***Maada’oonidiwag gete-dibaaJimowen* (“sharing old stories”): reflections on a place-based reparatory research partnership in Nbisiing Anishinaabeg Territory**

Katie Hemsworth · Kirsten Greer · Megan Paulin · Kiethen Sutherland · Joan McLeod Shabogesic

Accepted: 26 April 2021 / Published online: 4 May 2021
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2021

Abstract In this paper, we reflect on an emerging community-based partnership rooted in place-based reparative research. Braiding knowledges (Atalay, 2012) from Nbisiing Anishinaabeg communities, northern Ontario universities, and multi-scalar museums, the partnership focuses on repatriation, reparative environmental histories, and action-based research in the context of settler colonialism and climate change. We reflect on ongoing projects that attempt to put Anishinaabe *gikendaasowin* (knowledge) into action alongside historical geographical research. We discuss how the partnership resonates with community geography values of relationship, collaboration, equity, and reciprocity, and urge non-Indigenous geographers to acknowledge how Indigenous knowledges and approaches have shaped these ideas long before geography became a discipline. We contend that historical geographers have a deeper role to play in community geography scholarship, citing examples of two projects related to (1) repatriation of Anishinaabeg cultural heritage and (2) storymapping through historical Geographic Information Systems (HGIS). However, we argue, geographers must continue to acknowledge their own positionality in a

discipline that was built through settler colonial violence and knowledge production. Finally, we reflect on the role of academic institutions in facilitating First Nation-university-museum partnerships through access to funding, space, and databases, while addressing the challenges of relying on institutional support for reparatory and decolonizing projects.

Keywords Indigenous knowledge · Anishinaabe · Settler colonialism · Repatriation · Community geography · Museums and archives · Geographic information systems

Introduction

On April 8, 2019, steps down the hill from where the American Association of Geographers’ Annual Meeting was taking place in Washington, DC, four scholars stood on the banks of Rock Creek. The group of geographers and historians, two First Nation (Megan and Kiethen) and two white-settler (Kirsten and Katie) scholars who work in relationship with one another through a community-based research partnership, took part in a sunrise ceremony on the ancestral lands of the Nacotchtank (Anacostan) in preparation for what would be an intense, emotional day of research and repatriation consultation at the Smithsonian Institution. Megan, a graduate student researcher and Mi’kmaw woman who grew up in the Nipissing

K. Hemsworth (✉) · K. Greer · M. Paulin · K. Sutherland
Nipissing University, North Bay, Canada
e-mail: katiehe@nipissingu.ca

J. McLeod Shabogesic
Nipissing First Nation, Nipissing, Canada

First Nation community, led the group in song, drumming, and a tobacco smudge. Each person in the group shared who they were, why they were there, and communicated their intentions for this day and our research to ancestors (see McGregor & Plain, 2014; Wilson & Restoule, 2010). The sunrise ceremony was an important ceremonial act of honouring the land we stood on as well as the (Anishinaabe) land, people, and *gikendaasowin* (knowledge) at the heart of the partnership—an act that was intentionally part of, rather than supplementary to, our repatriation research.

On a colonial Cartesian map, Rock Creek appears distant from the shores of Lake Nipissing (Nbisiing) on traditional Anishinaabeg¹ territory at the heart of our place-based research partnership. However, other types of cartographies—including counter-maps and counter-topographies (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017; Peluso, 1995; Tucker & Rose-Redwood, 2015)—reveal nuanced connections between places. This helps explain why the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and Rock Creek are important settings in a story about Nbisiing. Water, in particular, is a connective feature of the partnership, from its significance as essential to life, to its socio-economic role as a transportation route, to its ability to both sustain and harm communities in the midst of climate crises and ongoing settler colonial violence. Water washes up, over, and away many of the histories that connect the past, present, and future places we seek to understand through our partnership.

In this paper, we outline an emerging federally-funded research partnership between First Nation communities, northern Ontario universities, and museums focused on repatriation, reparative environmental histories, and action-based research in the context of settler colonialism and climate change. We reflect on ongoing projects that attempt to put Anishinaabe values of “working in relationship” (see Kovach,

2009; McGregor et al., 2018; Peltier & IMN-Ontario Team, 2018) and *mino-bimaadiziwin* (“living in a good way”; see Rheault, 1999) into action through research. The collaborative work we discuss speaks to Sonya Atalay’s (2012) holistic concept of “braided knowledges” that weave together the knowledges of different academic and non-academic approaches in ways that complement one another and encourage interconnectedness of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, ecological, and physical well-being (see also Kimmerer, 2013). Drawing on Indigenous approaches, collaborators engage archival and museum research with community mapping to show how stories about repatriation and place overlap, representing new and old, near and far, rooted in the land and routed across the digital.

Case studies of past and ongoing community geography² programs illuminate geographical scholars’ unique position to contribute in ways that range from securing resources, funding, and other privileges that break down access barriers, to providing legal and/or financial assistance and mobilizing consultation and action, all while operating in a role of facilitation rather than ownership (Boll-Bosse & Hankins, 2018; Robinson, 2010; Robinson et al., 2017; Shannon & Walker, 2018). Community geography has taken up participatory GIS as a core methodological and epistemological practice; the “Sharing Old Stories” partnership draws on the political potential of community-focused, participatory action mapping (Boll-Bosse & Hankins, 2018) as a contribution of community geography. Counter-mapping, or re-mapping, activates a form of what Anishinaabe geographer Deondre Smiles calls “indigenous counter-conduct”—a way to “adapt and resist the quotidian, pervasive nature of settler structures” (2018: 148).³ Drawing on the above scholars’

¹ We use the terms *Anishinaabe* (singular; also often written as Anishinabe, Nishnaabe, and Nishnawbe) and *Anishinaabeg* (plural) in this paper to refer to a group of Indigenous people who make up one of the First Nations in what is now Canada but whose traditional territory also extends into what is now the United States. *Anishinaabemowin* refers to the Anishinaabe language. *Anishinaabewin* (or *Nishnaabewin*) refers to “all things Nishnaabe” (Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 2014: 8, from Doug Williams; see also Geniusz, 2009). Where possible, we refer to the specific First Nations to acknowledge distinct communities.

