CAP also emphasizes that change has been a constant within southeast Alaska.

The Tlingit & Haida people have been responding and adapting to a changing climate for thousands of years. Preparing for continued and accelerated change is not something new, but a continuation of the holistic natural resource and culturally driven approach that has kept the Tlingit & Haida people a vibrant and growing community. (Weitzel 2019, 42)

Holistically, tribally driven priorities and plans are an example of cultural continuity. The CAPs allow this knowledge to be institutionally legible within a tribal government system and within the academic research system as well. This empowers tribal leaders to direct research design and interests.

In some cases, tribes are even more directly involved with the research itself. Tlingit and Haida started the Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network (SIGN) to partner with other tribes in the region and help fulfill the need for data collection. SIGN is predicated on Data Sovereignty, providing tribes with the capacity to collect and store data securely. It is based on the Aleut Community of St. Paul's Indigenous Sentinels Network and the Canadian Indigenous Guardians program. Both programs facilitate community-based monitoring programs and advocate for

³ In some cases, like functional baskets, red cedar is used throughout because yellow cedar also has more sap and can therefore leave a residue. However, it is often preferred for artistic pieces and has been used for other items as well.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty. The model, which is also shared by SIGN, allows community members to collect data and share it within the data system. In this example, Indigenous peoples are collecting, storing, and controlling the data and database. Tlingit and Haida itself has also been involved with other environmental monitoring and stewardship efforts through their Indigenous Stewardship department, as discussed in Chapter One. This has become common among tribes in the region, especially with the increase in cruise ship tourism. STA has also recently set up an air and water quality monitoring project, specifically to assess any damage brought about by increased cruise ship traffic in Sheet'ká. Many of these projects focus on increasing monitoring and data collection to better understand ongoing changes with tribal priorities in mind.

Other projects are already addressing obvious dangers and needs in the community. The most well-established version of this is the Southeast Alaska Tribal Ocean Research, or SEATOR, which is run out of STA's Environmental Research Lab, and focuses largely on shellfish toxicity. Shellfish are an important traditional food, though one that is structured by very specific conditions of harvest. Traditional Knowledge dictates certain times of year that are and are not safe for harvest. However, these rules are no longer as reliable as they once were. As such, testing for biotoxins is an important way to ensure the safety of tribal citizens and other locals who want to harvest shellfish (Weitzel 2019). The program allows STA to alert people via social media of biotoxins, and Tlingit and Haida will often share toxicity level data as well. The program has expanded to other communities in southeast and beyond. The potential for toxins is predicted to increase further with changing ocean conditions. This project represents an intervention that has responded to an emergent concern. It is an example of Western science and

technology – biotoxin testing – providing tools for the community, but under the sovereign tribal authority of how these methods and data are used.

These projects are the institutionalization of observation work that is already done in community and that has been done since time immemorial. Our ancestral knowledge is built on years of testing, observing, and learning on and with the land. Returning to the Raven cycle, these practices are very old and are embedded in our histories. Raven is always questioning, processing, and pushing. Raven sees problems and seeks answers for them, whether it be the sun being missing from the sky, salmon being difficult to catch, or the tide as an obstacle to gathering food. Through trial and error, Raven's methodology illustrates how to solve problems. As discussed in Chapter One, Lingít histories often require their subjects to attempt multiple approaches, with things rarely working out the first time. The need for experimentation is not merely a fact of life, but actually an ingrained cultural process. Raven's methodology is our research. Our worlding is based on these processes. While this approach has served us well for over 10,000 years, the current changes are rapid and diverse and heavily connected to settler colonialism. As new tools have emerged from Western science, and climate change has hastened changes, there has been an effort to take up these new tools to better serve tribal interests. The effort to utilize these tools also aligns more broadly with Vizenor's concepts of survivance and transmotion, illustrating their place within a larger adaptive strategy of Indigenous peoples. Through a framework of survivance, Raven's methodology can be traced to current usage of the tools of Western science to answer questions about our homelands. Just as we have always adapted in the past, so will we continue to do now and in the future.

Conclusion: Autonomy and Survivance

Even with extensive environmental knowledge, changing conditions have caused upheaval in Lingít knowledge systems. As changes continue, Lingít people need to understand these changes at the scale they are happening, which sometimes benefits from the additional tools of Western science. The use of Western tools and adaptation to systems of governance and knowledge is a form of survivance. Lingít survivance takes tools that were always already in existence and applies them alongside the tools of Western research, seeking to adapt within changing environmental systems. Existing power structures often dictate the terms of utilizing Western science, be it through funders like the NSF as arbiters of authenticity, or via models like co-production that inadvertently reinforce settler dominance. By contrast, survivance necessitates the autonomy to choose the terms and means of engagement.

A framework of survivance and transmotion requires Indigenous engagement with scientific tools beyond mere recognition. It is not enough for Indigenous peoples to merely be “co-producers” of research. Meaningful community-based research foregrounds tribally-specific concerns and includes Indigenous researchers and methodologies.⁴ Through this form of research engagement, Lingít participation in research resists the attempts at simplification that Daza argues are necessitated by neoliberal scientism. Funding organizations, like the NSF, are designed to serve the interests of the settler nation state first and foremost. This system allows for models like co-production to proliferate, relying on false promises of equal power relations between Western science and Indigenous communities. Rather than allowing these systems to

⁴ Other examples exist of Indigenous researchers adopting (while also critiquing) the tools of Western science. For example, the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR) at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada and Technoscience Research Unit (TRU) at University of Toronto in Toronto, Canada. TRU focuses on a critical approach to Science and Technology Studies, with an orientation to social justice and environmentalism led by Indigenous peoples. CLEAR engages in anti-colonial science attempting to critique and move beyond colonial science practices. In each case, positionality is important, requiring an Indigenous led and oriented approach.

dominate, Raven's methodology relies on messiness and constant change, illustrating the longstanding tradition of Lingít knowledge production about the environment.

The need for adaptation and relationality was at the core of the CaRE workshop, and it is something that can continue to be emphasized to visiting researchers. This is also integral to other ongoing projects that utilize the tools of Western science. Climate change mitigation and adaptation need to be multifaceted, and adaptation requires information. Projects like SIGN, SEATOR, Kutí and the CAPs are all ways that tribes are asserting sovereignty within the shifting landscape. These are examples of expanding research and conversations about climate change in a way that allows the tribe autonomy over the narratives and data. These new tools facilitate continued adaptation. One time, my auntie and I were using a wedge to strip cedar from a tree. While she explained this was not necessarily the way our ancestors would have done it, she also said that they adopted new tools and technologies as they became available. As such, they absolutely would have used any new tool they could, just as we were doing. A similar dynamic is obvious when one looks at metal tools and new artforms that came into existence after the onset of colonization. Western science is but another tool like steel or silver or glass beads. Not every artist chooses to make the same jewelry or carvings with their tools, and similarly, not every project takes up Western Science in the same way. Many older tools and technologies have now been integrated into artistic practice and everyday life. In the same way as our ancestors, we should be able to make these judgements and incorporate these new tools of Western science as we see fit. This is not to say that power dynamics are not at play, but rather to illustrate that these projects can be generative spaces of survivance. A similar type of tool – Transformative Scenario Planning – is the subject of the next chapter, which will focus on the ways this is limited by the settler system within which it exists, but can still be useful for the community.

Chapter Five: Transformative Scenario Planning and Lingít Ancestral Futures

As Chapter Four illustrated, frameworks and processes of Western science can be useful to Indigenous communities. In this chapter, I consider a very different framework and the ways that Lingít culture was represented by it while also exceeding its bounds. In the fall of 2023, I received an email inviting me to join the Scenario Planning Team for a Transformative Scenario Planning (TSP) process being facilitated by Reos Partners and hosted by Spruce Root, a local Community Development Financial Institution.¹ The TSP process sought to envision potential futures for southeast Alaska through a collective group effort, with the ultimate goal of using these future scenarios for strategic planning. After some consideration, I decided it would be a fascinating addition to my fieldwork and agreed to participate. The first step was a dialogue interview with the Reos team. This was meant to provide a foundation for people's understanding of regional challenges, and many of the questions were about best and worst case scenarios for the region. Given my positionality and research interests, I focused mostly on tribal sovereignty and climate change rather than economic or social concerns that I imagined other participants might address. The interview took place in November 2023, and the first workshop was in January 2024 in Ketchikan, a community similar in size to Sitka. (Technically the workshop itself was held in Saxman, which is a village just south of Ketchikan.) The second workshop took place in Juneau in March, and the scenarios were finalized virtually in order to be presented at the Sustainable Southeast Partnership Spring Retreat in Sitka in April 2024.

