

The Ecopolitics Podcast - S01E10: Treaty Relations and Environmental Politics in Canada
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Guests: Sherry Pictou (Dalhousie University) and Martha Stiegman (York University)

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What does it mean to be a treaty partner in Canada today? In this episode we speak with Dr. Sherry Pictou and Dr. Martha Stiegman about two documentary films they created together: In Defense of our Treaties, and We Story the Land. Through the conversation, we learn how the Mi'kmaq have worked to maintain treaty rights over their land and fisheries in the face of colonialism, neoliberalism, and what Sherry terms the "recolonization" of her people in the wake of Supreme Court of Canada decisions that affirm Indigenous rights. Sherry and Martha's work together bears witness to the resistance, and the cultural resurgence, that figure centrally in this work.

Episode 10: Treaty Relations and Environmental Politics in Canada

Sherry Pictou: Instead of allowing us as Mi'kmaq people to determine what our own livelihood would be like, how we would like to manage that, they assimilated us into the current fishery regime. And this seems to be the pattern, whether it's fishing, whether it's forestry, whether, you know, if it's over mining, it's always trying to assimilate Indigenous people into this economic regime. It recolonizes Indigenous people, their culture, their worldview, and so forth.

[00:00:37] **Peter Andrée:** Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast. This podcast series tackle some of the big questions in the field of environmental politics for university students in Canada. I'm Peter Andrée from Carleton University. And my cohost for the show is Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa, though Ryan's not joining us for today's conversation.

[00:00:57] In this episode, I'll be talking with Dr Sherry Pictou, assistant professor in the Faculty of Law and Management at Dalhousie University. She's the former chief of L's'itkuk, a Mi'kmaq community in Nova Scotia. And her work focuses on Indigenous governance.

[00:01:11] We'll also be joined by Dr Martha Stiegman. She's a filmmaker and assistant professor in the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University. Her community-based research and collaborative video work examines Indigenous-settler treaty relations in their historic and contemporary manifestations, with particular attention to food sovereignty and justice.

[00:01:35] So, this is one of two episodes in our podcast series, dealing with the intersection between ecopolitics and Indigenous politics in Canada. As we've previously discussed in this series, the politics of how land, air, and water is managed, protected and or exploited in Canada needs to be understood in

terms of the processes of colonialism through which this country was founded and which continue to this day.

[00:02:00] Over the last 350 years, colonial processes claim this land and its resources for European monarchs, with settlement first by the French, in the case of Canada's East coast and what are now the central provinces of Quebec and Ontario and then for the English crown, after the Battle of Quebec of 1775. Colonial processes also implicated the original inhabitants of these lands, Indigenous peoples, who live from time immemorial from coast to coast to coast in what is now Canada.

[00:02:28] Like the trees and beavers that became resources for colonial powers, Indigenous people have been exploited through these colonial experiences. And we'll be getting into some of the details of those experiences today. At the same time, Indigenous people like the Mi'kmaq community that Sherry comes from have participated in ongoing resistance to the colonial project, asserting their rights and responsibilities for their traditional territories.

[00:02:51] Today, we see ongoing acts of resistance and resurgence in these communities across Canada, which have direct implications for environmental politics. Our two guests today know each other well, and I've worked together for a number of years. Sherry Pictou is former chief of the community of L'sítukuk in the Mi'kmaq territories on Canada's East coast, known as Mi'kma'ki. L'sítukuk is known in English as Bear River First Nation, and it's located near the town of Digby and Nova Scotia. Martha undertook her PhD research examining the fisheries on Canada's East coast, focusing in particular on Indigenous settler relations. In that context, as part of that work, Martha made films, two of which were developed in close partnership with Sherry: 'In Defense of our Treaties' and the more recent film 'We Story the Land'.

[00:03:39] Today's podcast will build on the stories presented in those two films, so we encourage listeners to watch them first. We'll focus on what these films have to share for students studying environmental politics and Canada today.

