

LIVE CAMP

A DECHINTA 'FIELD GUIDE' TO FISHING
AND GOVERNANCE ON DENE LAND



DECHINTA

Centre for Research and Learning

ABSTRACT

At fish camp we work to create deeper connections with ourselves, each other, and the land. Even if from a distance, we hope that through this field guide, you will be able to connect in some way to the world of a Dene winter fish camp on Tłı̨ndeè (Great Slave Lake). By guiding you through our fish camp at Dechinta, you will walk away with a deeper understanding of Dene life. Our aim with this document, and the short film that inspired it, is for you to witness how the Dene continue to govern themselves according to their own laws and resist the ongoing forces of colonialism in the North, to think critically about what it means to form living relationships with Indigenous and Dene land in practice, and to see how Indigenous land-based education operates on the ground. At Dechinta we believe that sharing this knowledge, and making it accessible to others, expands the transformative potential of local Indigenous land-based activities, such as Łı̨we camp. We are excited to continue sharing land-based knowledge and parts of Dene life with you in the future, whether it be together on the land, or from a distance.



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ILLUSTRATION CREDIT

All photography courtesy of *Morgan Tsetta Film and Photography*. Morgan is a Vancouver-based Dene freelance photographer and videographer from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, with a passion for film and her Dene culture. Her website is: <https://www.morgantsettafilms.com>.

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WEBINAR ACCESS

This field guide is intended to be a supplement to the Łı̨we Camp short film that Dechinta released in 2021. To access the film, visit www.dechinta.ca/resources or view it on the Dechinta Centre YouTube channel [here](#).

This short film was shot and edited by Morgan Tsetta of Morgan Tsetta Film and Photography.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Łiwe Camp 'field guide'! A field guide is a book that is intended to help readers identify and better understand the land, animals, and non-human elements around them. Traditional field guides are often created by scientists with the purpose of documenting the natural world. This field guide has a different purpose -it explores the ethical and political relationships that we have to the natural world around us and to each other. It also has a different understanding of what constitutes a "field" and what constitutes "a guide".


At Łiwe Camp, 'the field' in question is not just an area of open land, but the territory of the Yellowknives Dene First Nations. An Indigenous field guide for fish camp is not just about helping us identify different types of fish. It is about being in a living relationship with this territory and living in accordance to the Dene laws that govern this territory. It is about understanding how we exist in relation to those elements, and what those elements teach us about how to live with each other and govern ourselves. At Łiwe Camp 'the guide' is both the Yellowknives Dene Elders, who have a deep understanding and knowledge of the land and the living elements on this territory, as well as the land itself. The land is the ultimate guide to learning how to live and be in the world around us.

This field guide cannot replace the holistic and life-long learning experience of being out on the land at Łiwe Camp. It was created with the intention to share the knowledge that we learned on the land at camp with a wider audience, making Dechinta programming more accessible to folks through the use of different mediums. Using the above Indigenous and Dene understanding of a 'field guide', we aim to demonstrate how the land informs what, and how, we learn in the 'university classroom' at Dechinta. This field guide illustrates what an Indigenous land-based university looks like in practice, when academic post-secondary theory is informed by actual land-based practices and community-led involvement on the ground.

This document was created alongside a short film that takes viewers on a 'field trip' of Dechinta's 2021 fish camp. When used together, the film and this accompanying guide invite you to witness and learn from our 2021 winter Łiwe camp. The short film can be accessed on our website at www.dechinta.ca/resources and on our YouTube Channel [here](#). It was filmed and edited by Morgan Tsetta of *Morgan Tsetta Film and Photography*. Morgan is a Vancouver-based Dene freelance photographer and videographer from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, with a passion for film and her Dene culture. Her website is: <https://www.morgantsettafilms.com>.



PART ONE:
HONOURING THE
GIFTS OF THE LAND AT
FISH CAMP

A wide-angle photograph of a snowy, open landscape under a pale sky. In the foreground on the left, the dark, snow-laden branches of a coniferous tree are visible. In the middle ground, a snowmobile is parked on the snow, with two people standing nearby. Further back, a line of trees marks the horizon. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

Jo Łiwe k'e nawhaahde gha mahsi.
Jo Jw'ahtindee Daigis wenee k'e agòht'e
Jo ndia k'e sii Whaedo ndi goeyeh eyits'o Kwet'ik'e
Mackenzie Island wiyeh
Dii ndia k'e whaedo Łaa'noògeede ile
Tindee k'e agòht'e
Wiłiide yatii k'e gots'ede.
Dii dee sii Done nee wiyeh do sii nde k'e ts'o agit'e t'a
done nee ts'edi hani-le de Denendeh wiyeh, eyits'o jo
eghalats'ide nide, done naowo wexoedi t'a eghalats'ide.


Welcome to the Dechinta fish (Łiwe) camp.
This camp takes place in Chief Drygeese Territory,
On MacKenzie Island.
This island has been used as a gathering site.
It is on Tindee.
The language spoken here is Wiłiideh Yatii.
This land is called Denendeh, and when we are here, we
work hard to follow the Dene Laws.

LIVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TERRITORIES

We opened this field guide by welcoming you to the learning space of tiwe camp in Wìlìideh Yatì, the language traditionally spoken on the territory where fish camp took place this year. When we are at fish camp, we engage in relational and reciprocal practices with the land as Indigenous people who are both from this territory and who are visiting this territory. In welcoming you to this space, we want to emphasize the importance of forming living relationships with the Indigenous territories you are visiting, a practice which goes beyond the institutional performance of land acknowledgments.


Land acknowledgements have become mainstream across Turtle Island (or what is now known as Canada). It is not uncommon to hear them at the beginning of workplace meetings, community events, university gatherings, and other public occasions. It is also commonplace to see land acknowledgements written out on mediums such as company websites, email signatures, or course syllabi. As the popularity of these statements has increased in recent years, Indigenous folks have expressed concern and critique over their performative nature (Hamilton, 2015; Robinson et al., 2019; Smoke, 2019; Wark, 2021), as well as their departure from the ways that Indigenous nations engage in diplomatic and political practices when they are on the territories of other Indigenous nations (Janzen, 2019; Vowel, 2016; Voth & Loyer, 2019). Institutional land acknowledgements are at odds with how many Indigenous people understand the land and their relationship to it, and do not reflect the longstanding political practice of reciprocal and relational territorial practices between Indigenous peoples that is “fundamentally tied to nationhood” (Wark, p. 3) and purposed in creating “...inter-Indigenous relationships rooted in tradition, respect, and openness” (Voth and Loyer, p. 107).