² As a (self-identified) Lakota reviewer pointed out, “community” is often a term used to distinguish Indigenous from non-Indigenous spaces, not necessarily academic and non-academic research relationships. We are grateful to the reviewer for this important distinction, worthy of further consideration when trying to encapsulate what “community geography” encompasses in different places and contexts.

³ For an excellent example of Indigenous counter-mapping, see Zuni farmer and museum director Jim Enote’s collaborative mapping project with Zuni artists which recentres listening as a key part of the mapping process: <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/counter-mapping/>.

work and extending it to focus more specifically on historical geography, our projects explore how GIS can become an important community space where mapping, storytelling, spatial analysis, and archival research can come together and employed as activism.

Yet, we argue, recognizing geographers' potential offerings in community-focused inquiry must occur alongside critical reflection on the discipline's (and broader academic institution's) role in settler colonialism and related imperial projects, many of which led to the dispossession of Indigenous people, land, and heritage in the first place (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017). In *Hungry Listening*, xwélmexw (Stó:lō) writer Dylan Robinson addresses the process of disciplinary redress in musicology and related institutional spaces, including "the reckoning with how certain areas of research are delegitimized within that discipline" (2020: 12). Geographers must also acknowledge, and confront, their "colonial inheritances" (Robinson, 2020) of the discipline's well-documented history of perpetuating land dispossession through colonial power relations (Coombes et al., 2012; Coulthard, 2007; de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018). These relations include, but are not limited to, cartographic knowledge production (Sparke, 1998), in which colonizers used maps to claim unceded land, draw boundaries, and marginalize or erase communities, as well as the colonization of botanical Anishinaabe-gikendaasowin (Geniusz, 2009).

Building from foundational work by critical, feminist, postcolonial, Black, and Indigenous geographers (see, for example, Kobayashi, 1994; McKittrick, 2006; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Louis et al., 2012; Hunt, 2020)⁴ we consider how community geography can be a terrain through which to expose and dismantle colonial, racist, and sexist power relations. Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing have informed (and, we think, resonates with) the values of community geography values, including relationship, ceremony, reciprocity, storytelling, and place-based research (see de Leeuw et al., 2012; Smith, 1999; Sutherland, 2020; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Wilson, 2008). In what follows, we present three examples of "reparatory praxis"—using repair (Hall, 2018) and reparation as the connective tissue joining theory and

practice—beginning with acknowledging the partnership itself *as* evolving praxis, then sharing two examples of preliminary practice focused on repatriation and collaborative counter-mapping. We end by responding to questions posed by editors of this special issue about institutional support and challenges, while gesturing toward future community geographies of repair. First, however, we provide further background literature on the values and motivations for the partnership, with particular focus on the Canadian colonial context.

Calls to action: decolonizing geographies

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recorded and named the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples whose children were forced to attend residential schools, where they were stripped of their cultural identities and languages, the legacy of which is still evident today (Stout & Kipling, 2003; Truth & Reconciliation Canada, 2015). The TRC, which culminated in a report released in 2015, was intended to mobilize reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in what became Canada. A primary output of the document was an extensive list of ninety-four "Calls to Action" for the Canadian government as well as universities, museums and archives, courts, and health institutions. Universities across Canada have taken steps to respond to the Calls to Action by re-assessing inclusion, recruitment, and support of Indigenous students and faculty (through scholarships, bursaries, and the creation of positions specifically for Indigenous hires, for example). Likewise, many scholars have re-evaluated their own knowledge translation practices, advocating for greater inclusivity of Indigenous thinkers (and scholars of color, more generally) in their syllabi as well as their citation practices, which, within geography, have systematically excluded Indigenous writers.

As Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) write, however, these approaches only skim the surface of decolonizing institutions of knowledge production, be they universities, museums, or archives. Attempting to move beyond acts of lip service or tokenism, our partnership—in its design, governance, objectives, and action—is guided by decolonial Indigenization (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), which presents a necessarily

⁴ See Shannon et al. (2020) for a more extensive overview of how community geography's roots are embedded in feminist and Black geographies.

disruptive opportunity to dismantle colonial knowledges and re-centre Indigenous worldviews, histories and knowledges, while focusing on treaty rights and principles that have largely been neglected by academic and state institutions. Gaudry and Lorenz remind scholars: “Indigenous faculty and allies tend to already be ahead of administration and invested in new transformative approaches to a decolonial academy” (2018: 226). Although responsibility should not rest on the shoulders of Indigenous scholars and broader communities, non-Indigenous academics have much to learn from the Indigenous-led research and action already in process.

When practiced with care, we think community geography frameworks (Shannon et al., 2020) can help respond to the above calls to action. Such frameworks resonate with Indigenous land-based pedagogy (Simpson, 2014) through collaborative, land-based learning in which knowledges are shared with the intention of benefitting community members and lands for many generations to come. In considering this special issue’s attention to praxis, Anishinaabe teachings of “place-thought” (Watts, 2013) seem to align with geographers’ attention to *place* as something that is both embodied as well as theorized. Embodying the places and acknowledging the land that ties knowledge communities together is therefore crucial (Atalay, 2012; Simpson, 2014).

