

# **We Have Stories: Five generations of Indigenous women in water**

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## **Abstract**

This paper traces the changing relationship between family, water, and fish through the lives of five generations of Indigenous women. We reveal the ways that Indigenous women's connections have transformed and persisted despite generations of omissions and erasures. We juxtapose interviews, academic research, and the settler colonial archive with the lived experiences and histories that exceed it. Weaving together what we know of the lives of Rosemary's great great grandmother Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh (Sophie) and great grandmother Tlahoholt (Emma) with stories of water and fish from their territories, we ask how settler colonial commissions, archives, and urban policies have sought, and failed, to control and erase Indigenous women's relationships to water, land, and family. Crucially, this article draws on stories that have been passed down to Rosemary and knowledge that she has accumulated through her lifetime working as a commercial fisherman. These stories about water and where people were from, why they left, or why they never went back—and how they continue to be connected to each other while being disconnected from place—are at the center of this article. Re-presencing Indigenous women and these connections raises essential questions about Indigenous resurgence in a context of settler colonial control, scarcity, and disappearance, emphasizing the importance of ancestral reconnection to Indigenous futurities.

**Keywords:** *Decolonization, water, settler colonialism, archives, Indigenous women, urbanization*

## Introduction

It's one of those west coast summer days. The sun casts a haze over everything. The tide out near Tsawwassen, British Columbia is low and the mud flats stretch out so far that you can barely see the saltwater. The air is filled with the smell of the ocean when the tide is out. As we drive to the ferry terminal, we pass the soon to open supermall.<sup>1</sup> We cross over the remains of the Tsawwassen Nation's longhouse, buried under asphalt and concrete in 1958, when causeway construction began on the ferry terminal.<sup>2</sup> There are no fishing boats on the water, no one out in the tidal flats, just a long stretch of road leading to ferry terminals and container shipping ports.

We're heading to Galiano Island, British Columbia. Today marks the culmination of three years of working together and a lifetime of research for Rosemary. Rosemary Georgeson is a Sahtu Dene and Coast Salish outreach coordinator in the arts.<sup>3</sup> Earlier in her life she was a commercial fisherman, truck driver, and chef, and sometimes all of these things at the same time. Jessica Hallenbeck is a white (Dutch, Russian, Hungarian) settler filmmaker and PhD candidate in Geography. This is the first time in 120 years that some of Rosemary's relatives will walk in Georgeson Bay, the birthplace of their ancestral grandmother Annie and great grandmother Tlahoholt (Emma). This article is about reconnecting Rosemary and her family with their Indigenous grandmothers. It is about how family intersects with water, fish, and territory,<sup>4</sup> revealing the ways that Indigenous women's relationships have transformed and persisted, despite generations of erasure.<sup>5</sup>

Jessica has lived as an uninvited guest on traditional, ancestral, and unceded *məθkwəyəm*, *Skw̓wú7mesh*, and *səlilwətaʔl* territories for the past decade. She traces the paternal side of her family back to the early Dutch colonization of Haudenosaunee territory in what is now Albany, New York. As part of learning about herself as a white settler on stolen land, Jessica participated in the Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign, organized by the Onondaga Nation and the friends

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1 Griffin, K. (2014). "Construction begins on two new Tsawwassen malls" (2014, January 24) *Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved August 18, 2016.

<http://www.vancouversun.com/business/Construction+begins+Tsawwassen+malls/9428089/story.htm>

2 Tsawwassen First Nation Retrieved December 09, 2016 from <http://tsawwassenfirstnation.com/general-info/tfn-history-and-timeline/>.

3 Rosemary works with Indigenous youth and does the necessary community outreach to support artistic works, like the show 'Missing,' directed by Marie Clements.

4 When we refer to family in the article we are referring to the descendants of Rosemary's great great grandmother Sophie. Yet, we also want to underscore that Rosemary also identifies family in a broader sense—their family on the water. As Audra Simpson describes in *Mohawk Interruptus*, family or place works to situate people in "the social, historical, or cartographic universe of the community other than as a friend or guest" (2014, 38).

5 Our research emerges from a working relationship and friendship that began in 2009 when we met in Williams Lake, British Columbia. Rosemary was working on urban ink's 'The Squaw Hall Project' and Jessica was working on a planning process with the City of Williams Lake. Jessica was invited by urban ink to help edit 'The Squaw Hall Project: A Community Remembers.' After the project ended we continued to work together, this time through the creation of a film based on 'Women in Fish Hours of Water,' a play Rosemary co-wrote with Marie Clements. Rosemary wanted to create a film that expanded on 'Women and Fish' to share the largely untold story about Indigenous women's connections to water.

of the Onondaga Nation.<sup>6</sup> The teachings from the campaign have stayed with her and this article is informed by this acknowledgment and ownership of her family's settler colonial story. Jessica is grateful to Rosemary, her family, and the many Coast Salish friends, knowledge keepers, and Elders who continue to teach her about Coast Salish lands and waters.

We weave together what we know of the lives of Rosemary's great great grandmother Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh (Sophie) and great grandmother Tlahoholt (Emma) with stories of water and fish from their territories. In a sense our research might be thought of as genealogical; connecting people and places over time.<sup>7</sup> We trace the changing relationship between family, water, and fish, asking how settler colonial commissions and urban policy worked to control access to water and how this impacted five generations of Rosemary's family. Moving from Rosemary's family to what was happening to fish and water enables us to see "the connections between widely disparate events and practices" (Raibmon, 2008, p. 59). This approach is critical, as there is a need for work that "attends to the local, particular, and often violent . . . micro-conditions which underpin, produce, and reinforce settler spaces (Edmonds, 2010, p. 2). Yet it is not our desire to fetishize or totalize settler colonial power. We adopt a genealogical approach in order to show how connections to water, fish, and family persist in the face of ongoing occupation. Re-centering Indigenous women and their connections raises essential questions about Indigenous resurgence in a context of control, scarcity and disappearance, emphasizing the importance of ancestral reconnection to Indigenous futurities.