If we think about the meaning of land from the perspectives of Indigenous people, we can see that the performative practice of land acknowledgements goes against the social, political, and legal understandings of land held by many Indigenous nations. For many Indigenous nations, including the Dene people, land is not just a material object because “human beings are not the only constituents believed to embody spirit or agency” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 61). Instead, land is a framework for understanding ethical relationships between human and non-human entities that offers us “a way of knowing, of experience and relating to the world and with others.” When land is viewed with agency and understood as a living relationship, we can see the shortcomings of institutional land acknowledgements. To ‘acknowledge’ the land from an Indigenous perspective is to practice a living social and political relationship with the territory you are on, and to exist in relational terms with all of the non-human entities that exist on that land. As Coulthard explains, “we are as much a part of the land as any other element...



...ethically, this means that humans hold certain obligations to the land, animals, plants, and lakes in much the same way that we hold obligations to other people" (p. 61). For many Indigenous nations, when you are on someone else's territory, you engage in reciprocal and relational political practices that fulfill the ethical relationships you have to the territory you are visiting. This type of relationship cannot be cultivated through words and statements but must be formed, learned, and nurtured through ongoing practice.

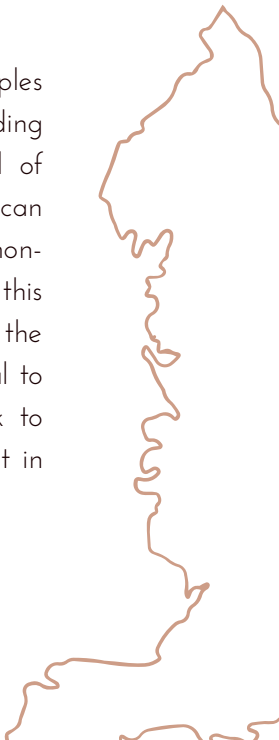
These practices also foster inter-Indigenous relationships that counter settler colonial control over Indigenous land. Indigenous peoples living on Turtle Island have always practiced Indigenous 'land acknowledgments', although they are better understood as diplomatic land practices or land relationships (Baskin, 2016; Marche, 2017; Simpson, 2008; Wilkes et al., 2017). These political and relational practices with the land work to restore pre-colonial relationships of diplomacy between Indigenous nations based on an ethic of reciprocity and respect for each other and the territory that is being shared. These are both historic and continuous practices nations or peoples embody to show accountability and care for the territory they are visiting by committing to live in accordance with the laws and ethics of the nation already living on and governing that land. This is an active political practice that created long-standing Indigenous inter-national relationships rooted in a mutual respect for the land and the non-human. These types of relationships were not, and cannot be, generated or practiced through a spoken or written 'land acknowledgment' as it is commonly practiced by Canadian institutions.



"[the land] can teach us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests. Indeed, for many Indigenous peoples it is our relationship to land that generates the processes, practices and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which we practice solidarity"

- Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson, 2016

A land acknowledge does not form a living relationship with the land or the Indigenous peoples whose territory you are on, and it does not do the work of dismantling the colonial scaffolding that structures daily life for Indigenous communities and Canadians. At best, this kind of acknowledgement temporarily disrupts the settler colonial erasure of Indigenous presence. It can make Indigenous peoples and their homelands feel seen, and it can be a first step for non-Indigenous peoples in learning about Indigenous peoples and places. At its worse, this performative trend exists as a stand-in for meaningful engagement and practice with the territory and the Indigenous peoples you are visiting or living on top of, and is antithetical to Indigenous understandings of land and practices of governance. At fish camp, we work to engage in these Dene political practices and we center the land and our relationships to it in everything that we do.



- **Denendeh:** The land of the people
- **Chief Drygeese Territory:** Home to the Yellowknives Dene First Nations which includes the communities of Dettah and Ndilo.
- **Dettah:** Dettah means "charcoal" or "burnt point". It is located on the Northern shore of Great Slave Lake, just outside of Yellowknife. The Dettah area has been used as a summertime gathering site for generations, eventually growing into one of the two Yellowknives Dene Communities.
- **Ndilo:** Ndilo means "end of island". It is located on the north end of Latham Island, adjacent to the City of Yellowknife. Despite being located in close proximity to Yellowknife, Ndilo remains an independent and distinct community. The area has always been an important fishing and berry picking spot, with access to prime hunting areas. Ndilo became a permanent settlement in the early 1940s.
- **Tłı̨ndeè:** Great Slave Lake

(Information found at <https://ykdene.com/about/our-land/>)

Chief Drygeese Territory

Chief Emile Drygeese July, 1900 Treaty 8

Chief Joseph Drygeese July, 1920 Treaty 8

"As long as the sun rises, the grass grows, and the river's flow"

Yellowknife
N'Dilo ★ ★ Dettah

Great Slave Lake

McLeod Bay



Yellowknives Dene First Nation
Akaitcho Treaty 8

25,800 square nautical miles
124,872 square kilometers

Coordinates

Point A: 65.33N 110.19W	Point G: 62.27N 115.15W	Point M: 62.41N 111.15W
Point B: 64.22N 112.29W	Point H: 62.28N 115.32W	Point N: 62.52N 110.15W
Point C: 64.20N 112.20N	Point I: 62.19N 115.39W	Point O: 62.53N 109.15W
Point D: 64.12N 112.34W	Point J: 61.42N 115.37W	Point P: 63.40N 107.15W
Point E: 64.15N 112.42W	Point K: 61.42N 113.18W	Point Q: 64.57N 107.15W
Point F: 63.22N 114.10W	Point L: 61.58N 112.00W	