Our use of the term *reparatory praxis* builds on Catherine Hall’s (2018) work on “doing reparative history” within the context of slavery and its legacies, specifically in the UK and in her own discipline (history). Reparation, as a people-focused process of repair (which Hall and others distinguish from institutional reparations), identifies the people and systems responsible for inequitable, broken relationships (including but not limited to relationships with people and with land) and then mobilizes forms of repair from within. While prioritizing Anishinaabeg research values of working with others “in a good way,” researchers must also acknowledge that there has and continues to be some form of wrongdoing. Reparatory work involves hearing and acknowledging past harms and inequities as a) truth and b) injustice; yet it must go further than acknowledgement and apology. Drawing from McKittrick’s (2006) notion that terrains of domination are always “alterable,” reparatory praxis also involves action-oriented projects that can begin to dismantle dominant power relations while opening

space for new stories and stronger relationships, which we discuss below.

Reparatory praxis I: place-based partnership

The “*Maada’oonidiwag gete-dibaajimowen*—Sharing Old Stories”⁵ partnership is a formal, place-based collaboration that brings together Anishinaabe knowledges, histories, and worldviews with academic scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and environmental sciences. Our projects are centred around decolonizing and Indigenizing environmental histories and geographical knowledges through *reparation* (of treaty relationships and epistemic violence reproduced through geographical scholarship), *repatriation* (of Indigenous cultural and ancestral heritage), and *revitalization* (of Indigenous places, languages, and cultures). Major grant partners include Nipissing University, Dokis First Nation, Nipissing First Nation, Laurentian University, Ingenium Canada, North Bay Museum, and Chicago Field Museum.

Although built off existing relationships and networks, the partnership officially began in 2019 with the announcement of federal funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for a 2-year Partnership Development Grant (PDG) aimed at initiating community-based partnerships with the intention of applying for a much larger Partnership Grant in the future. The PDG funds collaborative and exploratory work; for us, this involves devising new research governance structures that disrupt traditional or colonial research relationships. The grant also contributes stipends for students, artists, and other knowledge keepers to play a more active role in community-focused research. Finally, the PDG funds partial salary releases for community members who require dedicated time off from their other employment to participate.

Our partnership is comprised of First Nation community leaders and knowledge keepers, academic scholars, curators, archivists, artists, GIS technicians, and archaeologists. We come from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, from the sciences and

⁵ Miigwech to Randy Restoule, a Dokis First Nation member and collaborator on the partnership, for this name and translation.

social sciences and humanities, from local and international institutions, from younger and older generations. It is difficult to try to pinpoint when and where this partnership began; however, we try to offer a brief overview of our intersections here, acknowledging that introducing how we came to this place (the partnership and Nibisiing Anishinaabeg territory) is an important Indigenous sharing practice. Some members have longstanding ancestral kinship with each other and the land. Others came to the territory through academic work. In 2013, Dokis and Nipissing First Nation members as well as Nipissing University scholars (including Kirsten Greer), shared knowledges at the Lake Nipissing Research Conference, overseen and organized by the then-Chief of Nipissing First Nation.⁶ In the years following, members of Dokis First Nation and Nipissing University formed a partnership to explore research trajectories related to ancestral heritage repatriation, environmental histories of the timber trade, and colonial land encroachment.⁷ Several collaborators in the current iteration of the partnership met as participants in an international symposium titled “Challenging Canada 150: Settler Colonialism and the Critical Environmental Sciences”⁸ in 2017, which re-ignited past connections and sparked new ideas for collaboration.

While many of us have only recently met in person within the past few years of writing this, it seems more accurate to say that we were already connected in a relationship through the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 given that we all live, work, or are enriched by the lands around Lake Nipissing, and are thus bound together by the responsibilities it carries to this day. Some have only recently begun to understand what that relationship means and the responsibilities it holds as treaty people, while others are part of communities

that have been fighting for the acknowledgment and honouring of treaty rights for nearly two centuries. Bearing these layered histories and positionalities in mind, we are still slowly imagining what we want this partnership to be, do, and produce, and must remain open to changes depending on community input which, given the multi-community and inter-disciplinary characteristics of the partnership, are sometimes divergent.

As Shannon et al. (2020) write, community geographers share an appreciation for, and dedicated engagement to, *place*, and indeed have much to learn about place from those whose knowledges exist outside academic spheres. We use the term “place-based” to acknowledge the centrality of place in Anishinaabe knowledges and techniques (Murdock, 2019) given that the partnership is rooted in deep, historical-cultural connections with traditional Nibisiing Anishinaabeg lands. Our collaborative work is embedded in the lands, traditions, and obligations of the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 (Fig. 1).

This treaty marked a formal relationship between the Nibisiing Anishinaabeg and the (British) Crown, intended to outline how the territory would be shared and protected.⁹ Although global in reach, and increasingly practiced across digital spheres due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our place-based approach focuses on the re-centring of Anishinaabe knowledges about the Lake Nipissing region. We therefore understand the reassembling and repatriation of museum and archival collections of ancestral heritage (taken from the lands of the Nibisiing Anishinaabeg and Robinson Huron Treaty territory and held in US-based museums) to be part of a broader place-based reparative process.

The Chicago Field Museum, for example, holds ancestral remains taken from Nibisiing Anishinaabeg lands. Members from Dokis First Nation, whose community primarily lives on Okikendawt Island (“Island of Buckets or Pails”) on the French River, are leading the repatriation process on behalf, and with the endorsement of, Anishinaabeg First Nations in the

⁶ That year also marked the beginning of a MES/MESc field camp hosted at Dokis First Nation, focusing on treaty histories and traditional ecological knowledges.

⁷ Examples of outputs from this work include a blog post on Franz Boas and Anishinaabe territory by Greer and Restoule (2017) and a presentation by collaborators from Dokis First Nation and Nipissing University (Greer et al., 2018) at the International Geographical Union in Quebec City.

⁸ In October 2017, taking a critical approach to Canada’s 150th anniversary celebrations as a nation-state, Nipissing University hosted a five-day international symposium to revisit how to examine past environments within the context of settler colonialism and Indigenous knowledges.