We draw on several archives, including the British Columbia Archives, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh archives, and Rosemary's personal archive.<sup>8</sup> We also include conversations and interviews conducted with Rosemary's relatives, descendants of Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh (Sophie) and Tlahoholt (Emma), and Rosemary's 'family on the water.'<sup>9</sup> Crucially, this article draws on knowledge that has been passed down to Rosemary and that she has accumulated throughout her lifetime. These stories about where people were from, why they left, or why they never went back—and how they continue to be connected to each other while being disconnected from place—are at the center of this article. To reflect the dialogical nature of our research and in response to critical issues of knowledge ownership, each section of this paper begins with Rosemary's voice followed by Jessica's voice.<sup>10</sup>

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6 For more on this campaign, please see Jessica Hallenbeck. (2015). Returning to the water to enact a treaty relationship: the two row wampum renewal campaign. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 5(3), 350-362.

7 For more on this approach see Paige Raibmon. (2008). Unmaking native space: A genealogy of Indian policy, settler practice, and the microtechniques of dispossession. In Alexandra Harmon and John Borrows (eds.), *The power of promises: Rethinking Indian treaties in the pacific northwest* (pp. 56-86). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

8 We would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Jean Barman who generously provided us with her own archive of R's family, as well as copies of McKenna McBride commission testimonies.

9 Part of our work has been putting the pieces back together across the generations. This has happened through ongoing attachments and connections that people have held with one another. Wondering who people are and holding onto stories that you hear helps to find your relatives. All of this exists outside of the colonial archive, and it is when people come together in place to share stories and share what they know that the past and the present come into focus.

10 We'd like to thank Dr. Dory Nason for her suggestion of structuring the paper in this way.

Identifying our voices as separate is an important aspect of recognizing the different knowledges and theories that we bring to our work together. Leanne Simpson (2014) talks about knowledge held within generations of families as theory that is “woven within kinetics, spiritual presence, and emotion. It is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal” (p. 151). We are both theorizing in this article, and attribution ensures that what Rosemary has chosen to share does not become subsumed within a western research paradigm, described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) as “unrelenting” and “profoundly exploitative in nature” (p. 92). In “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang (2012) discuss solidarity as an “uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict” (p. 3). Our separate voices, sometimes in dialogue, often divergent, reveal the contingent nature of solidarity and knowledge production. Importantly, we have grappled with many questions related to consent and knowledge ownership through our ongoing friendship, a relational accountability framework that also grounds what we share in this article (Hunt and Holmes, 2015; de Leeuw, Cameron, & Greenwood, 2012).

We begin by sharing stories from the life of Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh (Sophie) and Tlahoholt (Emma). By beginning in this way with Rosemary’s ancestors, we are following a protocol that gives voice back to them. During their lifetime their voices were being torn away from them and they were silenced. In sharing some of what they lived through we come to understand their disappearance in relation to what was happening to fish and water in their traditional territories. We also share their stories in order to emphasize reconnection as a resurgent, decolonial practice. We hope that our work helps shift the conversation between Indigenous feminism and Indigenous nationalism, opening up possibilities for collective political actions that are driven by reconnecting with family (Suzack, Huhndorf, & Perreault, 2010, p. 3).

## **Ancestors, water, and archives**

### *Rosemary*

We don't really know who my great great grandmother Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh (Sophie) is or where she is from. We know that the government gave her the name ‘Sophie,’ telling her like so many Indigenous people that she needed to have a ‘proper’ name. On her 1881 marriage certificate she is listed as “Sophy” (Indian Woman).<sup>11</sup> But we found her real name hidden in the archives, and that is how we know it is Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh.<sup>12</sup> We know much more about her husband Scotty Georgeson, who made his way to Salish territory from the Shetland Islands in 1858.<sup>13</sup> He left Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh pregnant in Snaw-Naw-As (Nanoose Bay) in 1862 when he went to pre-empt land and operate the Beaver Pass stopping house in Lightning Creek, Dakelh territory (Laing, 1929, p. 332). Scotty came back a few years later, fishing with Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh and operating the Sandheads Light Ship at the mouth of the Fraser River (Georgeson, 1961, p. 8). Later they were transferred to the new lighthouse on Mayne Island at the entrance to Active Pass in the Gulf

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11 Marriage certificate 81-09-002556, British Columbia, Division of Vital Statistics, GR 2962.

12 Death certificate 10104, British Columbia, Division of Vital Statistics, GR 2951.

13 Statistics Canada (1901). Retrieved from <https://www.bac.lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1901/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=59883>.

Islands (Graham, 1986). They lived and worked at the lighthouse on Mayne Island and built a house on land Scotty pre-empted in Georgeson Bay on Galiano Island, at the opposite end of Active Pass.<sup>14</sup> Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh raised her own kids, and most of her grandkids, and even a few of her great grandchildren at the lighthouse (R. Georgeson, personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016). They did not get married until right after their son John married Elizabeth Cornish in 1881.<sup>15</sup> We know from a newspaper article that when Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh and Scotty's youngest son Henry died whaling off the coast of Japan, Scotty was consoled in his grief by his many friends and family, but there is no mention of Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh's grief, or even any mention of Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh as Henry's mother.<sup>16</sup> She did not even exist in the death of her son, though she was present at the time, raising all her grandchildren.



*Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh (Sophie) and Scotty Georgeson*

Stories about Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh have been passed down in my family. I know that people would visit Scotty at the big house in Georgeson Bay or at the lighthouse. The people visiting often would not know that Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh was in the room because she always wore black and had a chair behind the old wood stove where she would sit.<sup>17</sup> When the old Scotchman wanted his coffee refilled he would tap his cup on the table and she would come out and fill his coffee cup. Nobody

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14 Pre-emption records GR-0766.12.44 File 8 Dec 1873, British Columbia Archives.

15 Marriage certificate 81-09-002556, British Columbia, Division of Vital Statistics, GR 2962.

16 "Harry Georgeson was a younger son of Mr. Henry Georgeson of the lighthouse and a great favorite with everybody. Mr. Georgeson is one of the oldest and most respected settlers in the district and has brought up his family with every credit to himself." From Plumper Pass (1894, June 9) *Daily Colonist*, p. 2. Retrieved from <http://archive.org/stream/dailycolonist18940609uvic/18940609#page/n1/mode/1up/search/georgeson>.

17 When I was still young I heard this story from some of my relatives who knew Sophie.

remembers her speaking, just her movement of coming out from behind the stove. When she wanted to get away she used to get in her canoe and go out fishing near the lighthouse or in Active Pass. And when she caught a fish that was too big for her to pull on board she would tie her fishing line around her waist and let the fish tow her around until it tired itself out (Georgeson, 1965). Then she would row back onto the beach and pull the fish in. My uncle Archie talks about Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh being out on the water longlining with her kids; that was just a normal thing to do (Georgeson, 1965). In every photo she has a dress on. I hope she did not have to do it in those big heavy dresses; I hope that they let her wear pants. To me that is dangerous as hell. One hook gets caught in that clothing and you go overboard; that clothing would drown you from the weight and would wrap itself around you like ropes.

### *Jessica*

In *The Faraway Nearby*, Rebecca Solnit (2013) writes that “stories are compasses and architecture; we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them. . . Which means that a place is a story, and stories are geography” (p. 3). The written archival story of Scotty Georgeson is a triumphant story about Scotty, the gold prospector and lighthouse keeper who pre-empted land on Galiano Island (Bruyneel, 2015). This story of Scotty, told and retold by a plethora of local historians (British Columbia Historical Association, 1983; Graham, 1986; MacFarlane, 2016) is an important one, buttressing the legitimacy of settlement, producing and reproducing settler memory, in this case of a bygone era of lighthouses and early days on Galiano Island. It is a story of settler geography, naturalizing settlement, and in so doing erases the ongoing violence of colonization and the story of Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh.

We know that Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh played a crucial role in Scotty’s survival and his claim to land. She helped Scotty fish for their subsistence and they worked together to render down oil (Georgeson, 1965). She was there when Scotty pre-empted land in Georgeson Bay, and she helped to clear the land (Georgeson, 1965). As Archie Georgeson (1965) says of his grandmother, “When they first went there or even before they went there, she was always in with him, you know—with the fish and that, helping him do this and do everything.” Scotty published soundings and navigational charts for a huge area of the Salish Sea, and we suspect that he did not likely come to this knowledge without Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh’s help. The story that has been told about Scotty erases Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh’s claims and knowledge of territory, water, and place. Crucially, it is not just that Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh’s story is erased by those who have written about Scotty’s life, but it is also that her own life is so rarely glimpsed in the colonial archive. The same is true of all the generations of Indigenous women in Rosemary’s family. This impossibility of locating Rosemary’s Indigenous grandmothers in the settler colonial archive is scripted by a logic of elimination that works through omission to conceal the centrality of Indigenous women to family, land, labor, and water.<sup>18</sup> Putting the stories of Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh and Tlahoholt back into place and into relationship brings these strategic occlusions into sharper focus, identifying “what fades out of focus, what has been disappeared from the final product. The violences that are less marked, less identifiable” (Stoler, 2013, p. 5). This is why we have worked together to find out where Tlahoholt was from and where her children went. The disappearance of Rosemary’s grandmothers from the settler colonial archive is part of a larger disappearance of Indigenous women from the narrative of settler colonialism, salmon, and urbanization. Tracing the shifting and occluded

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18 . For more on this, please see Ashley Glassburn Falzetti. (2014). Archival absence: The burden of history. *Settler Colonial Studies* 5(2), 128-144.

relationship between Indigenous women, water, and fish through five generations of Rosemary's family enables us to reveal how these relationships persist (Stoler, 2016, p. 5).

While personal and intimate lives are always imbricated within structural contexts, much of the academic work on law, water, fish, and settler colonialism in British Columbia has largely neglected to center the experiences, lives, and knowledges of Indigenous women (Harris, 2004; Harris, 2001; Lutz, 2008).<sup>19</sup> Alongside Zoe Todd (2016a) and Alificja Muszynski (1996), this article acts as a corrective, holding up, in the words of Dory Nason “the boundless love that Indigenous women have for their families, their lands, their nations, and themselves as Indigenous people” (Nason, D. 2013, blog post).<sup>20</sup> Re-centering Indigenous women enables us to understand their importance to the settlement and growth of Vancouver and their strategic resistance to dispossession in their continuing connections to water, fish, and family.

## **The Transformation of land, water, fish, and family**

### *Rosemary*

My great grandmother Tlahoholt had children with William Georgeson, Scotty and Sophie's son. For a long time all I knew about her was that her name was Emma or Emily. Meeting my Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh relatives I learned that Emma's real name was Tlahoholt.<sup>21</sup> They said that she probably got her English name from the church, which would not recognize her ancestral name, and wrote 'Emma' down on a baptismal or marriage certificate.<sup>22</sup>

Tlahoholt left Georgeson Bay with her kids right after her husband William died. She was able to leave Galiano with her kids because of the water. She got in a canoe and paddled out from Active Pass to Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh territory. Tlahoholt would have had no problem getting out of the pass and paddling, navigating through rough waters.<sup>23</sup> She knew the water so well that it was just like breathing.