For the first workshop, I flew down to Ketchikan, which is an approximately forty-five-minute flight south. On the flight, I read Osage scholar Jean Dennison's book, *Vital Relations*:

¹ I want to disclose that my father is on the Spruce Root Board of Directors, though he started after I became involved with the Transformative Scenario Planning process. Additionally, I began working for Spruce Root two months before the completion of this dissertation, though this chapter was written before the start of my employment.

How the Osage Nation Moves Indigenous Nationhood into the Future. There is a section in the book that talks about Osage ribbon work as a metaphor for colonial entanglements. It reads as follows:

Osage ribbon work, born out of eighteenth-century trade with the French, is a particularly well-suited metaphor for understanding Osage approaches to layering. Using the raw material and tools obtained through the colonial process, Osage artists began by tearing silk into strips and then cutting, folding, and sewing them back together to form something both beautiful and uniquely Osage. (Dennison 2024, 141)

This was on my mind when arriving in Ketchikan, and it came in handy the next day in Saxman.

On the first day of the workshop, we had breakfast as a group, then we moved into some introductory activities. We went around to share our names, and we were also asked to bring something to the workshop that represented our perception of southeast Alaska at that time. I had mostly forgotten this in the rush to pack, but I had intended to bring some silver formline² jewelry, which I knew I would find a way to connect to the region more broadly. Fortunately, I had worn a lot of jewelry, and when we were asked to discuss our items, I pulled a carved silver bracelet off my wrist. I own several similar bracelets, and this one was carved with Raven holding the sun, reflecting that I am of the Raven moiety. The connections suddenly clicked into place for me, and I ended up talking about the ribbon work section of *Vital Relations* in my explanation of my object. I mentioned that I had been reading the book and the emphasis that Dennison places on the way ribbon work emerged from colonial relations. As she writes, “[R]ibbon work is an example of the ways Native peoples navigated colonialism by forming new relations with materials, practices, and peoples” (Denison 2024, 141). I drew a comparison to the

² Formline is the Indigenous Northwest Coast artistic style. It includes geometric shapes and representations of various figures, often relating to oral histories. Artists use it across a number of different mediums.

type of silver bracelet I was wearing. Although we had copper jewelry prior to colonization, silver was a new addition and the bracelets – often carved with clan crests – stood in for clan crest tattoos that were, for a time, outlawed or frowned upon by settlers.

Similar to the new materials and adaptations of Osage ribbon work, Lingít silver work is a practice emerging from colonial relations, but one that many Lingít people wear proudly. This art form also supports artists and galleries in the region. Indeed, alongside bracelets, other carved silver formline pieces have been made by artists for visitors to the region for some time (Bunn-Marcuse 2017). As such, the bracelet represented forms of adaptation and economic engagement, as well as cultural and material exchange. I bring this up because, upon returning to my notes to reflect on my experiences for this chapter, *Vital Relations* has served as a useful text to understand some of the nuances and strategies of those involved in Spruce Root and its decision to engage with the Transformative Scenario Planning process. *Vital Relations* focuses largely on the agency of Osage peoples in the process of nation building, though also on the many challenges and compromises faced by tribal leaders. This chapter is similarly focused largely on the agency of Native peoples and of Spruce Root, while also attending to the system within which these relations exist.

In Saxman, after introductions, we heard a presentation about the history of the facilitators, Reos Partners. The summary included the fact that Reos's methodology came from the scenario planning work done at Royal Dutch Shell. Founder Adam Kahane worked there and learned the methodology before creating Reos Partners. Kahane was called in to assist in a scenario planning process – now called the Mont Fleur Scenarios – focused on reconciliation in South Africa in the 1990s. The story goes that based on his experience he went on to form Reos Partners and proceeded to facilitate similar workshops all over the world. Kahane has written

more about this himself, which will be expanded upon alongside a more comprehensive history later in the chapter. At the time, I knew little of Reos but was immediately skeptical of the narrative that placed the oil industry as a neutral player in the story, from which *Transformative Scenario Planning* could simply hint at and move on.

I immediately knew that from an academic and anthropological standpoint, the oil industry-based history of Transformative Scenario Planning would need to be unpacked in this chapter due to the academic focus on intellectual traditions. The foundation of scenario planning as something used by the oil industry means the tool is tied to a set of logics that are viewed by many in the academy as deeply troubling, given their imperialist and extractive nature. Indeed, academic literature on scenario planning tends to be largely critical or dismissive of TSP and the Mont Fleur Scenarios. For example, R. John Williams writes, “Advocates of scenario planning frequently argue that it helped ‘end apartheid in South Africa’ (after some former Shell planners teamed up with professors at the University of Western Cape in 1991 to publicize ‘possible futures’)” (2016, 536). Even so, my approach from the beginning of the first workshop was to take the story of Reos Partners on its own terms to properly participate in the process. Similarly, I acknowledge that evaluating scenario planning as a *tool*, rather than as an intellectual project, is necessary to properly understand the intricacies of its usage. This chapter thus considers (and takes seriously) Transformative Scenario Planning as a framework with something to contribute. It also considers and takes seriously the historical context of scenario planning and the worldview and intellectual tradition that accompanies its connections to the oil industry. I take this approach to address how scenario work interfaces with Lingít worlding and Lingít futurism in the context of the “Possible Futures for Southeast Alaska” created by the scenario team in 2024.

I begin with a discussion of Spruce Root and the way the organization embodies Lingít theory from life and seeks to move beyond the colonial systems it inhabits. Next, I describe an in-depth history of scenario planning and TSP. I will then dive further into some of the key moments in the Spruce Root TSP process and how Indigeneity was taken up in those spaces. Finally, I will look at some of the ways that Lingít worlding exceeds settler ontologies and epistemologies, especially through some of the discussions that took place during the second scenario planning workshop in Juneau. Spruce Root has an investment in Indigenized futures. Scenario planning, despite the methodological shifts to a “transformative” variant, has its intellectual basis in colonialism and extraction. As such, these two projects are largely at odds, which caused some inevitable conflict during the workshops and planning process. While it may initially seem contradictory that Spruce Root was the impetus for the TSP process, I argue that it is in fact Indigenous agency in this process that makes way for a distinctly Lingít form of futurity.

Spruce Root and the Project of Indigenizing

Spruce Root is a Community Development Financial Institution³ (CDFI) that was funded with \$500,000 seed money by Sealaska⁴ in 2012. While they do offer an array of loan programs, they also offer professional development and business workshops for southeast Alaska locals, and they are the parent organization for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, which is a collective impact network that facilitates collaboration and communication. While largely focused on Native peoples and issues, they seek to serve all of southeast Alaska, not only Alaska

³Spruce Root’s website states that CDFIs are “mission driven institutions that are dedicated to providing financial services to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged individuals within under served communities.” They are certified by the Department of the Treasury and must promote community. As the Spruce Root website also states, “As a CDFI, Spruce Root puts the community first and values local, economic growth” (“What it means to be a CDFI” Spruce Root).

⁴ Sealaska is the regional ANCSA corporation in southeast Alaska.

Natives. Spruce Root aims to provide local and Indigenous businesses with capital and also Indigenize concepts of lending and business planning. Working with Spruce Root's definition, I understand "Indigenizing" as bringing Indigenous concepts and frameworks to spaces and activities that are not Indigenous by default. I have heard on multiple occasions that it is often difficult to communicate exactly what Spruce Root is trying to do. It defies the logics of the colonial system within which it exists, but the organization also does not fit neatly within perceptions of Indigeneity. As such, executive director Gah Kith Tin Alana Peterson, who is Lingít of the Luknahadi clan, told me in an interview, Spruce Root is often viewed as "too Native" from the perspective of non-Natives, but as not Native enough from the perspective of some in the Native community.

Even so, the organization clearly grounds its guiding principles in both Native values and histories, with an emphasis on storytelling. Their approach takes multiple different and creative forms, allowing them to center Indigenous epistemologies and values while still executing their function as a CDFI. Around 2020, the board decided to modify Spruce Root's values based on Southeast Alaska Native values, according to Peterson. This was done, in part, to align Spruce Root more strongly with its Indigenous commitments. The values are paired together and include Balance/Reciprocity, Native Knowledge/Indigenous Stewardship, Progress Over Perfection/Learning at the Speed of Trust, and Equity/Abundance. In their work, this has often been informed by elders and knowledge keepers who have been consulted on how to present and share this information. They have also consulted with language experts in attempts to incorporate stories and Lingít language into their mission and values.