⁹ The Canadian Constitution recognizes treaties as part of supreme law of the land. However, these treaties have been willfully neglected and broken in various ways through imbalances in colonial power relations (Truth & Reconciliation Commission, 2015). For more information on the Robinson Huron Treaty’s historical geographies and its related litigation, visit <http://rht1850.ca/>. See also Switzer (2013) and Switzer and Crawford (2015).

Fig. 1 Excerpt of the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850, which included signatories from Dokis First Nation (Chief Dokis) and Nipissing First Nation (Chief Shabogesic, written as

“Shabokishik,” whose descendant, Joan, is a co-author). Source: Library and Archives Canada

region. The remains were collected by Franz Boas to put on display at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago and have since been kept at the Field Museum. Although Boas is best known as “the father of American anthropology” (see Holloway, 1997), he also trained as a geographer in Germany prior to immigrating to the United States. His contributions to the Columbian Exposition must therefore be understood through a geographical lens to effectively contextualize his ethnological fieldwork, ideas, and legacies in both geography and physical anthropology

(Koelsch, 2004; Trindell, 1969), which have lasting effects for communities like Dokis First Nation.

In addition to ancestral remains of humans, natural history institutions like Carnegie Museum of Natural History hold the natural heritage of the Lake Nipissing region in the form of plant specimens, bird skins, fish and insect collections, which shaped western scientific knowledge systems. These sentient, ancestral, and sacred beings (Geniusz, 2009) were taken from the land, removed from their relations, and became virtually inaccessible to the communities from which

they came.¹⁰ Notably, this partnership is an assemblage of people who are lived embodiments of the above legacies in multiple ways—from the collaborators who are descendants of the people whose remains sit in Chicago Field Museum or who are briefly acknowledged as “Indian guides” in fieldbooks or whose medicinal plants were taken as specimens to natural history museums, to the collaborators who come from colonizer communities and who, as settler academics, might be called disciplinary “descendants” of the geographers and anthropologists—including Boas—who took those remains in the name of exploration, science, and discovery.

If settler-geographers have played a role in these histories of dispossession, then settler-geographers should take greater responsibility for studying and repairing them (TallBear, 2019). Critical historical geographers, we contend, are particularly well-positioned to contribute to repatriation initiatives through archival theory and methodology, and through critical historical reflection on their own positionality within a colonial discipline (see, for example, Lane, 2011; Cameron, 2014, 2015; Farish et al., 2017; Greer, 2020). As Laura J. Cameron (2014: 9) writes, “historical geography itself might make contributions to an expanded definition for ‘participatory’ geography and offer energy and ideas to help rejuvenate current practice, confronting the new challenges and injustices that continue to multiply.” As we discuss in the next section, one approach to repairing the silences, erasures, and broken relationships caused by colonial and nation-building practices, we suggest, includes facilitating the repatriation of items from colonial institutions.

Reparatory praxis II: repatriation consultation between first nations, universities, museums and archives

Returning to the story that opened this paper, part of our reparatory praxis involved preliminary repatriation consultation at the Smithsonian Institution’s warehouse facilities of the National Museum of the American Indian in Maryland. Guided by collaborators from Dokis First Nation and Nipissing First Nation who could not attend,¹¹ main goals of the visit to the warehouse facilities of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) were to: (1) pay respect to collaborators’ Anishinaabeg and Illilo ancestral heritage at NMAI, (2) better understand the repatriation process at the NMAI and begin consultation with NMAI staff about the possibility of borrowing or receiving objects; (3) photograph in detail the objects requested by First Nation partners and ask about documentation of previous visits from Nipissing First Nation members in the early 2000s; and (4) inquire about the collections of human remains that were suspected to be held somewhere within the Smithsonian Institution’s network.

After the more formal consultation meeting, it came time to view the items from the communities (including from Nibisiing/Nipissing Anishinaabeg territory as well as Illilo/Cree in the James Bay region; see Figs. 2, 3). Respecting the underlying partnership value of ceremony, Megan led the group in an indoor smudge, an offering, and the tying of tobacco pouches for First Nation community partners to find when they returned for future repatriation meetings, potentially without academic partners. At Megan’s suggestion, when the objects were wheeled on carts into the viewing room, we greeted them—baskets, tools, toys, and clothing—as sentient ancestors in Anishinaabemowin (their language):

“Aaniin!”

“Boozhoo!”

Of course, consultation is just one part of a much more complex process with layered spatialities and

¹⁰ The Smithsonian Institution, for example, is over 700 miles from Dokis and Nipissing First Nation. Its museums are not located on Anishinaabe territory and requires travel across international borders, in addition to other barriers that prevent community members from engaging with their own relations and histories. One such barrier is that Canada does not have a repatriation act similar to the United States’ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) which requires federal agencies and museums to repatriate human remains and sacred objects back to Indigenous communities upon request (NAGPRA, 1990; Pub.L. 101–601; 25 U.S.C. 3001–3013; 104 Stat. 3048–3058).

¹¹ We acknowledge the privilege of scholars in the partnership who were able to visit the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian by timing the visit with our trip to the AAG conference in Washington, D.C. We consulted with community partners before visiting the Smithsonian and used Skype and FaceTime to bring physically absent collaborators into the room during the viewing of ancestral objects.

Fig. 2 Kirsten Greer (middle) and Megan Paulin (right) photograph Anishinaabeg cultural heritage objects at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) warehouse facility after performing ceremony. A main

goal of the partnership is to document and facilitate the repatriation of items that were collected from Anishinaabeg communities over two centuries and held in colonial museums and archives

temporalities. The repatriation process takes place in many settings and requires community consultation, trust-building and slow research to build a case, while also carrying a sense of urgency for some. In our case, it involved thinking critically about what repatriation means to the Smithsonian staff, federal legislators, our partnership as a group, and individual collaborators, which is often varied.¹² It also requires careful community deliberation around what to do with the heritage items if or when they return home, including whether to put the materials in a local museum or repository, bury them, or put the items back into everyday use.