ACKNOWLEDGING THE LAND AT FISH CAMP

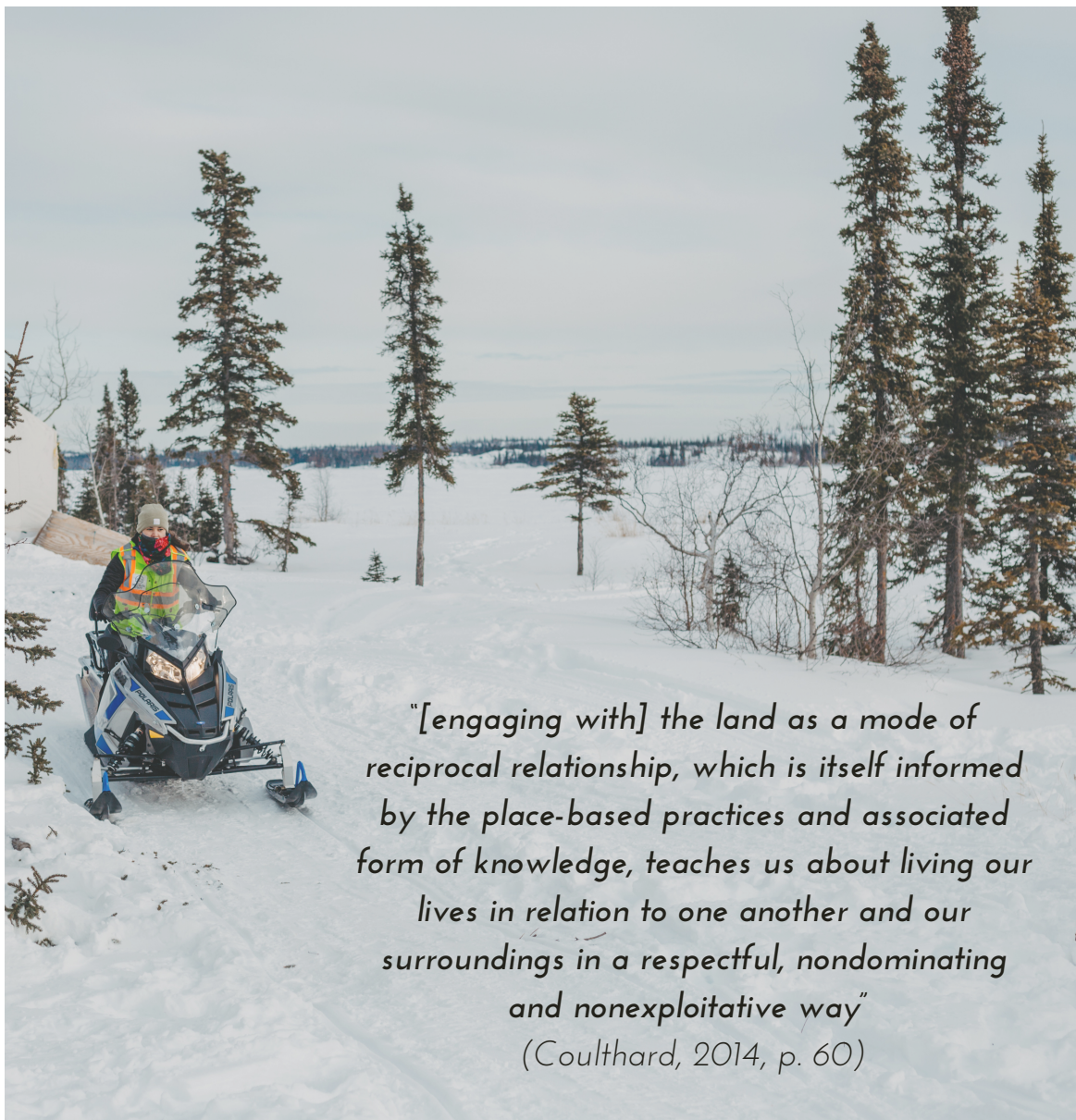
At Dechinta, we work to embody Dene land ethics by learning from and engaging deeply with the land, respecting the practices and laws of the Dene people, and prioritizing the creation of sustainable relationships with the human and non-human entities on the land around us.

When we set up fish camp on the Chief Drygeese Territory of the Yellowknives Dene First Nations in Denendeh at Liwe Camp this year, we entered into a relationship with that territory. This relationship was (and continues to be) social, economic, political, and legal in nature. It is defined by the ethical obligations we have to all of the non-human elements on this territory that have been practiced by the Dene since the beginning of time. By catching and preparing fish at camp in a Dene way and according to Dene law, we are practicing Dene place-based ethics.



When we fish on Chief Drygeese Territory, we do so in a respectful, nonexploitative, sustainable and relational way. These fishing practices have always existed amongst the Dene and are deeply informed by engaging with the land as a source of knowledge and intelligence. We take the lead from Elders and knowledge holders who teach us about our obligations to the land and fish on this territory. At camp, Dene knowledge holders shared stories about the importance of fishing in the past and in the present, the ethical practices around harvesting and sharing the catch, and the importance of teaching younger generations this knowledge. In tandem we learned practical skills that allowed us to fulfill these obligations on the ground.

When we are at fish camp the land and territory inform everything that we do. By creating a community of learning on the land, from the land, and in relationship to the land, territorial acknowledgements are brought to life at Liwe camp.



"[engaging with] the land as a mode of reciprocal relationship, which is itself informed by the place-based practices and associated form of knowledge, teaches us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way"
(Coulthard, 2014, p. 60)