Spruce Root openly acknowledges the way it works within capitalist and colonial systems, seeking to make those systems work better for communities and for Native people with

a practical approach in mind. Many of their activities push at the edges and even extend beyond the parameters of what they are from a Western perspective, or within the settler colonial capitalist system. A basic principle of Spruce Root's work is that "economy" and "wealth" are not – conceptually – ideas that were introduced by colonialism. Peterson explained that, to her mind, Indigenous peoples have had an economy and a sense of wealth culturally and prior to colonization, it is simply a very different idea of what this looks like. Indeed, focusing on Indigenous conceptions of wealth and economy is what Spruce Root is doing from within the settler colonial system. This includes redefining the principles of lending from an Indigenous lens, filtering loan applications with an Indigenous perspective in mind, and facilitating trust and community connections throughout the region.

Indeed, I learned in an interview with CDFI Director Michael Ching, who is Native Hawaiian, about an early version of what was, at the time, being called the Indigenous Five Cs of Lending. This was adapted from the Five Cs of Credit, which include Character, Capacity, Capital, Collateral, and Conditions. These are meant to determine for a lender if the borrower is likely to repay their loan. Spruce Root sought to redefine this for its own purposes, emphasizing that, from an Indigenous perspective, these principals would look different. When discussing his ideas, Ching explained some of the ways he was rethinking these concepts. His Indigenous Five Cs at the time were "character, confidence, competence, connection, and cure." In our conversation, he emphasized changing how we define value and repayment. For example, the desire for abundance to create sharing, rather than scarcity to create demand. Reciprocity is key to Spruce Root's values, requiring not only financial repayment of the loan, but also repayment in other forms – for example, evaluating potential borrowers based on the benefit of their business model to others in the community and to the environment.

This all goes beyond merely changing the words being used – that is to say, changing what the “Cs” are but maintaining their basic assumptions and meaning – and Ching indicated that he was trying to rethink these systems to align their character with an Indigenous worldview. Indeed, he began from an understanding that money does not actually relate to an Indigenous economy. Therefore, principles of respect, responsibility, and relationships needed to guide this process, with that being the added value rather than profitability. This illustrates a Lingít principle that wealth is measured not by what you have but what you *share*. Bringing these ideas into the model in which Spruce Root operates helps to nurture the community and the economy, according to Ching, allowing for mutual flourishing. This also pushes back against Western capitalist extraction and consumption, leading to environmental fallout. Ching indicated that Indigenous stories warn against this type of waste. We need an economy that shares, in contrast to our current economy, which has no remedies for waste or greed.

Due to the restrictions of the current economy, Spruce Root’s work involves redefining concepts and making them function better for the community. Indigenizing business plans, communication focused on storytelling and relationships, and personal/tribal values are all examples of this orientation. Spruce Root often upends expectations put upon it from many different perspectives, and it seeks to rethink the way Western systems can operate *for* Indigenous peoples. Oftentimes, this includes operating in ways and in spaces that, as Jean Dennison writes, “colonial discourses say Indigenous peoples can’t handle or shouldn’t be involved with, including technologies, extractive industries, bureaucracy, and capitalism” (2024, 36). Dennison also emphasizes, “We must use this work to make sure we are not letting ourselves be defined by [capitalist and colonial] structures, even as we navigate them. However, we also need to do so in a way that does not foreclose the creative strategies our nations have

used and continue to use” (2024, 168). I likewise seek to consider the creative strategies Spruce Root has used as laid out in this section – Indigenous lending, values, business models, and other projects – as well as to consider the way Transformative Scenario Planning fits into this larger model of strategic action.

The “Wack” History of Scenario Planning

I knew based on what the Reos team told us that the history of scenario planning involved Royal Dutch Shell, and I knew that I needed to learn more than what we were told to fully understand that context. Royal Dutch Shell first created scenarios in the 1960s with methodology developed by Pierre Wack. Shell has utilized the scenario process ever since, creating different sets of scenarios over the years to continuously prepare themselves for potential futures. This body of work is referred to as the “Shell Scenarios.” This methodology was subsequently adapted, first in South Africa between 1991-1992. The resulting “Mont Fleur Scenarios” are connected to Shell only through shared methodology. The Mont Fleur Scenarios were facilitated, in part, by then Shell employee Adam Kahane. Kahane subsequently left Shell to form Reos Partners and adapted the scenario process to better fit the new methodology he envisioned: Transformative Scenario Planning. Despite the allegedly transformative nature of the Transformative Scenario Planning process, TSP is deeply rooted in oil futures, which themselves find their origin in military strategy. Indeed, the Shell Scenario process can be traced back to the theories of Herman Kahn, whose futurist thinking came out of post-World War II military strategy and the RAND Corporation.⁵

⁵ RAND (short for “Research and Development”) began as the RAND Project established by the United States Army Air Forces post-WWII to consider future weapons development. It eventually expanded into education and international affairs as simply “RAND.” It now exists as a nonprofit think tank.

Kahn's contributions to futurology included a move to a pluralistic view of the future. R. John Williams defines the advent of this futurist mode of thinking as having two distinct phases (2016). The first was rational and based on new computational abilities. The second was focused on stories of potential futures. Kahn himself began at RAND with these computational methods. He began to believe that his calculations indicated not a singular future but rather a more complex picture requiring a "narratological model of systems analysis" (Williams 2016, 482). This new model took into account the "uncertainties" and pluralities of multiple futures rather than assuming the virtue and precision of computational models in predicting a singular future (Williams 2016). After the publication of *On Thermonuclear War* (1960) led to controversy over his callous discussion of the loss of human life, Kahn left RAND and founded the Hudson Institute in 1961. Kahn's framework of plurality led him to develop a scenarios model of thinking, as described in his later book *The Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation on the Next Thirty-Three Years* (1967). Within these scenarios, there is an emphasis on both the plurality of possibilities and the fact that all the stories being told are hypothetical futures rather than predications. Kahn even claimed that the scenarios had a "mythic" quality, seeking plausibility but always allowing for an element of surprise in the story (Williams 2016, 523).

Also in the 1960s, Royal Dutch Shell was anticipating global shifts in the oil market and sent two of its strategists to learn scenario thinking from Kahn. Pierre Wack, often called the father of the Shell Scenarios, was one of those sent to learn this methodology (Shell Scenarios 2012). Building upon what he learned from Kahn, Wack and his team went on to create the first Shell Scenarios. Their first big success was predicting an oil crisis that would send shockwaves through supply and demand. As the narrative goes, Shell was able to respond much more quickly to the 1973 oil embargo, far outdoing their competitors because they had accounted for a

scenario in which such an event would occur (Shell Scenarios 2012). Wack's methodology was all-encompassing; he conducted the scenario planning process in a remote monastery in the French countryside so that "he and his team could talk, burn incense, and meditate without telephones, offices, or home life" (Williams 2016, 528). While Kahn's futurist thinking already sought insights from Eastern philosophy (he was even referred to as a guru, according to Williams), Wack's approach to scenario building leaned even more into a form of spiritual or religious experience. He was greatly influenced by his own enlightenment journey, first through encounters with philosopher and spiritualist George Gurdjieff in France, later with Zenkei Shibayama in Japan, and finally with Svamiji Prajnanpad in India. The teachings of Svamiji emphasized constant change in the world, as well as the need to expand one's perception to "cultivate 'the art of seeing'" in order to move beyond the constraints of the self (Williams 2016, 527). Wack approached his professional endeavors guided by these teachings, and Svamiji even called scenario building Wack's "yoga" (Williams 2016, 527).