[00:03:51] Sherry. Most of the listeners to this podcast will have recently watched two films that you and Martha worked on together, 'In Defense of our Treaties' and 'We Story the Land'. I'd like to start our conversation today with the backstory behind these films. How has settler colonialism in Mi'kma'ki been experienced by your people, Mi'kmaq? And how does that set the context for the stories of both resistance and renewal presented in these films? I know there's likely a lot to say on this question, much

of which is very painful to your people. But what are the big themes that you would raise about the Mi'kmaw colonial experience for our listeners that set the backdrop for these films?

[00:04:29] **Sherry Pictou:** This is a very powerful question and one that cannot be summed up quite easily. So I'm just going to try my best here to sum up like 500 years of colonialism that's still going on. But basically prior to those films, Indigenous people in Canada were considered wards of the state up until 1960 when they received the right to vote.

[00:04:56] So they had no political rights, no voting rights, and very much their bodies were colonized, if you will, by just having them designated as wards of State. And I think even like in the late 1930s we disappear out of politics altogether, and you can find Department of Indian Affairs reports in the Department of Mines and Energy, as opposed to today it's called Indigenous Affairs.

[00:05:25] So there's all that backdrop. And to add to that is, was the imposition of western, if you will, or non-Indigenous governance systems that was also steeped in patriarchal notions of what governance was. So it really interrupted the whole, our whole sense of being and who we were as a people. So skip ahead, particularly in the Mi'kma'ki context or the context of Mi'kma'ki we had Peace and Friendship Treaties along with some other - tribes, for lack of better terms, other nations, that was involved in a Confederacy known as the Wabanaki Confederacy. And these Peace and Friendship Treaties were just that - they were Peace and Friendship Treaties, they were not like the numbered treaties, there was no giving away of land or anything, it was actually their agreements of how to coexist. And fundamental to those treaties were that we would always be able to hunt and fish. There were several treaties, 1752 was very significant and of course, 1760 and 61 was the two treaties, well they're both, they're basically the same treaties but at different times that won us the Donald Marshall Jr. case in 1999. And think about that - 1760, 61 and 1999.

[00:06:57] Think of that gap and that's how long it took us. And even within Canada's own judicial system, that's how long it took us to prove that we had treaty rights. So in that context, it was the treaty right to fish for a moderate livelihood. I will not get into all the specifics because there was two cases. It was the first time in history when the Supreme Court of Canada came back and qualified their initial judgment. And really that was under the pressure of government, industry and so forth. And in that context of 1999, and I still see it today, the underlying racism that existed really reared its ugly head.

[00:07:48] And so that was the real, the backdrop for that first film, because about 32 out of 34 communities that signed into a commercial fishing agreements that really was dictated by that overall all fisheries regime - I might add that that was being privatized as well, very much like an agriculture, like these are big companies taken over the whole fishing, without having to get in all to the specifics - and our community decided not to, let's take our time and let's do this. Like, let's figure out how we want to do this. And so in the course of taking that action, we were quickly sidelined because by then the Indigenous organizations and communities that were very much focused on how, you know, getting fishing boats, getting into the water and so forth.

[00:08:51] And so there was very little room to discuss alternative ways of doing that. So to make a long story short Martha had offered us this excellent opportunity to find our voice. That film became our talking stick. Finding our voice in that first film 'In Defense of our Treaties. And in the course of the years that followed, we did a lot of experimentation, if you will, a lot of research of trying to figure out what were the Mi'kmaw concepts of our relationship with the land and waters. And we've participated in many projects and so forth. And that is the backdrop of what you're seeing in the second film 'We Story the Land'.

[00:09:46] This was now trickling down if you will, to the youth. And there's other aspects of 'We Story the Land' because it gave Martha and I also an opportunity to really position ourselves in terms of doing research almost as a treaty relation, if you will. And so that's the long of the short of it.

[00:10:14] **Peter André:** Well, Sherry, thank you. I mean, you've encapsulated a lot there and I think you know, the point that's sticking with me is really this idea that the way - following the Marshall decision, the government came in you know, how you frame it as a recolonizing. And how I interpret that, but maybe I'll just ask you to clarify. Cause I'm thinking, you know, I think what you mean is they didn't come in and say, 'How you want to do this?', they came in and said, 'and this is how it's going to be done, and this is the technology, this is the scale of operations, this is what it is, these are the regulations you'll have to follow'. And it was not a nation to nation discussion whatsoever, was it?