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19 For work that centers Indigenous women in relation to fish, water, and law outside of British Columbia, please see Zoe Todd. (2016). From fish lives to fish law: Learning to see Indigenous legal orders in Canada. Yates-Doerr, E., and C. Labuski (eds). *Somatosphere: Ethnographic Case Series*. <http://somatosphere.net/2016/02/from-fish-lives-to-fish-law-learning-to-see-indigenous-legal-orders-in-canada.html> retrieved June 2018. Also Zoe Todd. (2016). 'This is the Life': Women's Role in Food Provisioning in Paulatuuq, Northwest Territories. Kermaol, N and I. Altamirano-Jimenez (eds). Pp. 160-185 in *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place*. Athabasca: Athabasca University Press. doi: 10.15215/aupress/9781771990417.01.

20 February 12. "We hold our hands up on Indigenous women's love and resistance" [Decolonization Blog Post]. Retrieved from <https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2013/02/12/we-hold-our-hands-up-on-indigenous-womens-love-and-resistance/>.

21 Thanks to Norman Guerrero for sharing this information from the Squamish genealogy archive with us.

22 Norman Guerrero states 'the churches would not recognize the ancestral name but rather making the ancestral name a surname. And that was reversed when they had descendants, as the parents new "Christian name" would be given to their children as a surname. That's how a lot of our peoples have first names as surnames now "George, Thomas, Jacob, Joseph, etc.'" (Personal communication, March 2017).

23 I talked about this with my cousin Fay Blaney who agreed that paddling those waters would have been just like breathing for Emma.

Tlahoholt paddled across with her kids and went back to her home. But somehow Scotty the lighthouse keeper found her and kidnapped her youngest child, taking him back to Galiano Island. That was my grandfather. Because we were separated from Tlahoholt, we never knew where she was from, where she went, or what happened to her children. Because my grandfather was kidnapped, my family did not have a direct connection with Emma and her kids. But we were always connected to each other through water and fish. We all knew how to clean it, catch it, preserve it, and celebrate it, and it was the center of all of our lives.

Like Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh and Tlahoholt I grew up on fishing boats. My first memories are of being on the water on my dad's fish packer in the Georgeson Bay. I mostly worked with my dad, trolling from Galiano Island to Prince Rupert and back. Surrounded by the smell of saltwater, coffee, fish, and diesel, I loved to fish in the early morning. The sun was always the brightest then, and there would be a gentle roll in the boat. My brothers and I knew our life was part of the water that was around us, in our bay, around our island. It was our highway. We survived off it. It was our food source, our economy, our social structure. The water was a place where we connected with family and friends. It all came from the water around us.



*Rosemary at age 16 with halibut*

We used to all be fishermen. Some of us were trollers, some were gillnetters or seiners. I remember when I was a kid on Galiano there were times when pretty much every Seine boat on this coast was tied up between Whalers Bay, Miners Bay, and Sturdies Bay and they were still going through Active Pass all night long. As trollers, we had poles on the bow of our boat and on the mid-section that dropped down so that we could run our main lines, our deep lines, and our middle lines. Dad always ran 36-foot poles on his boat, which meant we were 81 feet from the tip of one pole to the other. And in those 81 feet we would have six lines at different levels. We would have our deep line, our main line that was a little shallower, and then our outside lines that we would fly what they used to call pigs on, which were Styrofoam blocks locked on our steel trolling



line. If we were fishing sockeye we would have 12 hooks minimum on each line, so we were flying 96 hooks. During spring fishing, we fished near the bottom so we would have a plug and above our bottom line we would usually fly a couple of spoons or flashers. Coho are surface fish, so we would shorten up and fly 36 hooks. We always knew that there was an art to trolling.

When I first went into the cannery they put me on the bottom table. It was a really hard conveyor belt to work. There were no white women down there, they were all up on top because it was easier. We worked seven days a week. We would do 12 hour shifts six days a week and on the seventh day we would work eight hours. You would spend that whole time bent over the belt. After three weeks you had trouble straightening your back. I worked on the bottom belt for two years. This was at Norpac fisheries down at Commissioner street in Vancouver. There were more white women at that cannery. They did not have to travel with the fish. In 150 years everything we had for thousands of years prior to that has been taken and destroyed. What had always been normal has been taken from us. There is a resentment in me around that. They have got our food, which is another form of genocide. There will always be fish for the sports fishermen, the tourists, and the foreign investors.