This appropriation of non-Western epistemologies is indicative of the extractive colonial framework perpetuated by Wack's scenario planning process. The forward-looking approach of this framework also ensures that extractive colonialism is secured for the future. As Williams points out, Shell's scenarios allowed them to envision the devastation brought on by climate change, and a way to profit from it. In 2008, Shell sought to get ahead of competition "with bids for 2.1 billion dollars on leases in the Arctic, where thawing temperatures meant (they hoped), more locations for potential drilling (Williams 2016, 537). As evidenced by these actions, the scenarios resulted not only in negative environmental impacts, but also in imposition onto Arctic Indigenous homelands. In the introduction to her book *Queer Times, Black Futures*, Kara Keeling points out, "A future in which Royal Dutch Shell would continue to exist as such

forecloses upon a future in which those groups of living beings we currently can identify as ‘Black people’ and/or Indigenous peoples, have the resources to enjoy a sustainable and joyful existence on this planet” (Keeling 2019, 5). Shell relies on extraction from the lands and labor of Black and/or Indigenous peoples, and simultaneously these same people are those put most at risk by Shell’s operations, as is the case with Arctic drilling. The Shell Scenarios even describe the scenario building process through “a metaphor of exploration and map-making,” according to Keeling (Shell International BV in Keeling 2019, 1). These are deeply colonial metaphors, reflecting the logic of “exploring” and “discovering” new places, resulting in what Mishuana Goeman describes as “spatial violence asserted through the geographical imaginings and subsequent mappings” (2013, 19). In the case of Arctic drilling, scenarios predicted an opening in which Indigenous homelands could be mapped and exploited for drilling, thereby worsening the very condition of global warming making that “exploration” possible. Colonial extraction of knowledge and resources is at the heart of Shell’s scenario planning process.

Out of the success of the Shell Scenarios emerged Reos Partners and Transformative Scenario Planning. Adam Kahane, the founder of Reos Partners, learned scenario planning at Royal Dutch Shell from Ged Davis and Kees van der Heijden. Van der Heijden, Kahane argues, solidified the work started by Wack (2012). In 1991, Kahane was asked to help facilitate a scenario planning process in South Africa. This process was desired, in part, in opposition to scenarios that Wack worked on as a consultant with the largest mining operation in South Africa, Anglo American, and on another project for the financial services group, Old Mutual. As such, the scenarios that Kahane worked on were pitched as “An Alternative Scenario Planning Exercise of the Left” (Kahane 2012, 4). These scenarios, which were eventually dubbed the Mont Fleur Scenarios, heavily influenced the structuring of South Africa going forward, largely

because many political figures worked on the scenarios and developed perspectives and relationships in the process, at least according to Kahane (2012). From here, this new Transformative Scenario Planning method – which Reos Partners continues to facilitate – became sought-after in a variety of contexts.

The pathway from Shell to Reos is framed in Kahane’s book, *Working Together to Change the Future: Transformative Scenario Planning*, as a shift in methodology. Kahane claims that Shell sought “objective” and “neutral” scenarios, despite some leadership pushing for an approach that would more specifically try to shape the future. Kahane argues that there is thus a difference between Shell’s “adaptive” scenarios, which seek only to adapt to an “objective” future and his own “transformative” scenarios, which seek to shape and change the future. In *Working Together to Change the Future*, TSP’s roots in oil are treated as a neutral historical fact, which was also the case in the historical/methodological summary provided by the Reos team at the first TSP workshop. I would argue that the methodological implications run deeper than this, as I will discuss further in later sections.⁶

Finalized Scenario Summaries

My analysis going forward relies, in part, on an understanding of what the final Southeast Alaska scenarios look like. The broad summaries are as follows (see Southeast Alaska Scenario Team 2024):

Geesh/Bull Kelp: In this scenario, external forces are shaping the region. With a great deal of upheaval politically, mining and other extractive industries are prioritized. The economy is boom and bust, and urban centers grow while village populations decrease. Geesh can grow quickly

⁶ Certainly, the material ties persist, as some of Reos’s staff members also come from the oil industry, including one who worked on the Southeast Alaska Scenarios.

and overwhelm an ecosystem, but it also provides essential nutrients. However, in this scenario the region is out of balance.

Shéiyi/Spruce: Cruise tourism is the major economic driver in this scenario, resulting in a deeply seasonal rhythm to the year. There is an influx of workers in the summer and local populations are sparse in the winter. This mirrors the seasonal lifecycle of shéiyi, which in turn represents the cyclical and changing nature of the economy in this scenario.

Kanat'á/Blueberries: This scenario is shaped largely by several waves of climate refugees who move to southeast Alaska. The first are wealthier people seeking refuge from fires and other changes in the lower 48. The next wave of refugees is relocated by the government. In this scenario, just as kanat'á are not native only to southeast Alaska, many new people create the dynamic of the region, sometimes at the expense of locals and especially of Native cultures.

S'axt'/Devil's Club: Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination drive this scenario, resulting in resistance from many non-Native people. The title is derived from this dichotomy: s'axt' is medicinal but has spiny branches. Tribes gain control over land bases, village populations rise, and settler populations drop. Large-scale healing initiatives change the narrative in the region, and economic opportunities are more limited, but land management is sustainable, and subsistence harvest is an important part of life.

Temporal Slippage and Settler Hybridity

The scenarios went through several iterations before reaching anything resembling the summaries above. Indeed, for many participants, it was a slow and often frustrating methodology. Starting in Ketchikan, the Reos team emphasized that TSP is a very academic process, requiring different stages of scalar engagement from participants. We started with broad trends that we saw in the region, eventually narrowing in on more specific issues and ideas. It

was emphasized repeatedly that we were telling stories about possible futures, not what we wanted to happen or an actual prediction. We were also told repeatedly that the scenarios must be *plausible* and *challenging*. The scenarios began to take nebulous form over the course of the three-day workshop. As we dove into the process, some clear themes emerged. A major concern was climate change and how it would look in the region. Indeed, from early on, one of the scenarios posed a future in which climate refugees came to southeast Alaska. Industry, economy, and governance were other major themes that emerged.

It also became clear that there would be several sticking points that people could not agree on or that we as a group returned to repeatedly. For example, many participants felt there were not enough social workers, educators, or healthcare workers included on the team. These social issues arose constantly, but there was a pervasive feeling that we did not have the required expertise in the room. Most relevant here is that several Native participants felt that non-Native participants were ignorant of the tribal and corporate structure in Alaska and had a general lack of understanding of Native issues, leading these aspects to be underdiscussed or underrepresented. Even so, Native values and practices were still being posed as *solutions* to regional issues like interpersonal/community dynamics, climate change, and land management. The problem was less with Native *ideas* and more with the actual Native *people* and *organizations* present in the region. There was therefore a lack of clarity on how Native people would fit into the scenarios, and at first, it seemed as if perhaps one scenario would be the “Native scenario,” with others not at all mentioning tribes and Alaska Native corporations. This resulted in the other three scenarios being largely “settler scenarios” given each scenario’s tendency towards Native erasure.

At one point, participants were looking for solutions to this issue, including how to more thoroughly include Native peoples in the scenarios. One Indigenous participant suggested that a radical take would be that all southeast Alaskans, including settlers, would be “Native.” In other words, settlers would be reframed as being Indigenous. This comment was made in response to Native issues being held apart from “regional issues.” However, despite the intentions of this provocation to flip the focus of the conversation, it assumes a form of futurity predicated on settler inclusivity. Even to bring Native issues to the forefront, the notion of settlers “becoming Native” still plays into a vision of the future that is reliant on settler futurity. Mark Rifkin argues that settler temporality aims to “reorder existing Indigenous experiences of time to bring them in line with non-native modes of jurisdiction and programs of development” (Rifkin 2017, 130). Settler futurity is reliant on Indigenous assimilation, or on settler claims to Indigeneity. If the whole region were to be “Native,” the ultimate settler colonial destiny – to access and claim Indigenous land without impediment – would still be fulfilled. Settlers would have full rights to territory, finally taking full claim over the land in the form of a hybridized society wherein actual Indigenous inhabitants would have no claim to sovereignty, land, culture, or reparations.

Indeed, the matter of hybridity loomed large over the planning workshop. Another set of scenarios was introduced to participants as an example on the first day of the workshop. These were the Hawai‘i’s Soul Scenarios. Two of our facilitators had helped with the Hawai‘i scenarios, and Spruce Root had been inspired by them as well, creating the impetus for the southeast Alaska scenarios. They were presented to us in a positive light, specifically through the framework of a story about the process. Apparently, the Hawai‘i scenario team had been struggling to come together and find a purpose when a Native Hawaiian elder refocused the group by asking what would happen “to Hawai‘i’s soul.” This apparently completely reshaped

the conversation, ultimately leading to the title and structure of the scenarios. Each one represents a different outcome for “Hawai‘i’s soul.” From what I can tell, the Hawai‘i Scenarios were also created by a group of Native Hawaiian and non-Native community members and leaders. I was, of course, not present during the planning process, so my discussion of these scenarios is not meant to be a critique of those present. Additionally, as someone who is not Native Hawaiian, it is not my place to determine the usefulness or quality of these scenarios. However, their emphasis on hybridity read alongside the writing of Native Hawaiian scholar Mailee Arvin is elucidating for the discussions that happened in southeast Alaska.