[00:10:59] **Sherry Pictou:** No. One of the most difficult tasks, I think as both settlers and Indigenous scholars have in particularly teaching other students or working with other students is around this concept of colonialism, because we tend to think of it historically. Now you just heard me talk about the history and trying to bring it up to the present day.

[00:11:23] And we're also trained to think of that in geographic terms in terms of these notions of developing and developed countries, South, North, and so forth. What we take for granted in that, that there's populations within the North or the rich countries and so forth.

[00:11:45] And that's why colonialism, you will hear Indigenous scholars speak about ongoing colonialism, and it's a very difficult concept for students to grasp because we're trained to think of this in 'developed' and in 'nondeveloped'. And I have such a rough time with that because you're still seeing the impacts of colonialism historically, and you're still seeing these impacts of how colonialism is reinventing itself, but in modern times, so to speak.

[00:12:20] When I talk about recolonization and so forth, you have to kind of get the notion out of Oh, country-to-country, but what's happening within these countries and the way I've explained it at a United Nations level and so forth is that I'm from an exploiter country, but I'm exploited within an exploiter country or something to that effect, if that makes sense.

[00:12:44] **Peter Andréé:** Yes, it does. It does. Sherry, you've spoken about the Peace and Friendship Treaties and what they meant to your people and, and, you know, there's a whole history of how the English crown, and then the Canadian state has not followed through on many of its treaty obligations, but I'd like to bring Martha in here because Martha, in the second film that we're talking about today, 'We Story the Land'. You talk about your presence as a filmmaker on that canoe trip as part of being a good treaty partner. What do you mean by that?

[00:13:22] **Martha Stiegman:** What I actually say in the film is that I'm trying to learn how to be a good treaty partner. And I think that's really my motivation in terms of making the films that I've made with Sherry and with others, is it's part of my learning process about learning what the spirit and intent of the treaty relationships, that govern my presence on the Indigenous lands as a settler are, in hopes that, you know, my learning journey will inspire or will help other settlers who are also learning to live in right relation with Indigenous peoples and with the land. And, you know, I'm just so humble and grateful to people like Sherry and others in L'sítukuk. And also I think I want to name Kerry Prosper also from Mi'kmaw Nation who I've had the honor of working with, who I met through Sherry, to welcome me on that learning journey.

[00:14:21] And that really started working with Sherry on, 'In Defense of our Treaties'. And in that film, we were trying to, as Sherry said, we were trying to capture their critique within L'sítukuk that the

leadership and the harvesters had of the treaty recognition process that had been set in motion by the Marshall decision. You know, the hope with Marshall had been that that would open the space for people to recover food and life ways in a self-determined way. And that that process would be able to in turn fuel and feed into a larger process of decolonization.

[00:15:00] But as Sherry said, that's not what happened. The state insisted on shoehorning Mi'kmaw people into a fishing industry that was regulated on terms that went against their cultural and spiritual values that undermined instead of recognize their treaty rights and that they fear, you know, all the money that went along with those deals will go towards will be taken away from any kind of eventual treaty settlement that's reached. You know, a great deal of focus for me in terms of the learning that I was doing and the critique was being articulated in L's+tkuk, was at the level of political economy, right? How is neoliberalism intersecting with settler colonialism to overdetermine the expression of Indigenous rights. How is the politics of recognition is, as Glen Coulthard names it, how is that playing out in Mi'kma'ki? And by that, I mean, you know, how is the state insisting on quote unquote "recognizing" treaty rights in ways that funnel into, that are on the state's terms that feed into the process of neoliberal capitalism. I think that's really important for settler people to understand if we're going to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities. And if we're going to try to find common ground. Because I think if we recognize that settler colonialism and neoliberalism are working together, then any kind of struggles that we have against neoliberal capitalism will fail if we don't understand that it's working with settler colonialism, if we don't find a common cause.

[00:16:44] You know, as my learning deepened, I realized that there was more to being a treaty partner than simply advocating for policy change or for advocating for the political space for Indigenous communities to express their rights on their own terms.