*Jessica*

Fishing was a way of life and salmon was central to Indigenous economic and political orders, both along the coast of British Columbia and the interior of British Columbia (Claxton, 2015; Shreve, 2009; Harris, 2008; Fiske & Patrick, 2001). We know from speaking with her descendants that most of Tlahoholt's children quickly left Sk̓w̓x̓w̓7mesh territory to live in Church House, at the mouth of Butes Inlet, Xwémalhk̓wu (Homalco) territory.<sup>24</sup> From talking with Rosemary's Homalco relatives, we know that Tlahoholt's daughter Emily would catch hundreds of salmon and travel in a small boat to Vancouver to sell fish by the Burrard Street bridge. There, Emily would meet with her sister Annie who had stayed in Sk̓w̓x̓w̓7mesh territory. Water facilitated Tlahoholt's escape from Galiano Island, where she paddled all night with her children back to her territory. Water also enabled the return of Emily to Sk̓w̓x̓w̓7mesh territory to sell salmon and to visit her sister Annie. The story that emerges from the lives of five generations of Indigenous women in Rosemary's family is of the critical importance of salmon and water for food, family, safety, and sovereignty. Yet, this is also a story about rapidly changing relationships brought about by the commodification of salmon in Tlahoholt's territory. These shifts and what they meant in terms of survival reveal some of the reasons why Tlahoholt and most of her children did not stay in their traditional territory, and why Tlahoholt continues to be missing. Within Sar-Augh-Ta-Naog and Tlahoholt's lifetimes, the canning industry sprang up, largely alienating Indigenous women from the traditional food fishery. This initial moment of accumulation would reverberate through subsequent generations in the form of racialized cannery work, increased control over fishing licenses, loss of reserve land for urban development, and finally the near total unravelling of the connection to fish and water.

Prior to colonization approximately 220 kilograms of salmon were consumed annually per person living along the Northwest Coast (Newell, 1993, p. 15). Further inland, the Lake Babine Nation averaged over one thousand salmon per year per family (Newell, 1993, p. 15). Fish, and in particular salmon, was central to the economies and ways of life of Indigenous peoples and separating Indigenous peoples from their ways of subsisting and from their traditional economies

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24 Spellings of Homalco names from Paul, E. Raibmon, P. Johnson, H. (2014). *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder*. UBC Press.

was central to the commercialization of fish (Butler & Menzies, 2007; Harris, 2001; Newell, 1993; Wright, 2008). In turn, the commercialization of salmon fueled the industrialization and urbanization of British Columbia (Muszynski, 1986; Newell, 1993).

Once a market was found in England, salmon canning quickly became the biggest industry in British Columbia and was essential to the early industrialization of British Columbia and the urbanization of the Metro Vancouver area. In 1870, a year after Tlahoholt was born, the first salmon cannery opened in Annieville (now North Delta). By 1883, there were 14,000 Indigenous people (likely all women) working in the canneries (Newell, 1993, p. 50). When Tlahoholt and most of her family left Skwxwú7mesh territory for Church House a million cases of sockeye salmon (the equivalent of 22 million kilograms of sockeye) were coming out of the Fraser River every year (Muszynski, 1996; Newell, 1993).

For the first thirty years of the salmon canning industry, Indigenous peoples made up almost the entire workforce. Salmon canning was seasonal and entire villages would travel to work near the canneries. Indigenous men would typically borrow money from the cannery to rent boats and nets and were paid based on their catch. Indigenous women were not allowed to lease boats or nets or receive any monetary advances. As a result, a large number of Indigenous women worked in the canneries (Muszynski, 1996; Newell, 1993). In the early days Indigenous women were particularly valued for their labor in the canneries, and it is this labor that became the backbone of the industry (Muszynski, 1996; Newell, 1993).<sup>25</sup>

Due to the seasonal nature of salmon canning, labor shortages were common and there was much fear that this was holding back the development of the industry (Muszynski, 1996, p. 117). There was a need for laborers and as Butler and Menzies (2007) point out, Indigenous wage labor was created by inhibiting subsistence activities, undermining Indigenous economies, establishing male headed single family households, and segregating male and female labor (p. 13). Sarah Hunt (2016) details how the binary gender system laid out in the Indian Act created a male hierarchy while simultaneously erasing Indigenous roles that were non-gender binary. The imposition of colonial gender roles via the Indian Act went hand in hand with the dispossession of land. As Lawrence (2004) argues, “removing women, then, was the key to privatizing the land base . . . a central aspect of the colonization process in Canada would be to break the power of Indigenous women within their Nations” (p. 47).

In the context of what is now British Columbia, disrupting Indigenous women’s connections with their Nations and families was necessary for the reconfiguration of Indigenous women’s labour. This shift facilitated the dispossession of water and fish while simultaneously ‘freeing up’ Indigenous women and children’s labor for cannery work. Cannery work was codified as women’s work. This codification served the dual purpose of transforming Indigenous women into wage laborers while also removing Indigenous women from their traditional roles within their communities by establishing a white supremacist gender based hierarchy. At the heart of this was control of the fishery, as fish and marine food sources were central to the subsistence of many Nations in British Columbia, and colonial control over fish and their commodification displaced (but did not eliminate) Indigenous economies and governance systems.

Indigenous men were given little choice but to fish for the canneries that had begun to line the Fraser River and the coast of British Columbia. Meanwhile, Indigenous women were prohibited from owning any property, including fishing nets, boats, and oyster leases, and were

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25 I want to note that the disciplining of Indigenous bodies and relationships into bounded categories was and is manifest through the very gendered categories imposed by colonization that in turn extend and expand into prescribed spaces, roles, and work.

often forced to live off of their reserves due to the gender provisions in the Indian Act.<sup>26</sup> Indigenous women were increasingly drawn into cannery work as both a survival strategy and as a way of maintaining a connection to fish. As Chief Jimmy Harry (1913) put it, “the older men fish, and the younger people they do practically the same as those in [Mission] No. 1 reserve, they go to the canneries and fish for the market” (Royal Commission on Indian Affairs, Affairs, New Westminster Agency, Seymour Creek No. 2 Indian Reserve, Saturday, June 21st, 1913. p. 51)

The temporary migration of families and communities to the coast to work for the canneries opened up territory for settlers. As Harris, C (2004) argues, “The social means of production and of subsistence were being converted into capital. Capital was benefiting doubly, acquiring access to land freed by small reserves and to cheap labour detached from land” (p. 172). Because entire villages would relocate to the coast to be close to the canneries, when the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs traveled throughout the Province, they would use the low population numbers and lack of fishers to justify the expropriation of land.<sup>27</sup> Massive migration to the canneries provided an impetus for services and commercial activity to grow around the cannery sites. Segregated worker ‘housing’ was needed, along with other infrastructure. Indian agents were initially responsible for policing the boundaries of residences and later moved inside the canneries, amid fears that unsanitary bodies would contaminate the canned salmon (Mawani, 2009). In this way, towns began to take shape around cannery sites, facilitating the expansion of a racialized and gendered urban colonial order organized around ensuring that white settlers were the central beneficiaries of the booming salmon canning industry.