I want to draw out a few specific examples from the Hawai‘i Scenarios that I feel are indicative of the way settlers appear in these scenarios. Hawai‘i’s Soul is consistently framed as the relationship between Native Hawaiians and non-Native Hawaiians. For example, these are the outcomes for Hawai‘i’s Soul in the four scenarios (see Hawai‘i’s Soul Scenario Team 2022):

- 1) In “Iwa’,” Hawai‘i’s soul is lost because Native Hawaiian and “multi-generational local families” migrate away due to high cost of living, with the concept of “Hawaiian” determined by blood quantum.
- 2) In “Nēnē,” Hawai‘i’s soul is “split in two” because Hawaiian is defined by those who have citizenship in new tribal governments and management over land is divided between traditional Native Hawaiian values and Western capitalism.
- 3) In “Manu o Kū,” Hawai‘i’s soul is transformed. Native Hawaiians values are widely accepted by all and “those who reside in Hawai‘i and exhibit aloha spirit are considered Hawaiian, regardless of ethnicity.”
- 4) In “‘Ua’u,” Hawai‘i’s soul is tested. Hawai‘i becomes its own sovereign nation, and all citizens are considered Hawaiian.

As is demonstrated by these four outcomes, the term “Hawaiian” being contentious is clearly a major issue, with unity under this single category being a desirable outcome, at least for

some. This imagined future has resonance with Arvin's discussion of settler desire for hybridity. Native Hawaiians "mixed" with other races were thought by sociologists of the Chicago School to be superior, overcoming some of the ostensible negative aspects of their Indigenous ancestry (Arvin 2019). Arvin writes, "Thus, heterosexual reproduction is taken for granted as the mechanism for moving Hawai'i forward into what Tavia Nyong'o has called 'the straight time of heterosexuality, wedded to progress' that heralds a 'hybrid future' that is also seen as progressing from, and curing, the racism of the past" (Arvin 2019, 101). As such, "hybrid Hawaiian girls" were seen as the reproductive vector of this hybridity, wherein they could marry immigrant men, paving the way for the new hybrid future (Arvin 2019).

In the Hawai'i scenarios, a racialized hybrid future is reflected in discussions of "Hawaiian" being no longer defined based on ethnicity in Manu o Kū. Similarly, the notion that Hawai'i's soul would be *split* in Nēnē when Hawaiian is defined by tribal citizenship indicates that settlers fear being left out of the future, which in this scenario would leave no room for hybridity. The desire for hybridity is also present in Iwa', in which "multi-generational local families" are listed alongside Native Hawaiian families, and their absence is part of the reason why Hawai'i's soul is "lost" in this scenario (Hawai'i's Soul Scenario Team 2022, 9). This indicates that for good or for bad, hybridity is essential to Hawai'i's soul. Finally, in 'Ua'u, Hawai'i's soul is "tested" by its status as an independent nation, and citizenship is extended to all, Native or not (Hawai'i's Soul Scenario Team 2022, 18). This is a testament again to the vision of a hybrid future in which no division exists between Native and non-Native Hawaiians. This is deeply ironic given the resonance it has with the United States's history. Afterall, the US broke from Great Britain and became its own nation state, with Native people eventually becoming citizens, but this has not solved any of the issues of settler colonialism. As Arvin

argues, hybridity in Hawai‘i has always been an idealized vision of the American melting pot (2019, 232). These scenarios reflect that desire, racially and politically.

There is a similar desire present in Alaska, wherein settler actions harm Alaska Natives by enacting the “frontier lifestyle.” A prime example is the push for a “rural preference” for subsistence, rather than an Alaska Native preference, as discussed in Chapter Three (Haven 2022). In such cases, settler actions erode Alaska Native sovereignty to assert settler ownership of and belonging on Indigenous lands. In the scenario planning process, this played out in a discussion about tribal governments extending citizenship to non-Natives in southeast. This was proposed as a solution for the “Native scenario” to make it more inclusive to settlers who were concerned that tribal governments would have too much power in this scenario. Coming out of the Ketchikan workshop and into the period between workshops, the editorial team – of which I was a member – continued to edit and write. Settlers becoming tribal citizens was a major point of discussion in these meetings, as the team seemed to realize that settlers may not fit into a future largely determined by Native presence, knowledge, and values. I had to explain on multiple occasions that tribal citizenship for all Alaskans was not practical, given the way that tribes function and their relationship to the US government.

Once it became clear that this was not a “plausible” outcome, the scenario in which regional power is in Native hands was subsequently saddled with issues like economic stagnation and population decline, as is the case in the final document. This “all Native” scenario was thus, in many ways, seen as undesirable by settler participants. This relationship shows up even in the final name for the scenario, Saxt’, or Devil’s Club. It is an important medicinal plant for Lingít people, though its limbs feature sharp spines that make it difficult to harvest. Despite its important cultural usage, the description for the scenario points out its “spiny” nature because it

is “undesirable” for many in the region. At the start of the Ketchikan workshop, Native values and stewardship were seen as positive solutions to issues like climate change. This was true up until the point that real Native people were involved and settlers were no longer fully included in the narrative.

In Juneau, these discussions continued, with a major concern being how to bring in Native people more actively while not “excluding” settlers. One feature of the TSP process is to create a grid wherein important high-level questions/issues are laid out. For the Southeast Alaska Scenarios, this includes things like “Where is the power held that influences the region?” and “How do we respond to climate change?” These questions must be answered for every single scenario. As Native issues were continually being overshadowed or left out, I decided to suggest a new category, which ended up being “What happens to haa kuusteeyí ‘our way of life’?” Because that question now had to be answered across the scenarios, this resulted in Native peoples and organizations/tribes being included within each scenario.

One major concern with this new addition was that non-Native people would feel excluded by this category. This manifested in two ways: 1) those who directly expressed a concern that settlers would feel alienated, and 2) those who wanted to know if non-Native people could enact and practice haa kuusteeyí. During the Juneau planning session, I had several discussions with White participants about how and when non-Indigenous peoples may be able to enact haa kuusteeyí. In one scenario, a large-scale healing initiative also involved non-Natives, thus necessitating that settlers understand and enact Indigenous values and stewardship practices. In this scenario, non-Native people were said to be living by the principles of haa kuusteeyí. I think this may have caused confusion about how haa kuusteeyí was being used in the other scenarios and whether settlers were included in this category on the chart. In a smaller group that

included me, several other Alaska Natives, and a few settlers, we worked to redefine many of the category questions, and we sought to determine a summary for haa *kuusteeyí* for each scenario.

It was during this session that we finally determined that haa *kuusteeyí* should be focused specifically on Alaska Native cultural practices. This choice also represented a refusal of hybridity. Native participants wanted Indigenous issues, tribal governments, and Native organizations to have their own specific place in the scenarios irrespective of regional issues.

Asserting Lingít Presence Since Time Immemorial

The shift away from hybridity also represented an assertion of Native presence throughout the scenarios. In each possible future, the trajectory of the Native population, tribal governments, and tribal corporations are all traced. The assertion of Native presence in the scenarios was made most obvious in one example from the Juneau workshop. A participant suggested having a scenario in which essentially all Native people had left the region. This was quickly ruled out as not being “plausible.” It was made clear that, given the 10,000 plus year history of Lingít presence on this land, there was no way in which another twenty-five years would result in no Lingít people being left in the region. Or perhaps more saliently, there was no way that all cultural traditions would have been eliminated within that timeframe when they have been an ongoing form of resistance to colonization since the 1700s. This represents a form of ancestral presence through the assertion of the longevity of Lingít existence on the land. Both through the assertion of Lingít knowledge of and on the land and through the *longue durée* of Lingít presence, there is a clear understanding that Lingít people do hold a distinct place in the region. This presence would not have been asserted had it not been for the Native people present at the workshops bringing our ancestors with us into the room. That very presence lent credence to the fact of our ancestral futures.

Ancestral presence and ancestral futurism are related to the Lingít concept of haa shuká. Shuká means “ancestor,” but can also refer to the future. It essentially refers to those who have come before and those who will come after us. This concept collapses the temporality of past and future, bringing us as Lingít people into the same temporality as our ancestors and descendants. This occurs in ceremony, wherein ancestors are brought into the room by their descendants. Part of the *ku.éex*’ relies on descendants *embodying* their ancestors. Participants will say things like “It is not me offering this fire dish,⁷ it is my maternal grandmother,” or some other relative in their clan. This is similarly evoked in naming practices and, by extension, clan relationships. Children often receive the Lingít names of their clan relatives and are thought to embody elements of that person’s spirit in a practice sometimes called “limited reincarnation” in English (Marks 2025). Similarly, if someone carries the same name as one of your relations, they become that kinship relation to you. For example, someone who had your grandfather’s name could be called “grandfather” even if they were younger than you. The living can embody the deceased through naming practices and in ceremonial contexts, again breaking down these temporal boundaries of the past and present.