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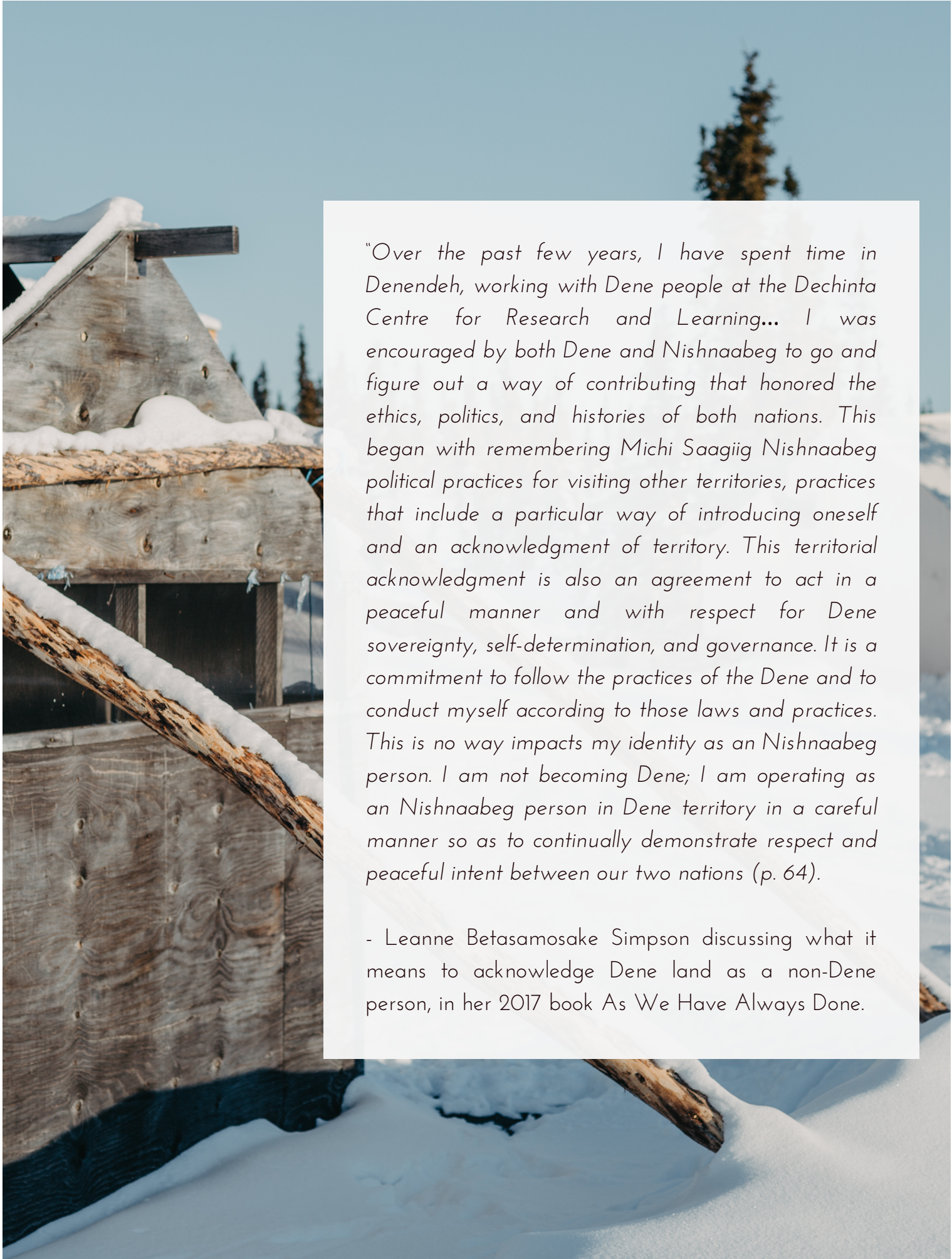
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"Over the past few years, I have spent time in Denendeh, working with Dene people at the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning... I was encouraged by both Dene and Nishnaabeg to go and figure out a way of contributing that honored the ethics, politics, and histories of both nations. This began with remembering Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg political practices for visiting other territories, practices that include a particular way of introducing oneself and an acknowledgment of territory. This territorial acknowledgment is also an agreement to act in a peaceful manner and with respect for Dene sovereignty, self-determination, and governance. It is a commitment to follow the practices of the Dene and to conduct myself according to those laws and practices. This in no way impacts my identity as an Nishnaabeg person. I am not becoming Dene; I am operating as an Nishnaabeg person in Dene territory in a careful manner so as to continually demonstrate respect and peaceful intent between our two nations (p. 64).

- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson discussing what it means to acknowledge Dene land as a non-Dene person, in her 2017 book *As We Have Always Done*.