The capture of salmon as a commodity for export led to significant changes in Indigenous women’s relationship to salmon. Indigenous women were removed from the water and cannery work coded as women’s work. The booming canning industry put massive development pressure on Tlahoholt’s territory. This came in the form of settler recreation, drinking water infrastructure, industrial production, and bridge construction. Tlahoholt was from Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh territory. She was born in 1866 and lived in eslhá7an, along the banks of Cch’ích’elxwi7kw stakw (Seymour River).<sup>28</sup> A few years after her birth, Cch’ích’elxwi7kw stakw (Seymour River) was surveyed and a reservation created that included part of the river.

Photographs taken during Tlahoholt’s lifetime show white people hiking, boating, fishing, and picnicking on the river and its banks.<sup>29</sup> The photographs underscore that early dispossession of the land that Tlahoholt was from was enacted in the leisure time of white settlers.<sup>30</sup> By the late

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26 Section 3 (c) from the 1876 Indian Act reads “Provided that any Indian woman marrying any other than an Indian or a non-treaty Indian shall cease to be an Indian in any respect within the meaning of this Act, except that she shall be entitled to share equally with the members of the band to which she formerly belonged, in the annual or semi-annual distribution of their annuities, interest moneys and rents; but this income may be commuted to her at any time at ten years’ purchase with the consent of the band.”

27 The commission only traveled in the summer to hear testimony, a time when many people were at the canneries.

28 As Tlahoholt was Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh we are using Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh spellings and place names. We thank Norman Guerrero from Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh for providing the spellings of the place names.

29 These photographs include “Boating Seymour Creek” by H.T. Devine. City of Vancouver archives, part of the Major Matthews collection, reference code AM54-S4-2; “An Unidentified Man Fishing in Seymour Creek,” City of Vancouver archive, reference code CVA 371-2868; “Out P13 Prominent Citizens of Vancouver at a Picnic at Seymour Creek,” City of Vancouver archives, Major Matthews Collection, reference code AM54-S4-: Out P13.

30 Elsewhere, white wealthy families would enjoy summer holidays camping out on the beaches. This would quickly end in Vancouver due to the contamination of water by industry and raw sewage.

1880s, and still during Tlahoholt's lifetime, white settlers with boats and picnic baskets had been replaced by those pre-empting land along the Seymour river in order to first acquire and subsequently consolidate timber licenses (O'Donnell, 1998). At this time the reservation boundaries were changed to exclude the river.<sup>31</sup> The Seymour River was subsequently chosen as a supplemental source for Vancouver's drinking water and an intake was built in 1907 (O'Donnell, 1998). Drinking water intakes and dams would continue to be constructed until 1925 (O'Donnell, 1998). Settler recreational practices and industrial development on land and on the water simultaneously appropriated land and shrank "Native space from its hereditary territorial boundaries to the confines of Indian reserves" (Raibmon, 2008, p. 58).



*"Boating Seymour Creek" shows A.W. Ross, Dr. McGuigan, Mr. Jackson, W.E. Gravely, and others at the Phibbs and Thompsons Milk Ranch House, North Vancouver, B.C., May 24, 1886<sup>32</sup>*

Settlement in the form of recreation, pre-emption, and urbanization was significantly impacting Indigenous access to water along the Seymour River and the water itself was being contaminated with cedar shingles and logs from two working mills and a shingle company (Kahrer, 1989). In 1892, the same year that Tlahoholt's son George William Georgeson was born, Keith Road was constructed through the Seymour reserve. In the following three decades, a license would be issued to J.A. Sinclair to dredge 42 acres of the foreshore for his sand and gravel company and the Vancouver Harbour commission would obtain foreshore access to the Capilano, Seymour, Mission, and Burrard reserves (O'Donnell, 1998). The Sk̓w̓w̓ú7mesh Nation were intentionally kept uninformed about most of the changes happening to their reservation and were poorly compensated, if at all. Tlahoholt's son and Rosemary's grandfather and his siblings would live to see the construction of the Second Narrows Bridge, an act that paved over more of the remaining land of their mother's reserve and eventually the 45 1/2 hectare Seymour creek reserve would be left uninhabited. Currently, there are six water licenses on the Seymour River, all issued to the

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31 National Archives, Canada, RG 10, Volume 1022, Microfilm T-1459.

32 Glass transparency (lantern slide), hand col., 5 x 8 cm <http://searcharchives.vancouver.ca:80/index.php/boating-seymour-creek-2>: CVA 371-2868.

Greater Vancouver Regional District, diverting 80,457,315,000 gallons of water a year from the river to supply drinking water to Vancouver (Jolly, 1997).

The major rivers of Tlahoholt's territory were initially transformed by white sports fisherman and outdoor enthusiasts, used to carry logs to the Burrard Inlet, then torn apart as pipes were put in to capture drinking water for the City of Vancouver. The river was irreversibly changed by the development of the Second Narrows Bridge. In many ways this reconfiguration of territory began out on the water. The capture of salmon and its subsequent commercialization led to the growth of Vancouver, putting increased pressure on the Seymour River which became choked with logging booms, drinking water infrastructure, and highway development. Within Tlahoholt's lifetime, the relationship between water, fish, land, and family had been irreconcilably altered.