[00:17:02] You know, we think about Indigenous people, we think about Mi'kmaw people as having treaty rights, but, you know, I remember asking Kwegsi, the traditional chief in Esgenoopetitj, or Burnt Church, about the treaty rights that had people had. And he laughed at me and he said the truth. We don't have treaty rights. The treaties are for you guys. The treaties, give you guys the right to live in peace and friendship here. As long as you respect the spirit and intent of those treaties. And I would add as long as you demand that your government do so as well.

[00:17:31] I've learned from sharing from people in L'sítukuk, that those treaties were negotiated, not just in a British legal context, you know, we talk about the Aboriginal jurisprudence, we talk about the place that the Marshall decision has in Aboriginal law in Canada. But those treaties were also negotiated in a Mi'kmaw context, in the Mi'kmaw legal context. Our people were welcomed into a web of relations that include not just humans, animals, plants, water, all of the web of life that is here. And that leaves us with reciprocal, reciprocal obligations. We have to learn what our place is here.

[00:18:15] As I think Harold Johnson puts it in two nations, one family, you know, talking about the treaty process in Cree territory. He says something to the effect of, We hoped that in welcoming you here, you would learn from us what it means to live here. And as a white person who was born at the apex of neoliberal capitalism, there are not a lot of tools in my cultural context to help me to understand that. I have to learn how to live in relation. I think we have to learn how to live relationally. And that was really what I was doing in that second film, 'We Story the Land'.

[00:18:55] **Peter Andréé:** Thank you, Martha. There's a lot to think about in everything you've just said, and I'm going to follow up on some of those points in a second. I would like to turn it back to Sherry for a minute to - you know, you both articulated how the response to the Marshall decision by the Canadian government specifically in relation to the lobster fishery in L'sítukuk was to want to impose a new colonial regime or renewed colonial regime.

[00:19:29] And as I recall your community, Sherry, said no, in various ways. And I wonder if you can tell me a bit about how within your own community and traditions, what have been the efforts to establish or reestablish a fishery that fits within a Mi'kmaw cultural acceptance.

[00:19:54] **Sherry Pictou:** This is a real difficult question to answer. I think learning, you know, there's been a lot of learning and relearning. And there's some disappointments, it's like one step forward, 10 back, one step forward, 10 back. But what has happened is we were - we were outside of earning any livelihood. But we kept a food fishery going, and I even hate using those terms because there's food fishery, there's a food fishery case, and there's a commercial case. And that's an essence how livelihood has been determined for us that you either participate in the food fishery and you don't sell that fish, or you participate in the commercial fishery, albeit you have to do it on our terms.

[00:20:45] And so that's basically the division, where it kind of preempts any attempt to say, well, is there a way that we can do both? Is there a way that we can attend to both a food economy here,

where our food is looked after first? And is there a way that also that we can make a living off that? In essence we've been sort of fishing on the sidelines. In the meantime, When this court case had taken place in 1999, it immediately triggered treaty negotiations here in Nova Scotia, referred to as the Made-in-Nova Scotia Process, or there's the Mi'kmaq Rights Initiatives that administrates this treaty negotiation process. But what had happened, it wasn't until 2013, until the Mi'kmaq chiefs filed a court application, forcing the federal government to get a mandate to negotiate this.

[00:21:50] And I sat through that court case and some of the court proceedings or the preliminary proceedings. And it was, our lawyer was Professor Naomi Metallic who's also at the school of law now at Dalhousie University. And it really gave you a taste of that colonialism. It really gave you a taste of where they were thinking.

[00:22:16] And I think the most hurtful for those of us who were in that courtroom was when they refer to Donald Marshall Jr and that particular court case, which was to us a treaty right court case, as a criminal case. But to make a long story short, we were set to go. We were set to fight that. The judge at that time, this was Nova Scotia Supreme Court, was giving us the go ahead to go. But within the 11th hour, The Department of Fisheries and Oceans came forward and said, Okay, now we're ready to negotiate.

[00:22:51] So 1999, 2013, now let's jump it ahead to 2020. So they're negotiating this and under the Mi'kmaq rights initiative, they're negotiating. Okay, what would a livelihood fishery? But why does happen during these past 20 years, you become so used to those parameters that's been set by the government that it's even difficult in my own community - you will hear talk about a food fishery, a commercial fishery, and so forth. And it's very difficult to step outside of that colonial thinking, because that's how the majority of the Mi'kmaq's been fishing for the last 20 years.