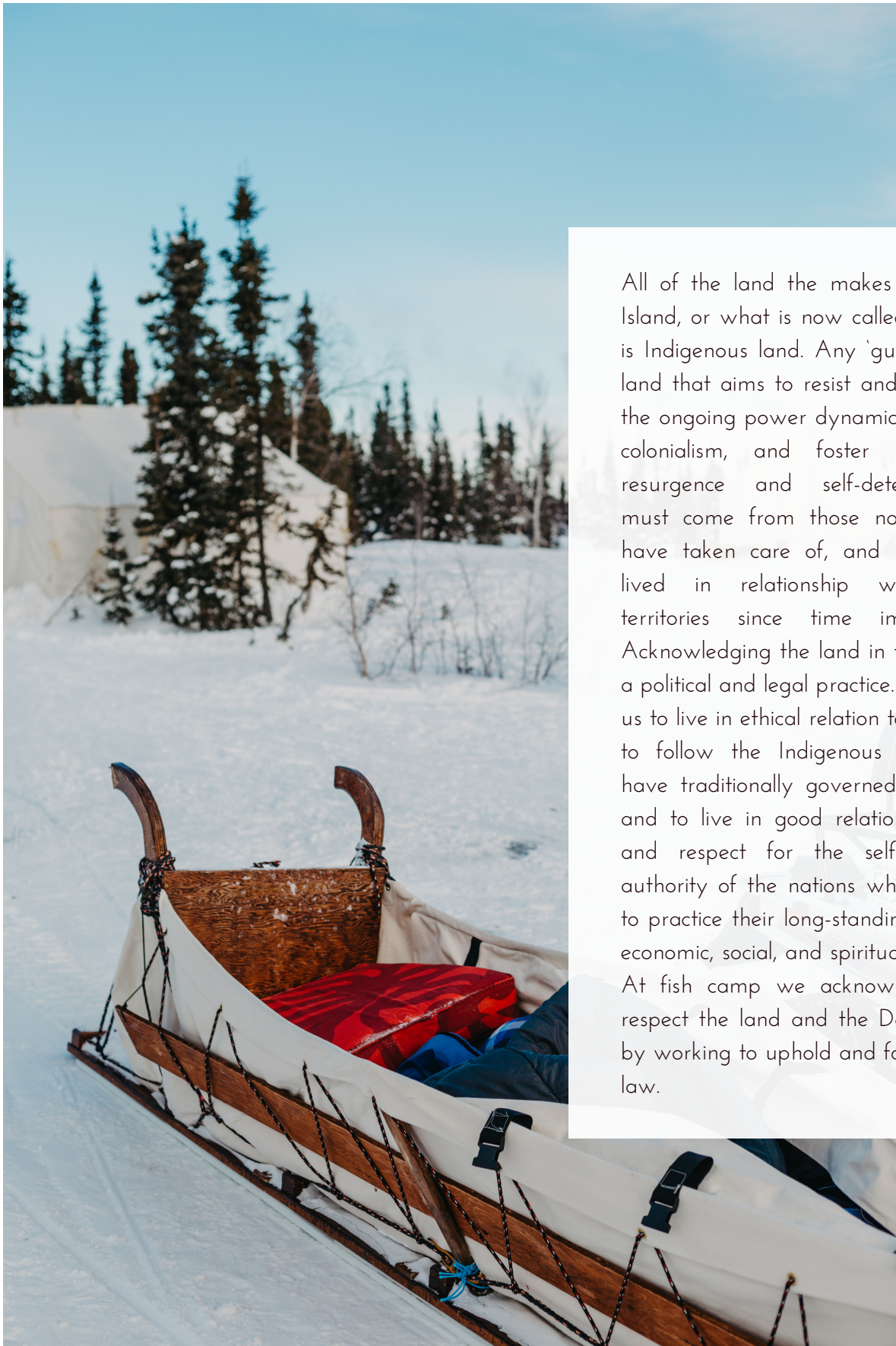


PART TWO:
FOLLOWING DENE
LAW AT CAMP

"It is the land that creates our community, and from the land we learn the laws that show us how to live well"

- Kyla LeSage, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning





All of the land that makes up Turtle Island, or what is now called Canada, is Indigenous land. Any 'guide' to this land that aims to resist and dismantle the ongoing power dynamics of settler colonialism, and foster Indigenous resurgence and self-determination, must come from those nations who have taken care of, and who have lived in relationship with these territories since time immemorial. Acknowledging the land in this way is a political and legal practice. It requires us to live in ethical relation to this land, to follow the Indigenous laws that have traditionally governed this land, and to live in good relationship with and respect for the self-governing authority of the nations who continue to practice their long-standing political, economic, social, and spiritual practices. At fish camp we acknowledge and respect the land and the Dene nation by working to uphold and follow Dene law.

WHO ARE THE YELLOWKNIVES DENE?

The Wiilideh Yellowknives Dene are one of the peoples of the T'satsaot'ine (metal or copper people). Wiilideh territory consists of lands around Tindeè (Great Slave Lake) north to the Coppermine River, and east to the Theron River.

Since 1959, descendants of the T'satsaot'ine have lived mostly at Deninu Kue, Rocher River, Lutsel K'e, Reliance, Ndilo, Dettah and Enodah. Today, the people and their territory are named after the great T'satsaot'ine leader Akeh-Cho: The Akaitcho Peoples and Akaitcho Territory. Wiilideh Yellowknives Dene call themselves after the river (the Wiilideh) in the southerly parts of their territory, where they traditionally spent summer.

In the Wiilideh Yellowknives dialect, wiilih in English means fish known as coney (or inconnu) and deh means flowing water or river. Wiilideh Yellowknives Elders tell a story about European explorer Alexander Mackenzie, who decided to call the river "Yellowknife" after what they thought the people camped at the mouth were calling themselves. Elders today believe their ancestors and the interpreter were actually informing Mackenzie about the copper knives they held in their hands at the time.

The Yellowknives Dene First Nation consists of the communities of Dettah and Ndilo. Dechinta is extremely fortunate to have hosted fish camp on Yellowknives Dene territory with the permission of Chiefs and Council. The Yellowknives Dene are the experts at Dechinta. They carry and live Dene philosophy, theory, and practical knowledge about how to live well in their territory.



LIVING DENE LAWS AT FISH CAMP

The Dene Laws are an important and living ethical structure that create the foundation of Dene governance. At fish camp you observe Elders embodying the lives in their daily life, you hear Elders share stories about the laws, you see them on posters in our tents, and you learn about their origin story. Indigenous laws are different from western laws. They were not originally written down but encoded in the oral tradition and were shared through stories and by the way people lived individually and collectively. These living laws are not as simple as they appear on the surface but are embedded in a complex network of Dene philosophy and ethics. It is by being on the land that our understanding of these laws deepens.



When we fish on Chief Drygeese Territory, we work to uphold and practice the laws of the Yellowknives Dene First Nations. These laws have been informed by a longstanding mutual interdependence with the land. The first Dene law is 'share what you have'. Fish camp is a place where we practice and live out this law, which is foundational to Dene life and land. At camp we share the harvest with the community, the knowledge from the Elders and the land, and the joy of being together and working hard.



The activities we carry out at fish camp teach us how to live our lives in relation to the fish, the land, the water, and each other on this territory. In turn, these activities in and of themselves are a practice of Indigenous governance. For the Dene, and for many Indigenous peoples, our relationship to land and all living things generates the processes, practices and knowledges that inform our political and legal systems. Our land-based practices create, and are created by, Indigenous modes of governance.





Akwełò Done Naowo sii. Ełeghats'eedi hot'e

The first Dene Law is share what you have

SHARING WHAT YOU HAVE AT CAMP



How do we learn and practice the Dene law 'share what you have' at fish camp?

- From the youngest to the oldest, "share what you have" tells us to share with others, but also teaches us how to learn from everyone around us and see the best in what everyone is bringing.
- The land can be a challenging place and we all have to work hard together. This is why it is important to always have people of all ages at camp together. Each of us has gifts to share, which will make sure that the whole community can be safe and well.
- Camp it is more than sharing food. We also make sure that visitors understand the importance of the teachings of the land, and how to be respectful of what the land is sharing with us.
- We observe and learn from the Elders who always share. We share stories from the Elders, stories about the land, how it used to be, and how it might be again.
- When we are on the land together, you will always hear laughter. Some people share joy, and always know how to make a camp a welcome and warm place to be.
- Some people share skills, such as pulling nets, and others show us how to learn.
- Through the generosity of the land, we have learned to share. We work hard to share all that we have.

Resources:

<https://dehcho.org/nahe-nahodhe-way-life/>



PART THREE:
CAMP AS COLONIAL
RESISTANCE

"The effects of colonialism are felt here- poisoning the land and water with arsenic and mines, and attempting to remove Dene people from their lands, waters, and teachings through residential schools, forcing people into wage labour, and removing them from their homes and homelands"

- Kyla LeSage, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning



The Indigenous lands and nations of Turtle Island have experienced the devastating effects of settler colonialism for hundreds of years. An Indigenous 'field guide' to fish camp must address the historical and ongoing impact of colonialism and settlement on the Indigenous territory where camp takes place. Colonialism has changed the landscape of how we engage with and relate to the land. It is important for us to understand this so that we may then learn how to resist and exist on this land outside of these colonial frameworks and processes, and according to Indigenous ways of life.