The collapsing of past and present is essential in other aspects of Lingít culture as well. In Chapter One, I discussed the way that storytellers will both reference other stories and bring in contemporary issues when telling the Raven Cycle, events that occurred before Lingít people were even present on our homelands. This iterative form of worldmaking builds on the past and present in its very construction. It constantly collapses time and builds on itself as distinct periods are brought into the story. I would argue that any form of Lingít futurity is always reliant

⁷ These are offerings meant to feed the deceased in the afterlife. They are called “fire dishes” because they are burned so that they will pass into the realm of the dead and nourish the deceased. It is a way of remembering the deceased and speaking their names so they will be fed and warmed in the afterlife.

on the past. The Lingít people present for the TSP workshops proved the longevity of our people, as embodied through the current generation in the room. Our future was then understood through reference to this longevity.

Transformative Scenario Planning relies on “hypothetical” futures, but Lingít futures are assured by connection to our descendants. Through the temporal lens of haa shuká, the long presence of Lingít ancestors on the land establishes Lingít futures based on ancestral connections and the blurring of past, present, and future. A similar relationship to place and land is summarized by Vine Deloria Jr.:

A Crow chief, told that the government owned his land, said that they could not own it because the first several feet down consisted of the bones of his ancestors and the dust of the previous generations of Crow people. If the government wanted to claim anything, the chief continued, it would have to begin where the Crow people's contribution ended. (Deloria 1999, 253).

Lingít people are also a part of our homelands. In 2050, Lingít ancestral presence will remain on and with the land, thereby also assuring Lingít ancestral futures. Our descendants are our future, and we are all future ancestors; there is nothing “hypothetical” about it.

The Lingít concept haa shuká refuses the constructs of a set linear time, also refusing what Rifkin calls settler “modes of jurisdiction and programs of development” (Rifkin 2017, 130). Transformative Scenario Planning desires and demands linear time. Even if it imagines multiple hypothetical futures, they are still grounded in a cultural understanding of time that is ultimately linear, with past, present, and future as distinct categories. Haa shuká, which represents *both* those who come before us and those who come after, *exceeds* the temporal boundaries of TSP. This results in the need for Lingít constructions of the future that are not

contained by these scenarios, despite Lingít people and organizations being included in them. The depth of our relationship with land and the potential for our future on our homelands is gestured to in the scenarios, but only in a limited capacity. Most potently, TSP was never going to be a space to create scenarios for the end of settler colonialism. Its history in extractive industries and the military industrial complex does not lend itself to radical acts of resistance or rethinking the position of the US as a settler state. As Keeling notes of the Shell Scenarios, “they do not include situations in which Shell Oil itself no longer exists, is rendered obsolete, or has redistributed its wealth” (2019, 9). There would likewise not be a scenario in which settlers imagined themselves out of existence. Nevertheless, even if an end to settler colonialism was not a part of the scenarios, Indigenous presence is, at the very least, assured in these imagined futures, and perhaps more importantly, beyond them.

Conclusion: Tools of Haa Shuká

Given the existence of Lingít futurism in its own right, scenario planning of any kind is not an all-encompassing mode of thinking, but rather a tool that can be useful in some cases. Its potential in southeast Alaska was reliant on the refusal of Native participants to allow Indigenous futures to be subsumed by settler futures. The scenarios are a tool, and Spruce Root knew that tool would only be useful for their work and for the region if it included Alaska Native participants. Those participants ensured that Native issues were represented in the scenarios. This was, in part, through the assertion of haa *kuusteeyí* and haa *shuká*, both of which changed the mode of engagement in the scenario building process. Spruce Root, despite being a CDFI, is connected to those ancestral lineages through its staff, through its mission statement and values, and through stories that shape those goals. Similarly, despite the TSP process’s history, there was no way to divorce the Native people in the room from haa *shuká* and from time immemorial.

This exceeded the bounds of TSP, just as Spruce Root exceeds the bounds of a CDFI and of Western capitalism.

The systems that Spruce Root relies on are made up of tools that our people have learned to use for our communities. Just like with Lingít silver metalwork, there are opportunities to adapt and innovate. These are tools that exist in the world of colonization, but they also do not define us and our culture exclusively. People continue to get traditional hand tattoos depicting their clans. There is no need to hide at this moment in time. However, people also like to wear silver bracelets or maybe they do not want tattoos and would rather display their clans on a bracelet. These are all circumstances of colonialism leading to new tools that we can choose to use when we need to or want to use them. Even if Native erasure had continued in the TSP process, those scenarios would not have erased our culture in the next 25 years. However, the very fact that Native issues were included and that they could be useful to tribes and Alaska Native corporations illustrates the way that we use and adapt these tools, assimilating them to our needs rather than letting them assimilate us.

This theme emerged at an event put on by the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP), which is a part of Spruce Root. The SSP puts on a yearly spring retreat (the 2024 retreat was focused on the scenarios), and the 2025 retreat had a theme of climate adaptation and preparedness. The whole retreat was guided by a story about a village needing to find a new home after their river had run low on fish.⁸ As the story unfolded over the three days, the village took stock of what tools they had, the importance of haa *kuusteeyí*, and how they could use this and the people who made up the village to solve the oncoming problems. The story was meant to

⁸ It is my understanding that this story was not a specific clan-owned migration story. Rather, it was an amalgamation of the type of migration stories that are very common among a variety of clans in the region. While the impetus for the migration may vary, needing to find a new village site is a common historical occurrence.

guide participants to also look at the people and tools available in their climate change preparedness planning. As illustrated by the type of migration histories alluded to by the story of the village, southeast Alaska Native people have been dealing with similar situations since time immemorial. The SSP and, by extension, Spruce Root – as Native-led organizations – sought to *share* these insights with Native and non-Native participants alike. These insights were reflected in the workshops being offered and the conversations held by participants. The main focus of the workshop was a project accelerator, with a focus on how to utilize available tools, emphasizing climate resiliency and preparedness. It was future-oriented, but relied first and foremost on existing relationships, tools, and processes.

The assessment of what we have, what tools, strengths, and what principles guide us are all components that make up a long history of Lingít worlding. As shown by the TSP process, Lingít worlding is something that refuses to be subsumed by settler logics. Whether it be nuclear/oil futures or settler futures in and of themselves, Indigenous temporalities continued to emerge, even as settlers attempted to subsume and appropriate them. The scenarios are a tool to be used, but they are not the only way to envision our future. We as a people have always been imagining and bringing into existence new and better futures for our grandchildren. We do not only think of current generations, but instead of the future generations and how to be a good ancestor. Lingít people should continue to think beyond settler constraints, whether it be through Lingít Indigenous Futurist novels, youth-led and focused leadership programs, story-based workshops, or Indigenized lending programs. As illustrated by the TSP process, our people are strong when we stand together and our futures are our own to envision.

Conclusion: The Future is Indigenous

When discussing themes for the 2022 Tlingit and Haida Youth Summit, one delegate suggested “The Future is Indigenous.” At the time, I was on the Commission and serving as a Member-at-Large on the board. It was an immediate hit, and we all agreed that should be the theme. The Tlingit and Haida Youth Commission began in 2021 and was functionally disbanded in 2024 due to staff and programmatic changes. The Commission hosted a total of four youth summits, the first two of which were entirely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of the function of the Summits was to write resolutions that would then be brought to Tribal Assembly by fully fledged Tlingit and Haida delegates. The Commission brought forth a few resolutions over the years, including one focused on climate change and carbon neutrality for the tribe. Environmental issues were a major theme during several Youth Summits, another way that futurity was considered by the Commission.