These are complicated discussions, and part of working in relationship is for some members (such as settler-geographers, Katie and Kirsten) to recognize

when to step back from decisions that are not theirs to make. Geographers can, however, still make important contributions to community-oriented work through their archival research skills, attention to layered historical context, and access to history-focused institutions and databases. The skills and resources required for these contributions can and should be shared with communities. Historical geographers worked with First Nation partners to identify where different items might be located and where objects might have been taken from. Tracing collectors’ movements has been a useful historical–geographical method for trying to understand what else might have been displaced and when (often through triangulation), and to locate references (in acknowledgement sections or field notes) to First Nations individuals who were important figures in the production of knowledge.

Despite their centrality to the partnership’s place-based research and storytelling, smaller-scale local or regional museums (North Bay Museum and Dokis Museum, for example) typically do not have the same access to resources of a national or larger urban

¹² Even within one institution, the interpretations and processes of repatriation can vary widely. At the Smithsonian, for example, the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of Natural History both have Repatriation Offices but “each museum manages a separate and distinct repatriation program” (see <https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/repatriation>).

Fig. 3 Kiethen Sutherland, Illilo graduate researcher, translates a document that originated from his traditional territory. This translation work helps fulfill one of the partnership objectives, which is to Indigenize sacred objects (human remains, plants, animals, and texts) through language revitalization

institution. Community geography projects, which tend to receive funding and resources from both governmental and non-governmental sources, can be vital for helping establish shared repositories, training opportunities, and databases. Although colonial museums and archives are increasingly amenable to working with First Nation communities on repatriation initiatives, many require proof that the objects will be going to facilities that meet industry standards as part of their adjudication criteria. Therefore, some of the benefits of multi-institutional, cross-community, and inter-disciplinary partnerships are that they can help fund community repositories and expand both the reach and accessibility of local and Indigenous-led museums and the histories they hold.¹³ In the next section, we discuss how the partnership is using

¹³ Funds from the partnership development grant, for example, were used to purchase a secure, online collections database that has since been made available to First Nation and museum partners in the Nipissing region.

geographical tools like GIS and community storymapping to create new spaces of repatriation, reclamation, and revitalization.

Reparatory praxis III: storymapping heritage through historical geographic information systems (HGIS)

An important aspect of the political and creative practice of counter-mapping—and one that is possible through increasingly interactive, multi-media components of GIS storymapping tools—is the reclaiming of voices, languages, and sounds of Anishinaabe territory. Following Louis et al.’s (2012: 77) interventions on Indigenous cartographies, we challenge the tendency to “view Western cartography as the standard by which all other cartographies are measured.” Hunt and Stevenson (2017) point out that not all Indigenous mapping is practiced in direct opposition to settler colonial mapping; furthermore, colonizers were neither the only, nor the first, people to make maps.¹⁴ The partnership’s recentring of Anishinaabe interpretations of land does not necessarily ignore historical colonial maps in the process; rather, we reimagine them as pedagogical tools and as texts in need of repair or reorientation.

In addition to creating new spaces for repatriation, our partnership involves reparative storytelling through—and as—mapping. Following the themes of the previous section, an important theme we explore through GIS storymapping¹⁵ is cultural-environmental heritage and the spatialities of repatriation. One partnership goal when using GIS, and more specifically, historical-GIS (HGIS; see Gregory & Healey, 2007), is to use geographical tools to document, interpret, and actively shape future repatriation processes. GIS databases¹⁶ serve as repositories for digital representations of the material artifacts used in our research, including photographs and attribute files with locations, dates, and collectors’ names. Although

¹⁴ Although aural/oral representations of land are central to Indigenous knowledge systems, mapping land visually has long been part of Nibisiing people’s practices, ranging from petro-glyph etchings to birchbark maps.

¹⁵ Our collaborators use ESRI Story Maps.

¹⁶ These databases are password-protected and housed over a secure server.

physical repatriation of the objects is a primary focus, this form of digital, online documentation is also essential for enabling access to communities in distant places, or visual access to objects that cannot be returned.¹⁷ Instead of sharing the items as lists, we find geovisualization more useful for showing spatial and temporal relationships, including the movements of items and community linkages.

Our preliminary work has already begun to reveal both the extensive geographies of settler-colonialism and the counter-cartographies of resistance, survival, and decolonization (see also Hunt & Stevenson, 2017). Working with Nipissing University geographers and remote sensing specialists, Dokis First Nation community members (including a GIS specialist) are using historical-GIS (HGIS) to build evidence that colonial land encroachment occurred outside treaty agreements. Overlaying historical and contemporary maps along with audiovisual materials, aerial photo mosaic processing (using aerial photos from 1928/29 and 1935), art, and treaty texts tell a much more nuanced story about land-based relationships and the geographies of settler colonialism (Greer et al., 2018). Partnership collaborators work with geographical mapping techniques while also disrupting colonial cartography through multi-layered and multi-media representations of land. HGIS therefore presents opportunities to *geovisualize* collaborators' stories and research trajectories, and to *use* and *preserve* existing archival materials, all while creating new, digital, and more accessible archives. Furthermore, in the absence of community labs, universities can become crucial interim spaces for housing (and securing) equipment which is often both expensive and extensive.¹⁸

¹⁷ In one emerging project, a nêhiyaw (Cree), Métis, and European-descent visual artist is working with a Nipissing University MEd graduate student to create a collaborative beadwork initiative that re-uses remote sensing and aerial photography to develop a beadwork pattern of Lake Nipissing that will be distributed to participating communities and will later be the centrepiece of a travelling exhibit.

¹⁸ The Repatriation and Digitization (RAD) Lab at Nipissing University, developed in collaboration with and accessible to community collaborators, provides enough space to accommodate the hardware (scanners, computers, desks) and software (archival and GIS databases, word processing programs) required to document, interpret, translate, and share stories with a wider public.