At fish camp this year, we learned about the history of colonialism in the North and the drastic impact it had, and continues to have, on Dene ways of life. Understanding this history helps us to recognize and fight back against colonialism on this territory, while reminding us of the strength and resilience of the Dene as they have worked hard to maintain Dene life amidst this ongoing colonial violence. When we learn this history, we appreciate the importance of returning to the land to restore what colonialism has disrupted and damaged, and we work towards restoring and gaining back Dene life by practicing Dene ways of knowing and being.



THE YELLOWKNIVES DENE AND COLONIALISM - A BRIEF HISTORY

The following is a brief guide to the history we learned at fish camp this year. It is not comprehensive and provides a summary of key points that Glen Coulthard made during his lecture. We have provided a list of further readings and resources that go into greater detail about Dene history on page 23.

- **Signing Treaties to Protect the Land (early 1900s):** In 1899 the Dene in Northern Alberta signed Treaty 8 with the Dene of the South Slave and the Yellowknives Dene joining in 1900. In the early 1920's Treaty 11 was signed further up the Mackenzie River towards Dehcho. These two treaties were understood by the Dene to keep peace with the increasing amount of white settlers that were coming to North for economic reasons. There were violent conflicts between settlers and the Dene people that followed the increasing resource development, and the Dene pushed hard for Canada to negotiate a treaty with them in order to maintain peace and friendship with the settlers, and to protect the land from extraction for future generations. For the Dene, these treaties emerged out of a concern for the land and a concern for the well-being of the community. These treaties are a living relationship that provide a political framework for how we ought to govern ourselves on this land.
- **Economic Changes to Dene Ways of Life (Mid-Late Twentieth Century):** In the latter half of the twentieth century some significant political and economic changes were really starting to dominate the North at that time. The emerging cash wage economy and colonial capitalist system in the Northwest Territories began to interfere with Dene ways of living. The cost of trade goods increased and the demand for furs rapidly declined, leaving Dene harvesters without income. The land-based economy eroded, and the Dene could no longer afford to live on the land doing harvesting and land-based practices. The Dene were being forced to enter into the emerging extraction industry under the form of wage labour, which was at odds with the Dene economic system, where people lived sustainably and in relationship with the land, producing only what they needed to survive.
- **Political Changes to Dene Ways of Life (Mid-Late Twentieth Century):** These economic changes overlapped with some significant political changes happening in the North. In 1968 oil and gas was found under the Arctic Ocean just off the North shores of the Yukon, Alaska, and the Northwest Territories. The federal government decided make Yellowknife the political capital of the Northwest Territories to demonstrate that they had uncontested sovereignty over Northern resources. This was followed by a massive influx of settlement, including over 3000 government officials who were now located in the Northwest Territories. This led to a shift in power, as the demographic of the North shifted to become a largely white constituency. This increase of settlement led to an increasing demand for jobs in the form of non-renewable resource development. Politically this led to an undermining of Dene self-governance and jurisdiction over their territories, alongside the Dene becoming more dependent on non-Dene forms of life economically to make their living.

- **Land Dispossession and Residential Schools (Mid-Late Twentieth Century):** The federal government used these political and economic transitions to remove Dene people from the land and into settlements through violent colonial policies and practices. This included things like stealing Dene children, making false promises, and withholding social assistance and family allowances from Dene families if they didn't agree to relocate. The residential school system removed kids off the land to produce menial wage labour for the new economy. At these schools, men were taught carpentry skills and other practical trades, while women were taught home economics. As a result, Dene men and women were situated in the menial economy of wage work while white settlers moving to the North were situated at the top of the economic ladder. This economically changed the Dene way of life to one of dependency on the emerging capitalist system and of subordination to the increasing number of settlers working in the extraction industry.
- **Asserting Dene Ownership and Jurisdiction Over Land (1973):** In 1973, the Dene resisted colonialism by trying to utilize Canada's legal system to force the government to recognize their claim to title (ownership and jurisdiction over territory). They filed a caveat to demonstrate that they had legal jurisdiction over their territories that was never given up. The federal government has always relied on the racist myth that Indigenous peoples in the Northwest Territories gave up their land rights through the signing of treaty as an extinguishment document, and the Dene have always said that the treaties were never about land, they were about establishing a relationship of reciprocity, peace and friendship between the Dene and non-Dene on their now-shared territories. This case became known as the Paulette case and was very important because the judge agreed that the Dene didn't cede, release, surrender or give up any rights to their territory. As such, they had what was termed 'Aboriginal rights', and those rights included land title that had to be dealt with in a fair manner by the federal government. This case put a legal question mark over who owned the land, what were the rights to develop the land, who those rights belonged to, and what were the rules that would guide such development. This was a massive economic threat to the government, who responded by creating the contemporary land-claims process.
- **The Dene Struggle for Self-Determination (1975-1981):** The comprehensive land claims process was designed to be implemented in places where title may or may not exist, in order to extinguish that title and open those lands to capitalist development by non-Dene industries. The Dene used the Dene Nation, or the Indian Brotherhood at the time, to resist this land claims process, proposing instead a means to settle in a manner that furthered the self-determination of the Dene in a land settlement. They provided framework for negotiations where everybody in the North could be self-determining. In 1975 the Dene Nation unanimously declared their rights in a statement of rights that came to be known as the Dene Declaration, where they declared themselves to be a nation. As a nation, they had the right to self-determination under international law, and that the basis of negotiations would happen with that right being upheld by the Canadian government. The federal government rejected this proposal, their land claims process was not designed to affirm Indigenous rights to self-determination but to extinguish it for the purposes of settlement and capitalist development. Instead, they proposed to protect Dene cultural rights, such as their right to participate in certain activities and speak their language, but not political rights like self-determination, which threatened settlement and colonial capitalist expansion in the Northwest territories.