During “The Future is Indigenous” themed summit in 2022, the focus was more on education. The resolution coming out of this summit was TA 22-10 “Mandating Annual Culturally Safe Trainings For All State Of Alaska School Educators.”¹ While not necessarily intentional, this resolution spoke to both the theme of the Summit and the larger goals and aspirations of the Commission at the time. The Commission was designed to help educate and train young tribal citizens (18-25) about tribal government processes. It was future-oriented in its aim to create young leaders, and uplift youth voices in the tribe. The resolution was targeted at assisting Indigenous students by addressing some of the structural issues facing them in schools. Feedback from participants indicated that these challenges were common. The colonial education system is a space of extreme trauma for Indigenous peoples, and many teachers are not culturally

¹ Here, TA stands for Tribal Assembly.

attentive to Native students. This results in frequent misunderstandings that often negatively impact Indigenous students. The resolution sought to place Indigenous students in a better position within these Western systems. The desire to better these systems for Indigenous people was also present in other work done by the Commission.

One example of this was in the way that delegates wanted to set up internal processes of the Commission. There was often a clear divide between the way that youth viewed tribal government processes and aspects that were not culturally fulfilling within that context. I am choosing to identify one specific example, that of the use of Robert's Rules of Order in the Youth Commission meetings. Robert's Rules of Order, or "Robert's Rules" are a style of parliamentary procedure developed in the 1870s by Henry Maryn Robert. Emerging from the need for a clear and unified set of procedures, Don H. Doyle argues that Robert's Rules worked in service of a newly emerging "nationally integrated society" (1980, 6). This would, seemingly, be antithetical to the aims of tribal governments enacting their own sovereignty within the settler nation state, but Robert's Rules are quite ubiquitous in tribal spaces in southeast Alaska. Because the Commission was designed to teach youth about tribal government processes, the initial assumption was that Robert's Rules would be learned and used by delegates. Immediately, this received pushback. Delegates wanted to decolonize and Indigenize the process, looking to circle peacemaking and consensus-based models instead. Ultimately, the tribe refused to allow delegates to only use other models and insisted on a looser interpretation called "Rob's Rules." Even so, this was emblematic of a larger phenomenon at play.

Youth delegates had grown up largely proud of their heritage and with more opportunities to resist assimilationist tactics by the US settler state. This is, of course, not to discount the tireless work done by elders and culture bearers who have made it possible for the

youth of today to have opportunities to take art and language classes, and to be proud of their culture. Rather, it is to say that these efforts are working and there is a widespread desire from young people to Indigenize our practices and to call out the insidious ways that Euro-American culture invades Native spaces. We have our own cultural procedures and need not rely on that which has been imposed by the settler project of nationhood. This encompasses tribal government procedures like Robert's Rules but also extends to calling out patriarchy, racism, homophobia, and transphobia in community, as those systems do not align with cultural values and beliefs. It is not merely that the future is Indigenous, but also that it is *Indigenized*. There are practices that we are reclaiming, and there are also non-Indigenous systems that can be Indigenized. This push, and especially its youth-led component is key to enacting ancestral futures that learn from the past and look forward to new possibilities.

Due to staffing changes and structural issues at the tribe in the spring of 2023, there was a gradually waning interest in the Commission (from the tribe and ultimately from delegates as well). This resulted in it fading slowly out of existence after a largely unsuccessful Summit in 2024. As such, this example represents both the ideals of Southeast Alaska Native peoples – “The Future is Indigenous” – and some of the failures that can emerge in practice, especially when values are spoken about but not acted upon. Uplifting youth and supporting delegates was certainly the intention with the Commission. Although many delegates have continued in various roles in community, this goal on the part of the tribe was ultimately not reflected in the support provided to delegates. I bring the Youth Commission up not to say that the Commission itself was a failure, but rather to illustrate that young Native people are future and solutions-oriented, recognizing the many challenges faced by their communities and seeking to address those things as they are able.

As a community member and scholar, I feel very deeply that climate solutions need to be at the center of this Indigenous future. So many issues at different scales come down to the question of what our future will look like on a changing planet. In southeast Alaska, this is felt deeply, especially by Native inhabitants for whom haa *kuusteeyí* *is* the land and waters. However, Lingít worlding now exists in a “recovered” state, that is to say, within the context of settler colonialism (Byrd 2011, xi). As Jodi Byrd writes, “there is a difference between recovered and having never lost in the first place that stands in breach still for those of us attempting to theorize the legacies of colonialism within indigenous worlds” (Byrd 2011, xi). This is a balance I have attempted to strike throughout this dissertation: Lingít worlding is a continuous practice since time immemorial, with an emphasis on adaptation in the face of extreme change, and also settler colonialism has had a deep impact on that world making project. The notion of an entirely “pure” Lingít culture is a false one, but accounting for settler colonial influence also does not erase the fact that there is a distinct Lingít culture, political structure, and world. Because climate change itself is so driven by settler colonialism and global imperialist projects of the West, this is a necessary vector through which to understand this project. Given its status as “The Last Frontier” in the American consciousness, Alaska provides a very specific canvas on which settlers can paint their colonial fantasy of conquest and belonging. This plays out in relation to climate change and fears over a “vanishing wilderness.” Even given the undeniable changes brought about through settler colonial occupation, there is still no way to deny Lingít past, present, and futures in our homeland. While we must accept and sometimes even embrace changes to our circumstances, there is no denying we are still here and the future *is* Indigenous.

As a result of this orientation, there are four separate but interrelated themes that I wish to highlight, which are: 1) Scale, 2) Knowledge Systems, 3) Futures, and 4) Haa K̓uusteeyí.

Scale

Scale is something that must be considered both geographically and temporally in a Lingít context. Scale can be compressed and stretched, especially through oratory and kinship. Ancestors and important places may be invoked in ceremonial contexts, collapsing temporal and spatial barriers that might otherwise exist. Old and new issues in the community might be collapsed, resulting in a blending of past and present issues. Things that happened a long time ago are deeply felt by descendants now and into the future. Similarly, things that happened in different places can be called spatially into the room as represented by ancestors. This occurs through oratory, the reciting of histories, and the presence of at.óow (sacred clan belongings). There is an elasticity to temporal and spatial scale that allows for these different interpretations, and that, in turn, allows for a more capacious understanding of something like climate change and its own scalar implications.

In Southeast Alaska, the regional and, more importantly, the local are essential scales in terms of climate research, mitigation, and preparedness efforts. This allows a focus on the tangible impacts that make environmental changes more understandable, refusing a planetary scale that elides all potential actions. This is uniquely applicable in southeast Alaska given the local emphasis of the region, but a similar perspective could be taken in other places to emphasize the affective nature of climate change. This also allows for a more network-driven model that focuses not on applying the same principles to every location, but rather accounts for similarities, while encouraging learning, and acknowledging geographic difference. This network model is utilized in projects like the Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network, the Sustainable

Southeast Partnership, and the Kutí Project. As has been illustrated throughout, my research has emphasized the need for a place-based approach that accounts for difference even between communities within the southeast region.

Indeed, place-based models as effective in southeast Alaska comes into direct opposition to much climate change discourse, including the use of climate proxies. The need to universalize climate discourse, for example through buzzwords like “Anthropocene,” forces a planetary scale that too often elides localized issues and solutions. This scalar orientation is also easily co-opted into crisis discourse that forces its own fast-paced temporality. This allows only for panic and reaction and not for reflection or planning. Often, the planetary scale becomes an overwhelming force in this discourse, defying all sense of tangible change and pushing many into a sense of helplessness or despair. This also relates to the way scale is felt geographically and temporally with climate proxies.

Climate proxies also allow specific political projects to be mapped onto climate change discourse. They result in an experience of these changes at a distance, also allowing an apathetic stance to slip in. Climate talk is revealing of how environmental change is felt at a regional and local level in southeast Alaska. This talk illustrates that people are thinking about and feeling changes in their day to day lives. This often intersects with Indigenous Knowledge, wherein people are observing and remembering things they have known or things that were told to them by family members and elders. Climate talk is a much more active form of engagement with environmental change, and it is likely that such observations and discussions could spur on mitigation and preparedness efforts.

Knowledge Systems

The way that discourse circulates also relates to worldview and knowledge systems. LIngít and Euro-American world views and knowledge systems are oftentimes incompatible. This dissertation has sought to draw a distinction between these knowledge systems, emphasizing the continued importance of Alaska Native epistemologies, especially on traditional homelands. This is not to say that there is or ever has been a purity to these knowledge systems, but there are distinct features that ought to be attended to, for example in policy decisions like at the Alaska Federation of Natives and in the context of Western research and science.