### **Licensing salmon, losing the water**

#### *Rosemary*

Diane and I around Christmas time, to make extra money, we would go and dig sacks of clams. One year we dug 700 pounds down in Montague Bay, in the rock piles there. We were sore. I had my daughter Jeannine in May and during her first, second, and third Christmas's we were out digging clams to make extra money. The first low tide would start around eight o'clock at night, and each night it was an hour later and we would dig for about ten days, until we were going out at two and three in the morning for tides, and we both had little kids at home. It was cold, hard work. It was beautiful out there at night on the beach. Diane's husband Kenny would come help us the last couple of nights because he could see that we were getting tired. And this just makes me sick. We would sell them to Jimmy Pattison's nephew Brian. And he made our last load sit, said it was only good for bait. That's when I punched him. "When you got them they were fresh. We had them in sacks, there was nothing wrong with them, but you let them sit on the deck of the boat when you went out and partied for two days. Now you're back and telling me they're only good for long-lining bait." I was tired, I'd had a couple of drinks, and I came right up from the ground and lifted him off his feet. That's my little Jimmy Pattison story.

It always has been a very tiered system built to ensure that we are eliminated from it. I remember that extreme heavy presence of the fisheries officers. It was always in our faces. There was one fisheries officer that was so bad, people were threatening violence. He was a mean, violent, vile man. He was verbally abusive to us, he thought we were all liars and thieves, he was a very racist guy. Officers like him would hide in bays and come shooting out at full speed. If you drifted at all they were boarding your boats, everyone was getting ticketed. Any time I went to the Surrey courthouse their roster was full of names of my Indigenous family and friends. Everyone was there for fishing violations. There was a huge backlog in the courts. Your boat would get chained to the dock and you had to pay heavy fines to get it out. My brother Gordon was coming over every few weeks for appearances in court. Everyone was getting pulled off the water and into court.

We switched to gillnetting and that was the beginning of the end. Put a drum on our boat, take off the gurdies and the spools and not do what we knew how to do. Quantity became more important than quality. That is the whole other layer of separation that we have. We still know how to do these things, how to move and run. The licenses got increasingly consolidated and all of a sudden what my brother Johnnie knew how to do came under scrutiny and the rules got changed.

Costs went up and he needed thousand-dollar LED lights. All of us who were raised working on the water, it costs us to stay out there. We had to go back to school to get upgrading so that we could be out there. Thousands and thousands of dollars to have a working boat on the water. I remember one year my brother Gordon did not even get an opening to fish but he still had to pay for his license and boat lease. As time goes on there are more recreational boats on the water, but they are out there with bare minimum. No one can afford to own a boat to keep fishing even when we are allowed to fish. We do not live on the water because we cannot go out on it. There is no movement on the water anymore. No women out there. They succeeded in taking that away. Food and life and movement is gone. They were doing that then to my great grandmother Tlahoholt, and one hundred and twenty years later, they have succeeded. The separation is what we have inherited. 150 years ago, this was to be a place for tourists. They now come from all over the world to fish in our waters and our access to it is limited and cut off. And they are still polluting our creeks and our rivers, farmed fish, whatever they can do to disconnect us from the water we used to call home.

### Jessica

The consolidation of fishing licenses coupled with the heavy enforcement of fishing regulations significantly impacted Rosemary and her families connection to water and community. Despite the salmon canning industry significantly diminishing fish stocks and the increasing development pressure on Indigenous lands, Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh and Tlahoholt were still able to maintain some access to fish.<sup>33</sup> As Rosemary shared, Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh would go out in her canoe and catch fish. Tlahoholt's daughter would catch fish and sell them by the Burrard Street Bridge. Rosemary's father was a fish buyer, and Rosemary inherited the life of being on the water. Yet within Rosemary's lifetime, fish would continue to decline, and increased policing of fishing regulations had an impact on Rosemary's relationship to water, fish, and community.

By the early 1960s, canneries were beginning to close and fishing licenses had become concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy entrepreneurs. As Woodrow Morrison puts it in *We Have Stories*, "people like Jimmy Pattison and a couple of other guys owned almost forty percent of all the licenses, so they didn't even have to fish. They just leased their boats, leased their license, and raked in the profits" (in Georgeson, R. (Director). (2011). *We Have Stories: Women in Fish* [Motion Picture]). Concentration of licenses went hand in hand with limits to the food fishery and the gradual elimination of smaller canneries along the coast (Ecotrust, 'Catch 22', 2004). Fish stocks declined dramatically, and the decline was blamed on Indigenous fishers.<sup>34</sup> The state on both sides of the border came down hard on Indigenous peoples who continued to fish. In the lower mainland, Indigenous communities and fish camps were routinely raided, leading to George Manuel, then President of the Union of British Columbian Indian Chiefs, declaring in 1978 that

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33 For more on the relationship between Indigenous commercial fishers, incorporation, and lifeways that exist outside of capitalism, see Hebert, K. (2015). Enduring Capitalism: Instability, Precariousness, and Cycles of Change in an Alaskan Salmon Fishery. *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 117, No. 1. 32-46.