- **The Denendeh Proposal (1981):** The Denendeh Proposal was a political vision for the government of Denendeh. It was a substantive document because it had both a political and economic vision of freedom for the Dene in the Northwest territories in the form of a public government. This was important as Dene interests were being overshadowed by the large influx of settlers to Yellowknife which had tilted political power to non-Dene. The Denendeh proposal asserted that the Dene would have their own sphere of government that would represent their interests, while the other chamber of government would be open and represent the interests of everybody. They also proposed to reinvigorate the bush economy. Economically, this would involve redirecting and redistributing funds skimmed off the capitalist economy into the non-capitalist Dene economy. When the Dene might choose to participate in some economic development, they would do so in ways that would affirm Dene culture and ethics through forms of workplace democracy. The government rejected this, as their eagerness to settle land claims with the Dene was rooted in a desire to exploit land and resources and expand the capitalist economy in the North.
- **Ongoing Negotiations (1990-Present):** After years of failing to recognize Dene self-determining authority, the federal government started forcing regions to negotiate independently over land claims, knowing the power that a united Dene nation in the North could assert in terms of their jurisdiction and land rights. After 1992, different Dene nations attempted to negotiate their interests through comprehensive land claims, while the federal government remained firm in its commitment to extinguish Dene rights and title. At the same time, development was moving ahead rapidly with the discovery of diamonds, and the Dene felt it was important to have a say over the pace of that development, or at least ensure that they would receive some of the economic benefit from this development in order to sustain their communities. The various regions took different approaches. The Dehcho are still negotiating and hold the commitment that no Aboriginal rights or land rights will be extinguished through their own negotiating process. The Yellowknives Dene and the South Slave refused to extinguish their rights as well but wanted to negotiate with the federal government through specific claims. Namely, they want the framework of Treaty 8 to be the framework that guides negotiations, but not Treaty 8 as understood by Canada, which views it as a land extinguishment treaty. They want to negotiate through Treaty 8 as it is understood by the correct version of history, which is the Dene understanding of it as an agreement to share the land, to safeguard the land, and to respect each other's way of life.

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RESISTANCE AND SELF-DETERMINATION AT FISH CAMP

Dechinta as an institution exists in part because of the continuous resistance and commitment of the Dene to their land, their language, and their intellectual system through their practices of being on the land. When we follow Dene laws at fish camp, we resist colonial domination and control over this territory. We work towards Indigenous and Dene freedom by acknowledging and respecting Dene governance and sovereignty over this land. This is self-determination. As Glen Coulthard explained during his lecture at camp this year:

"the word self-determination... the best way it was explained to me by an Elder once was that we are the boss. We're the boss of our own territory. That doesn't necessarily mean we're gonna boss people around because that's not the way that we do things, but we are the people who ought to be determining how we're going to live on our land so that we can best protect it for our future generations."

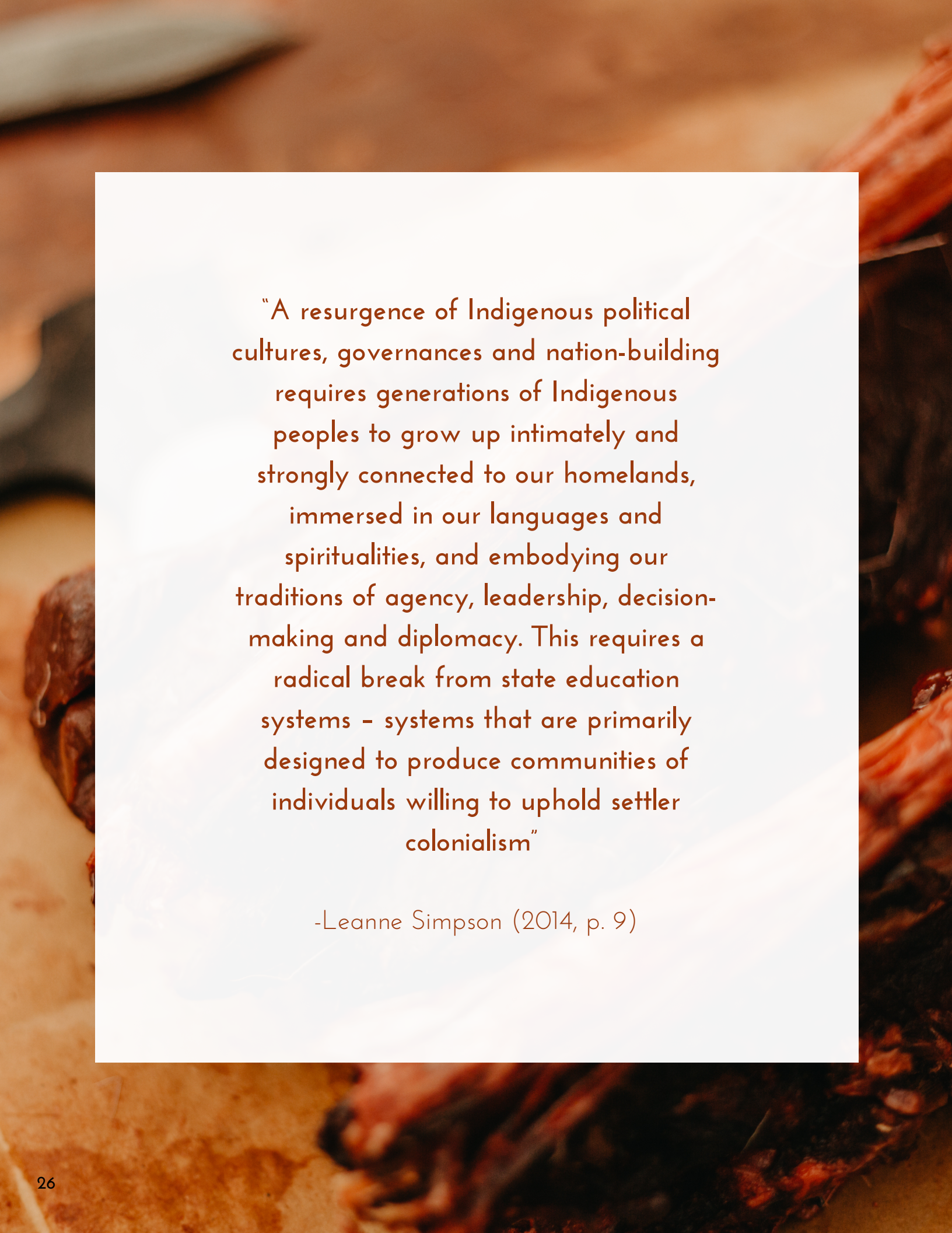
At fish camp we assert the right to govern ourselves as Indigenous people. We govern ourselves according to Dene laws, Dene economic traditions, and Dene cultural practices. We practice a Dene way of living.