As the partnership projects grow to facilitate more expansive archival databases, communities will be able to decide what types of stories they wish to share at a global scale, and which might be accessed solely by the community. For the non-Indigenous geographers in the group, a main goal is to facilitate—rather than drive—storymapping projects, potentially reaching a point where they are no longer involved. Yet, as a community-based participatory action process (Boll-Bosse & Hankins, 2018), there is also ample opportunity for settler geographers to share their own attempts to grapple with settler colonial histories and to use digital storymapping to push beyond the “geographies of ignorance” about Indigenous-settler relations in Canada or elsewhere (Castleden et al., 2013).

Institutional support and community-oriented research governance

In our experience, the importance of support from an academic institution that has already shown commitment to Indigenization and decolonization is paramount. Although Nipissing University (like all Canadian universities on both ceded and unceded land) still has a long way to go to repair the violence of settler colonialism in academic knowledge production, it is easier to begin this type of work when there are already support networks and resources in place at the institutions involved.¹⁹ Despite being part of a university that has prioritized “indigenizing the academy,” (MacDonald, 2016) community-focused research governance structures remain under-developed (De Leeuw et al., 2013). A major aim of the partnership, therefore, is to explore options for research protocol that amplifies “working in relationship” and sharing knowledge “in a good way.” Such protocol recognizes the value of universities, museums, and archives in the partnership but does not place them at the top of a hierarchy above community groups. Rather, it facilitates research-storytelling through whatever assemblage of academic and non-academic collaborators the community members find most appropriate.

¹⁹ Nipissing University's president from 2013 to 2020, Mike DeGagné (Animakee Wa Zhing 37 First Nation) was the first self-identified Indigenous president of a Canadian university.

Collaborators from Nipissing First Nation and Nipissing University, for example, continue to develop a research agreement titled *NBisiing Mii yi edebwetmaang* (“this is what we believe”)²⁰ that outlines partners, relationship, expectations, and obligations across the many communities and institutions involved. This has also involved working with Nibisiing Anishinaabeg and other Indigenous artists who guide the partnership in a return to *wampum* as a material representation of research governance, including treaty-based relationships and responsibilities (see Gehl, 2012; Bohaker et al., 2014). This research protocol, not unlike the original treaties and wampum belts that documented land-based relationships, comes with a unique set of geographies and histories—stretching across lands, communities, and time periods (Fig. 4).

A major challenge of reparation lies, unsurprisingly, with institutional bureaucracy. Even when partnerships (or university administration) strive to decolonize and Indigenize their research, the colonial frameworks of academic knowledge production are still starkly present in the language of funding and research ethics applications intended to shape research design.²¹ Although universities, museums, and colonial archives are taking greater care to reflect on (and change) their language, these institutions still implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, marginalize First Nations and other Indigenous communities by labeling them “vulnerable populations” in ethics applications or by assuming that Indigenous people are always “being studied” (as opposed to doing or leading research). As discussed earlier, decolonizing academic scholarship requires much more than changing the demographics of (in our case, geography) departments (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kobayashi, 1994, 2014; Mahtani, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

²⁰ Miigwech to the late Muriel Sawyer, former Nibisiing Deputy-Chief and Councillor, for the Nishnaabemwin translation.

²¹ Some Indigenous thinkers have also recently questioned whether decolonization in universities can ever be possible. Twitter is an important site for discussion on this topic; see, for example, Métis author Chelsea Vowel’s thread, in which she states “Indigenous-led education cannot be legible to colonial educational forms, but legibility is the standard we are forced into to be ‘trusted’” (Jan. 27, 2020; retrieved from <https://twitter.com/apihtawikosisan/status/1221799949664260097>; see also de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018).

Fig. 4 Wampum belts shared by Maurice Switzer (Bnesi), citizen of the Mississaugas of Alderville First Nation, at *Challenging Canada 150: Settler Colonialism and the Critical Environmental Sciences*, held at Nipissing University, where many relationships in this partnership began to grow

One outcome of this partnership is that it will create awareness about decolonizing funding language. It also provides resources for working across communities and institutions to produce new structures of research governance, accessible archival databases that can serve as repositories of historical and geographical materials, and memoranda of understanding that can be shared and adapted for place-specific research. If funding from governmental and academic institutions is necessary for this type of community-scholarly work to flourish, then, at the very least, the colonial language of funding applications, and the written outputs of funded research, must change to avoid reproducing the very problems “reconciliation-focused funding” is supposed to help mitigate.

Reflections: community geographies of repair

The power of settler colonialism is that it has normalized colonial knowledge systems (and, in doing so, dispossessed Indigenous knowledges) to such an extent that it is not always immediately clear that repair is needed, or the type of reparation required.²² Sometimes, the reparatory process can only become more evident after collectively exposing and dismantling an oppressive system—a task BIPOC scholars and communities have carried on their own for too long. As we have argued, community geography as a field (or indeed as a community) must continue to grapple with its broader disciplinary histories and geographies of settler colonial violence. Yet a focus on community-oriented praxis provides meaningful space through which to counter, reorient, and *repair* geographical knowledges. The partnership itself—its collaborators, rhythms, and forms—as both an entity and an ongoing *process*, is the most meaningful component of community-based research (Castleden et al., 2012).

Although scholarly outputs, like this paper, are important benchmarks in the eyes of granting agencies, Leanne B. Simpson's words are most resonant here (2014: 11): "Meaning then is derived not through content or data, or even theory in a western context, which by nature is decontextualized knowledge, but through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are different and valuable because of that difference." In the case of this partnership, the media used to communicate our projects (e.g., beadwork, Twitter, GIS databases and storymaps) do not simply showcase or translate the knowledges, activities, and outputs of the partnership; rather, they actively *create* and *repair*, helping strengthen relationships and shape—and hopefully decolonize—geographies along the way. As McGregor, Restoule, and Johnston (drawing on Wilson, 2008), write: "The process of doing research changes us, as well as the world around us."