Indigenous Knowledge represents an array of distinct epistemologies that are rooted in ancestral knowledge and reflect a deep-seated understanding of and relationship with lands and waters. At AFN, this was demonstrated through multiple forms of engagement with knowledge bearers present, especially in relation to changing access and conditions for subsistence. While discussions of subsistence and climate change are common in community, this engagement at AFN represented a specific attention to Traditional Knowledge systems as actionable data that should be presented to a wider state and federal audience in defense of Alaska Native homelands. Sharing this knowledge in such a setting, as well as utilizing it in state and federal arenas is an example of ongoing survivance that utilizes Traditional Knowledge in the here and now and towards the political and cultural goals of Alaska Native peoples.

This example involves Alaska Native people utilizing our knowledge for our own cultural continuum. However, this does require that the knowledge extend beyond our communities and, in this case, to the state and federal governments. This can create issues regarding the protection of knowledge, as well as power imbalances with the way the knowledge is understood and used. A similar dynamic emerges when Indigenous Knowledge is brought into Western science, or

even when Indigenous people conduct research within a Western system. The tools of Western science can be used by Indigenous communities, for example in cases like the SEATOR shellfish testing lab at Sitka Tribe of Alaska, the Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network, and the cruise ship air and water quality monitoring projects that some tribes are implementing. However, when Western science seeks to use Indigenous Knowledge, special care needs to be taken with regards to power dynamics.

So-called scientific thinking has long been weaponized against Indigenous peoples. It has been used to primitivize and dismiss Native epistemologies and thought-worlds. This is even more entrenched through the funding structures and intellectual lineage of climate research. Both climate change and scientific inquiry are bound up with settler colonialism and US imperialism. These systems of power do not disappear, even as Western scientists seek Indigenous Knowledge. Frameworks like co-production attempt to shift power to the hands of the community, but they fall short of system-wide changes that would be required to create meaningful changes for Indigenous peoples. While such frameworks are an improvement over Indigenous erasure, treating them as an end-goal or aspirational form of research can be highly limiting. This mode of engagement tends to recenter Western science and its perceived needs, rather than centering Indigenous modes of thinking and community needs. Further work is needed both to boost tribal capacity to deal with external researchers, and to adequately train and prepare researchers for engagement with tribal governments and Native communities. It should especially be emphasized that there is not a one-size-fits-all model. Just because an approach works in one community, does not mean it will work everywhere and each project or each tribe may have different expectations and requirements.

Futures

Tribally specific requirements are also essential when considering other “tools,” for example the Transformative Scenario Planning process discussed in Chapter Five. Lingít futurism does not align with the temporality imposed by the TSP framework. This extends to discourse about climate change more generally, as was also embodied in the Southeast Alaska scenarios. Climate change discourse is always about a unidirectional and singular future. Whether it be through projected scenarios seeking to plan for that future, or through data-based predictions, there is an assumed narrative of crisis (Whyte 2021). In Alaska, such narratives project the climate crisis onto a geographically remote place that separates its affective experience from the here and now. They also assume an ongoing form of crisis that is both paralyzing and ever present.

By contrast, Lingít futures are rooted in the past, but not stuck in it. Ancestral futurism relies on the collapsing and blending of temporalities and is grounded in the past and present of ancestral knowledge. It refuses notions of a unique crisis, acknowledging that we live in a post-apocalyptic world of settler colonialism, but also acknowledging that our ancestors have faced other types of disaster since time immemorial. Just as our elders have reflected on settler colonialism alongside the plights of Raven, we in this moment must consider that accumulated knowledge in relation to climate change. We assert our futures through what we do now and we can make those assertions through the wisdom of those who came before.

The distinction I have drawn between these epistemologies is, however, not meant to suggest that each exists in isolation from the other. Due to the number of Lingít people living on our homelands, and due to the prevalence of Lingít cultural principles in business, political, and non-profit spaces, these ideas have certainly had an impact on Euro-American ideas in the

region. This dynamic has a fraught history due to the genocide and cultural genocide that have been enacted against Lingít people. In some cases, knowledge theft and appropriation reinforce the existing settler colonial power dynamics. Small Town SOUL's move to Indigeneity and insistence on their having learned Indigenous values and practices is a prime example. The exchange of ideas is not necessarily positive, nor is it equal. Given the attempts at assimilation and cultural dominance, Euro-American ideas have also impacted Lingít epistemologies. It must be noted that some of these histories and ideas are shared.

The important distinction, however, is that the notion of an isolated and “pure” cultural standpoint is a fiction (specifically, a fiction of anthropology). The European – and by extension Euro-American – cultural context is not pure, but rather the result of cross-cultural exchange and communication, as well as imperial theft and forced colonial contact. Indigenous cultures are also the result of cultural exchange, both prior to colonization, and in its wake. As such, Lingít futures are also rooted in these forms of exchange, as is our past. Our futurism can adapt from other knowledge systems and still be rooted in haa kuusteeyí, our way of life. Indeed, haa kuusteeyí itself reflects that adaptation is necessary, including via the exchange of ideas.

Haa Kuusteeyí

We as Lingít people continue to live haa kuusteeyí and bring these principles into settler colonial, Western, capitalist spaces. Lingít epistemologies have a different grounding in ideas like “scale” and “science,” and do not need proxies to understand changes that are ongoing on our homelands. The differences in these epistemologies unsettle the very existence of settler claims to land and knowledge. Frameworks like the Anthropocene seek to create a single narrative of human destruction of the planet. Lingít (and larger Indigenous) existence and lifeways deny the unified truth of this framework. Narratives of the Ecological Indian *and*

humans as a plague on the environment are both equally unsettled, forcing an attention to the specificity of relationships with land and waters that characterize haa kuusteeyí. Again, this is not to say that there is some purity of Lingít existence, but rather to say that Lingít worlding is always an interruption to settler desire for erasure of Native peoples and claims to land and authority. As illustrated in the Youth Commission example, this is a project in the making, not something we can meaningfully conclude or arrive at. There is always more work to be done, and haa kuusteeyí is a way of life, not a thing to be done. When we open the box of knowledge, we must interact with it, not simply let it sit.

Haa kuusteeyí is an active process. It also does not only include ceremonial contexts. Lingít people strive to and do live their traditional values and way of life in colonized and Western-centered spaces. This can often cause discomfort for settlers, but it illustrates that Lingít culture continues to stand in opposition to settler colonialism. The repeated commitment to haa kuusteeyí and to Lingít values illustrates the importance of continuing these practices. This includes various forms of adaptation. Rather than illustrating some break or impurity within the culture, this is actually a deeply traditional practice with its roots in The Raven Cycle and the very creation of humanity. Adaptation in the face of great change is always something that our ancestors have enacted, and people have continued to do this in the face of settler colonialism and climate change.

Our Futures Are Our Own to Envision

What I have described here is a place-based look at how climate adaptation and ancestral futurism exists on Lingít Aaní. Much of this work is intended for Lingít and Alaska Native people, though many aspects are not specifically unique to Lingít people. With that in mind, I want to draw a line that this is a framework for consideration that can perhaps help to reframe the

way people look at and understand climate change, but it is not something to be appropriated or taken on as a non-Lingít person. Indigenous communities globally, and other communities seeking to live well together have their own approaches, and while some of what is written here may be relevant, a place-based orientation is always key. For example, Kianna Simone Dieudonné's work in the Seattle area focuses on relationships with land held by Black-identifying individuals. She focuses on efforts to connect with land via outdoor activities, hiking, and gardening in efforts to access ancestral knowledge, build community, and enact forms of repair. Black and Indigenous communities are often most harmed by climate and environmental issues, and while it should not all fall to us to repair those issues (see Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020), we do have a role to play within our own communities. I hope that my approach, and by extension the Lingít approach, resonates with other scholars and communities; even within a place-based approach, widespread coalitions are necessary in climate solutions.

Regarding the Lingít context, I want to end by summing things up with a quote that I used in the Introduction.

The Tlingit & Haida people have been responding and adapting to a changing climate for thousands of years. Preparing for continued and accelerated change is not something new, but a continuation of the holistic natural resource and culturally driven approach that has kept the Tlingit & Haida people a vibrant and growing community. (Weitzel 2019, 42)

I return to this quote for two reasons. The first is that, given my commentary on the Youth Commission, I want to illustrate that these situations are dynamic. Given the breadth of work done by tribal governments, like Tlingit and Haida, there are often simultaneous moments of success and failure. I want to acknowledge both aspects in pursuit of a balanced approach. More importantly, I deeply appreciate the sentiment expressed in this quote. To me, it illustrates the

importance of acknowledging our past in the present and future, and it speaks to the deep well of ancestral knowledge upon which we draw in the face of a changing climate. As we return ever more to this well, that is the strength and wisdom upon which we must draw, providing us with tools now and into the future.

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