When we are at Liwe camp we experience a resurgence of Dene nationhood. We create alternative worlds that allow us to momentarily break free from the sedimented and unsustainable practices and modes of thought that have come to structure our colonial present (Simpson, 2011, 2016). When we catch and harvest the fish according to longstanding Dene knowledge and practices, when we learn from elders and knowledge holders about how to carry ourselves at camp in ways that are respectful and ethical, and when we form meaningful and reciprocal relationships with each other and the land according as the Dene have always done, we enact and live Dene life on Dene terms.



"At fish camp we
have the chance to
re-introduce
ourselves to the
land and language.
To learn together.
To build
connections to each
other"

- Kyla LeSage, Dechinta
Centre




“A resurgence of Indigenous political cultures, governances and nation-building requires generations of Indigenous peoples to grow up intimately and strongly connected to our homelands, immersed in our languages and spiritualities, and embodying our traditions of agency, leadership, decision-making and diplomacy. This requires a radical break from state education systems – systems that are primarily designed to produce communities of individuals willing to uphold settler colonialism”

-Leanne Simpson (2014, p. 9)



CONCLUSION:
THE IMPORTANCE OF
LAND-BASED LEARNING



An Indigenous land-based university emerges out of Indigenous frameworks of thinking, rooted in local Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding. It is brought to life through Indigenous practices of being and doing that create alternative Indigenous worlds in the here and now.

THE IMPACT OF LAND-BASED EDUCATION

Ɓiwe camp is not just about catching fish and learning skills. It is about community, Dene ethics and law, self-determination, sustainable food, family relationships, teach traditional land-based knowledge, and passing down Indigenous and Dene knowledge and practices to Dene youth.



COMMUNITY

Dene communal practices have always sustained Dene life. It is through the land that we form community. We learn from the land how to live well with each other. At fish camp we practice community governance through the way that we operate at camp, and by sharing the harvest with the community.



ETHICS AND LAW

For thousands of years, Dene children grew up in an embedded community of learning, where in an immersive context, they would learn about governance and leadership by participating in a social organization that celebrated diversity, consensus, and accountability in the context of the Dene laws (Blondin 2006, 1997). The Dene traditionally learned their political and legal systems by being in meshed in community and by watching their Elders and older family members practice and live these laws daily. When we are at fish camp the elders, the land, and the fish teach us these Dene laws and ethics. We learn and practice how to be in this world in relation to others and the non-human in a Dene way.



SUSTAINABLE FOOD

The Dene have always been sustained by the land. At fish camp we engage in the Dene practices that sustain our relationship to the land and the sustenance it provides. These practices are sustainable for future generations and work towards the political aspirations of the Dene, creating a future of freedom to live in relationship with Dene land in a safe, healthy, and sustainable manner. At fish camp we learn to feed and take care of ourselves and our families by living responsibly on the land and with each other.



TEACHING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

As fish camp we work to restore the knowledge, skills, and spirituality of going out on the land. Elders teach traditional skills such as how to deploy a fishnet under the ice, how to clean a fish, and how to preserve fish. Learning occurs across generations and considers past, present and future. Elders are respected for their borne knowledge, ability to share it through storytelling, and as models for appropriate conduct.



SELF-DETERMINATION

Dechinta knows that it is not enough to simply imagine or theorize an Indigenous future. We cannot just rely on re-imagining how power, politics and life could take shape outside of settler colonial structure and thought, we must also strive toward this vision on the ground. Fish camp is an example of this. As a land-based university we work to restore the relationships, and the practices associated with these relationships, that Indigenous and Dene people have to each other and to the land.

FAMILY

Dene children historically grew up on their land lovingly attached to their families and their homeland and immersed in the intelligence of their own people. At fish camp we work to create this embedded community of learning by encouraging families to come out on the land together and by providing childcare that allows for the entire family to participate in camp teachings and activities.



INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

Before the imposition of colonialism in the North, Children grew up embedded in a Dene educational system that was designed to give them the necessary skills and knowledge to uphold the very best of Dene ethical and political practices and to promote the sanctity of the land, the water, the plants and the animals for the generations to come. This built strong, healthy Dene individuals, families, communities and nations, intimately attached to their homeland. At fish camp we work to restore this form of Dene education and foster a future of Dene nationhood by prioritizing intergenerational learning -teaching kids and young people Dene knowledge and ways of living on the land and with each other.



LAND-BASED EDUCATION VIDEO AND MEDIA RESOURCES

Introduction to Land-Based Education

(Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, NCCIE)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F6hg8uwZuQ3>

What is Land-Based Learning? A Digital Forum

(National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOUBbsNswLY&t=294s>

Fort Good Hope Fish Camp -The Importance of Camp

(National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education)

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-lUlfSyUCc&feature=emb_logo

Luge k'e rahtse deh - "We live with the fish"

(National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education)

Link: <https://www.nccie.ca/story/luge-ke-rahtse-deh-we-live-withthe-fish/>

Reciprocity: Dene Relationships with Fish

(National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education)

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5Nk1VujlO&feature=emb_logo

Leanne Simpson and Glen Coulthard on Dechinta Bush University, Indigenous land-based education and embodied resurgence.

(Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society)

Link: <https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/11/26/leanne-simpson-and-glen-coulthard-on-dechinta-bush-university-indigenous-land-based-education-and-embodied-resurgence/>



CONCLUSION

We have reached the end of our Łiwe camp field guide!

At fish camp we work to create deeper connections with ourselves, each other, and the land. Even if from a distance, we hope that through this guide and our short film, you have been able to connect in some way to the world of a Dene winter fish camp on Tłındeè (Great Slave Lake). By guiding you through our fish camp at Dechinta university, we hope you walk away with a deeper understanding of Dene life. Our aim with this guide was for you to witness how the Dene continue to govern themselves according to their own laws and resist the ongoing forces of colonialism in the North, to think critically about what it means to acknowledge Indigenous and Dene land in practice, and to see how an Indigenous land-based university operates on the ground.

At Dechinta we believe that sharing this knowledge, and making it accessible to others, expands the transformative potential of local Indigenous land-based activities, such as Łiwe camp. We are excited to continue sharing land-based knowledge and parts of Dene life with you in the future, whether it be together on the land, or from a distance.

Mahsi Cho for coming on this journey with us.

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