Reparative change is emotional, epistemological, financial, physical, and spiritual work. It requires active listening and imagining in addition to unlearning and undisciplining (Srigley & Varley, 2018).

Reparation involves coming to terms with the very idea that knowledge, in addition and in relation to land, has been colonized; indeed, the violence of identifying certain knowledges as "better" or "superior" continues to have lasting effects on knowledge production. Repatriation, as a form of reparation, also takes immeasurable time, space, and energy. Like so many other practices of reconciliation and reparation, the repatriation process often falls on the shoulders of the people from whom these objects, histories, and lands were taken. Greater access to archival records, museum collections, and map libraries can be very empowering to communities who are often excluded from these institutional realms and who have found ways to use these to create positive change in their communities; however, echoing critical theoretical approaches to archival activism (Evans et al., 2015), these experiences can also have re-traumatizing effects as community members come face-to-face with material reminders of violence, pain, and loss.

There continues to be an impetus for community geographers (especially white-settler scholars and those with the privilege and protection of tenure) to embody the values of their research through action—perhaps now more than ever with climate crises and the injustices that come with it. This action might include placing bodies into challenging and labour-intensive spaces and conversations, not speaking for, but rather learning and standing *with* community partners. In our case, on Anishinaabe territory, doing so means contributing to a process that is our responsibility as treaty people. Future work in integrating reparative approaches and spaces of repatriation into community geography praxis must take these place-based and embodied complexities to heart.

Acknowledgements The authors wish to thank all past and present members of the partnership. Chi-miigwech to Dokis First Nation, including Chief Gerry Duquette, Norm Dokis, Adrienne Dokis, and especially (former project coordinator) Randy Restoule for his invaluable work offering feedback, title translations, geovisualization and land-based teachings. Chi-miigwech to Nipissing First Nation, including Chief Scott McLeod, Jane Commanda, Cameron Welch, and elder John Sawyer for relationship-building. We are grateful to Glenna Beaucage and Katrina Srigley, as well as Cindy Peltier, for showing what it means to work together in a good way. Chi-miigwech to Maurice Switzer for treaty teachings and Wendy Makoons Geniusz for sharing Anishinaabe-gikendaasowin. We thank the Repatriation Consultation team at the Smithsonian NMAI. Thanks to Will Knight at Ingenium for partnership coordination and Megan Jee for GIS contributions. Thank you,

²² See Kobayashi's (1994) work on how the whiteness of geography has created such entrenched exclusions that they have gone unquestioned for too long.

miigwech, and philámayaye to the peer reviewers and special issue editors for insightful feedback. Finally, chi-miigwech and baamaapii to Nipissing First Nation Deputy Chief and language keeper, Muriel Sawyer (ban), who provided Nishinaabemwin title translations for projects and research agreements, and who passed on during the late stages of this piece. The effects of her lifelong commitment to her community will reverberate for generations.

Funding This research was funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through a Partnership Development Grant (890-2018-0098).

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

Human or animal rights The research outlined in this paper did not involve human or animal participants.

References

- Atalay, S. (2012). *Community-based archaeology: Research with, by and for Indigenous and local communities*. University of California Press.
- Bohaker, H., Corbiere, A. O., & Phillips, R. B. (2014). Wampum unites us: digital access, interdisciplinarity and indigenous knowledge—Situating the GRASAC knowledge sharing database. In Silverman R (Ed.), *Museum as process* (pp. 63–84). Routledge.
- Boll-Bosse, A. J., & Hankins, K. B. (2018). “These Maps Talk for Us:” Participatory action mapping as civic engagement practice. *The Professional Geographer*, 70(2), 319–326.
- Cameron, E. (2015). *Far off Metal River: Inuit lands, settler stories, and the making of the contemporary Arctic*. UBC Press.
- Castleden, H., Daley, K., Sloan Morgan, V., & Sylvestre, P. (2013). Settlers unsettled: Using field schools and digital stories to transform geographies of ignorance about Indigenous peoples in Canada. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 37(4), 487–499.
- Castleden, H., Mulrennan, M., & Godlewska, A. (2012). Community-based participatory research involving Indigenous peoples in Canadian geography: Progress? An editorial introduction. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 56(2), 155–159.
- Coombes, B., Johnson, J. T., & Howitt, R. (2012). Indigenous geographies I: Mere resource conflicts? The complexities in Indigenous land and environmental claims. *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(6), 810–821.
- Coulthard, G. S. (2007). Subjects of empire: Indigenous peoples and the ‘politics of recognition’ in Canada. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6(4), 437–460.
- de Leeuw, S., Cameron, E. S., & Greenwood, M. L. (2012). Participatory and community-based research, Indigenous geographies, and the spaces of friendship: A critical engagement. *Canadian Geographer*, 56(2), 180–194.
- de Leeuw, S., Greenwood, M., & Lindsay, N. (2013). Troubling good intentions. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 3(3–4), 381–394.
- de Leeuw, S., & Hunt, S. (2018). Unsettling decolonizing geographies. *Geography Compass*, 12(7), e12376.
- Farish, M., Mackintosh, P. G., & Greer, K. (eds.) (2017). Canada at 150: Critical historical geographies. *Historical Geography*, 45, 100–151.
- Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218–227.
- Gehl, L. (2012). *Anishinaabeg stories: Featuring petroglyphs, petrographs, and wampum belts*. Ningwakwe Learning Press.
- Geniusz, W. M. (2009). *Our knowledge is not primitive: Decolonizing botanical Anishinaabe teachings*. Syracuse University Press.
- Gregory, I. N., & Healey, R. G. (2007). Historical GIS: structuring, mapping and analysing geographies of the past. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31(5), 638–653.
- Greer, K. & Restoule, R. (2017). *Research trajectory #4: The Chicago Fair, Franz Boas, and the Dokis First Nation. Empire, Trees, Climate*. Retrieved from <https://empiretimber.wordpress.com/2017/12/28/research-trajectory-4-the-chicago-world-fair-franz-boas-and-the-dokis-first-nation/>.
- Greer, K., Restoule, R., Kovacs, J., & Prescott, M. (2018). Okikendawt timber: Using historical surveys and aerial photographs to examine colonial encroachment on Dokis First Nation land. *Presentation at International Geographical Union Meeting, Quebec City*.
- Greer, K. (2020). *Red coats and wild birds: How military ornithologists and migrant birds shaped empire*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hall, C. (2018). Doing reparatory history: Bringing ‘race’ and slavery home. *Race & Class*, 60(1), 3–21.
- Holloway, M. (1997). The paradoxical legacy of Franz Boas—Father of American anthropology. *Natural History*, 106(1), 86–89.
- Hunt, D. (2020). Every bus stop a tomb: Decolonial cartographic readings against literary, visual, and virtual colonial claims to space. *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*, 55(3), 199–206.
- Hunt, D., & Stevenson, S. A. (2017). Decolonizing geographies of power: Indigenous digital counter-mapping practices on Turtle Island. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 7(3), 372–392.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.
- Kobayashi, A. (1994). Coloring the field: Gender, ‘race’, and the politics of fieldwork. *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 73–80.
- Kobayashi, A. (2014). The dialectic of race and the discipline of geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104(6), 1101–1115.
- Koelsch, W. A. (2004). Franz Boas, geographer, and the problem of disciplinary identity. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 40(1), 1–22.

- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Lane, K. M. D. (2011). Water, technology, and the courtroom: Negotiating reclamation policy in territorial New Mexico. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 37, 300–311.
- Louis, R. P., Johnson, J. T., & Pramono, A. H. (2012). Introduction: Indigenous cartographies and counter-mapping. *Cartographica*, 47(2), 77–79.
- MacDonald, M. (2016). Indigenizing the academy. *University Affairs / Affaires Universitaires*. Retrieved from <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/indigenizing-the-academy/>.
- Mahtani, M. (2014). Toxic geographies: Absences in critical race thought and practice in social and cultural geography. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 15(4), 359–367.
- McGregor, D., & Plain, S. (2014). Anishinabe research theory and practice: Place based research. In A. Corbiere, M. A. Corbiere, D. McGregor, & C. Migwans (Eds.), *Anishinaabe-win niwin: Four rising winds*. (pp. 93–114). Ojibwe Cultural Foundation.
- McKittrick, K., & Woods, C. A. (Eds.). (2007). *Black geographies and the politics of place*. Between the Lines.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black Women and the cartographies of struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Peltier, Cindy, and IMN-Ontario Team. (2018). *Working in relationship with Indigenous communities*. Robinson-Huron Treaty Territory. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/276901016>.
- Peluso, N. L. (1995). Whose woods are these? Counter-mapping forest territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia. *Antipode*, 27(4), 383–406.
- Rheault, D. (1999). *Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin—The way of a good life: An examination of Anishinaabe philosophy, ethics and traditional knowledge*. (1st ed.). Create-Space.
- Robinson, D. (2020). *Hungry listening: Resonant theory for indigenous sound studies*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Robinson Huron Treaty. (9 September 1850). Parties: Lake Huron Anishinabe Chiefs and Principle Men, Hon. William Benjamin Robinson on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen (British Crown). RG 10, Vol. 1844, IT 148. Library and Archives Canada.
- Robinson, J. A., Block, D., & Rees, A. (2017). Community geography: Addressing barriers in public participation GIS. *Cartographic Journal*, 54(1), 5–13.
- Robinson, J. A. (2010). *Syracuse community geography: Evaluating a new approach to public participation geographic information systems*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Simpson, L. B. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), 1–25.
- Srigley, K., & Varley, A. (2018). Learning to unlearn: Building relationships on Anishinaabeg Territory. In D. McGregor, J.-P. Restoule, & R. Johnston (Eds.), *Indigenous research: Theories, practices, relationships*. Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Smiles, D. (2018). Geoforum “... to the Grave”—Autopsy, settler structures, and indigenous counter-conduct. *Geoforum*, 91, 141–150.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Indigenous methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
- Sparke, M. (1998). A map that roared and an original atlas: Canada, cartography, and the narration of nation. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88(3), 463–495.
- Stout, M. D., & Kipling, G. D. (2003). *Aboriginal people, resilience and the residential school legacy*. Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Switzer, M. H., & Crawford, K. (2015). *We are all... treaty people*. Union of Ontario Indians.
- Sutherland, K. (2020). *Family or bureaucratic traplines? The registered trapline system as a tool of colonialism in Kashechewan*. MES thesis, Nipissing University, North Bay.
- TallBear, K. 2019. Twitter posting, August 9. <https://twitter.com/kimtallbear/status/1159933919942234112>.
- Trindell, R. T. (1969). Franz Boas and American geography. *The Professional Geographer*, 21(5), 328–332.
- Truth and Reconciliation Canada. (2015). Calls to action. In *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the truth and reconciliation commission of Canada*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Tuck, E., & McKenzie, M. (2015). *Place in research: Theory, methodology, and methods*. Routledge.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Tucker, B., & Rose-Redwood, R. (2015). Decolonizing the map? Toponymic politics and the rescaling of the Salish Sea. *The Canadian Geographer*, 59(2), 194–206.
- Watts, V. (2013). Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!). *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 2(1), 20–34.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Wilson, D. D., & Restoule, J. P. (2010). Tobacco ties: The relationship of the sacred to research. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 33(1), 29.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.