34 For more discussion on the conflict between conservation and Indigenous environmental management systems and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, see Nadasdy, P. (2004). *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon*. UBC Press. Cruikshank, J. (2005). *Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*. UBC. Schneider, L. (2013). "There's Something in the Water": Salmon Runs and Settler Colonialism on the Columbia River." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37:2, pp. 149-164.

the department of fisheries was the “number one enemy of the Indians” (Newell, 1993, p. 113). This state-led violence culminated in fish-ins and fish wars, with Indigenous women playing an important role in resistance on many levels (Shreve, 2009). In *The Last Indian War*, Janet McCloud (1967) describes the important role that Indigenous women played in organizing the fish-ins “against the powerful politically-minded sportsmen’s groups, who are pushing the State officials to get the Indians off the rivers” (p. 28). The escalation had been 100 years in the making.

Importantly, much of the impetus for increased regulation of the fishery was done in the name of conservation. This, argues Cindi Katz, signals a massive shift in capital’s investment in nature, controlling and privatizing access to it as a coded “investment in the future” (Katz, 48). At the same time that canneries were closing and Indigenous communities were engaged in direct action to defend their rights to water and to fish, the City of Vancouver was transforming itself into a haven for luxury condominiums, complete with recreational opportunities connected with water. From the mid nineteen fifties to the late nineteen sixties, the City of Vancouver eliminated the last traces of X̱wáý̱xway from Stanley Park (Barman, 2007), demolished Hogan’s Alley, and reinvented Señákw (False Creek) from ‘Industrial wasteland’ into a symbol for what Vancouver was to become. In this process, fish-ins, fish wars, Indigenous rights to fish, and Indigenous women’s connections to water were held safely apart from Vancouver’s own plans for its waterfront. Today, the supermall that we pass on our way to the ferry terminal is newly constructed thanks to the Tsawwassen Nations’ final agreement signed in two thousand and eight. The agreement reveals the degree to which water and fish have been separated from land in treaty negotiations. The agreement permits the Nation to catch one percent of the entire Canadian allowable stock for the Fraser River. If stocks are ‘good’, this amounts to less than five thousand salmon a year, or roughly fifteen thousand kilograms of Sockeye. Based on pre-colonization numbers this is barely enough fish to feed sixty people for a year. Since the Tsawwassen Agreement, fish have been taken out entirely from the treaty process. It seems clear that fisheries will never again be part of treaty negotiations or agreements.

This separation between land, water, and fish is strategic and lies at the heart of the settler colonial project. The changed relationship to water and fish through five generations of Rosemary’s family signals the importance of intimate histories that interweave policies that targeted Indigenous peoples with policies that reinforced settler power, and settler practices that worked to unravel Indigenous places (Raibmon, 2008, p. 68). The capture of salmon and water altered family relationships. It changed the way people connected to each other, and it rendered Indigenous women dependent on men for survival and support. As Fay Blaney, Rosemary’s cousin puts it, “They worked so hard at the decimation of our families and our communities and in many ways they were very successful and a lot of us are going around with this shame like we don't really belong within our families. And this is in defiance of all of that, refusing to be separated. An act of resistance . . . reclaiming our grandmothers” (Faye Blaney, personal interview).

### **Family, reconnection, resurgence**

*Rosemary*

I am more connected now to Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh and Tlahoholt. The white side of my family, Scotty’s side, does not exist like it used to. Being descended from these women has settled in my body in a different way. It is different now knowing and saying who I am and where I am from. There was always a part that was at odds within me over it. It felt like history had been denied. I can say with confidence who I am and what I am, and that has come through this work that we

have been doing. We were forcibly disconnected from knowing who we were. Knowing has been a decolonizing process. We have given them a voice and brought them back. They are not lost in history anymore. When we know the stories and the place we know how to take care of it. Without the water we still come together, we are just learning different ways to do it.

*Jessica*

It's one of those west coast summer days. The sun casts a haze over everything. The wind has picked up in Georgeson Bay, and the water in Active Pass is changing, beginning to boil. Three of Rosemary's relatives are standing on a rocky ledge, looking out over the water. For the first time in 120 years, Tlahoholt's descendants are together in the Bay. Rosemary's stories about her relatives, passed onto her from people she knew from a lifetime of being out on the water led us to this work and to finding them. We have shared some of the journey that our research has taken us on, and in this last part of our article, we want to talk about how this work is resurgent, constructing Indigenous futures through reconnecting with relatives and ancestors.

Zoe Todd (2016), writing about her work with Indigenous women and fish in Pangnirtung, states that "traditional subsistence pursuits provide more than food: they afford opportunities to share knowledge with children and to revisit places of personal and family significance" (p. 217). The work of finding Rosemary's relatives has brought people together to share food and stories of ancestors and places that continue to be central in people's lives. It has brought family together to physically visit the places where their ancestors are from. It has been a privilege to be able to work with Rosemary to find her ancestors and meet their descendants, and to sit with Rosemary and her family and witness this incredible work unfold. I am deeply grateful.

## **Conclusion**

*Rosemary*

It was the smell, the smell that took them back. It did not have the scent of a sterilized institution. It was the smell of something wild, free and of a life well lived. They drank in that smell and held it. It was what they were made of. This is what they wanted their last breath to smell of. It proved that they were here, and their time was spent in the way that they wanted. Memories, family, loves, children, and teachings that took them back to the most constant in their lives. The place where they were most comfortable and content. It is in the same smell that has always been there since time began, a smell that is fading deeper into our memories as each generation moves on.

It was all because of water and fish. History, time, colonization did everything in their power to separate us. But the water and the fishing, the movement on the water, of following fish, kept us together. Family, water and fish. We do not have the water anymore, we do not have the fish. But now after 100 years we have the family again. They passed on knowledge and it is still being passed on and being used. Because we are writing this, that passed-on, inherited knowledge is still in use today, going out in the world in a different form. I have learned a lot from Sar-Augh-Ta-Naogh and Tlahoholt.

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