[00:23:34] And what had happened to us was that we had at a community meeting, one of the fisher folk had said, look We didn't get all the licenses, we didn't get the money and said, Let's just try to do something on our own, we need a boat. And so we partnered with another community and we started doing this and now we have our own fishing boat.

[00:24:00] From my point of view, and this is not my whole community, but from my point of view, what is missing there or the danger there is that we have to start having community meetings again, because we're starting to - though we're toeing the line, so to speak, which I say in 'In Defense of our Treaties',

there's still a danger of falling into the trap of that fisheries regime as being the only way to do things. Having said that, that seems to be the only way that we can legally do that.

[00:24:38] Now, having said all of this, despite that in 2020 that they're negotiating, what a Mi'kmaw livelihood, the fisheries are, our band, our community, along with two other communities have opted out of that. And they're watching how those deliberations take place, but we opted out so we're not there at the table. We're on the side table, but we're not there because of the fear that somehow again, that these renewed negotiations, if you will, are going to impact treaty rights in a way that water down basically what our treaty rights are, the right to self determine, the right to determine how we want to fish.

[00:25:32] And so that's basically where things are at now. It's been difficult. And I haven't been directly involved in the community. They still come to me from time to time, to the chief and council to get some guidance and so forth, but I have not been directly involved, but just observing what is going on, that's sort of what I'm seeing. And that was the fear that former Chief Frank Meuse and I had way back in the early 2000s is that, we start fishing this way, this is going to really set the parameters of how we do anything else. And that's sort of where we're trying not to fall into the trap. So it's sort of like what we have one foot in and one foot out. If that makes sense.

[00:26:20] **Peter André:** Yes, it does make a lot of sense. And what you've been describing I think is so useful for our listeners to understand the insidiousness of the colonial project that as you say, just the time lags of 20 years, how assumptions made by the state, the colonial state can get internalized in your community, as people are just, they're trying to get by and they have to, they want to get fish for their families. And so they start working in certain ways and, and using certain language that is promoted by the state. And I can just see the - I can see what you're talking about.

[00:27:02] Martha, as part of your PhD work at Concordia University and alongside the film we've been talking about 'In Defense of our Treaties', you also made other films on the plight of small scale fishermen, such as the longline fishermen of Nova Scotia in the face of the forces of economic globalization, or what you described earlier as neoliberalism.

[00:27:24] In the film 'In Defense of our Treaties', we also get some hints through the narrative of the shared struggles between small scale lobster fishermen and the lobster harvesters of L'sítukuk. What do

you see as the parallels, as well as the distinctions, when it comes to the challenges facing these two groups in the context of the larger forces at work on this planet in the early decades of the 21st century?

[00:27:47] **Martha Stiegman:** You know, in the decade before the Marshall decision came down, in the 1990s, there was a huge kind of tooth-and-nail struggle in non-Native fishing communities against the privatization of the fisheries. The Department of Fisheries was trying to impose an individual transferrable quota system onto the small scale fishery. And I won't get into the details of that, other than to just say that it was a, you know, it's a neoliberal model of fisheries management that literally privatizes the fish and is designed to consolidate the industry, to consolidate the takeover of large companies.

[00:28:27] And so in that, you know, there was - Every office of DFO in Nova Scotia had been occupied. In Digby, there had been a march of 3,000 out of the 5,000 people who live in Digby had marched in the streets to protest this. BUT, you know, the apartheid regime in rural Canada was so complete that people in L's'itkuk, who shop for groceries in Digby didn't know about these struggles that were happening in the very fishing industry that they were being assimilated into, through the quote unquote "recognition" of their treaty rights.

[00:29:06] But out of that movement had come, out of those struggles had come this movement for community-based fishery management, this kind of small and mighty movement. And I had the chance to meet people who had been involved in that as well as people from Mi'kmaw fishing communities, just a couple of years after Marshall came down, and it felt to me as though the stars were just fading from people's eyes.

[00:29:30] You know, the hope had been that if this movement for community-based management could find common cause and unite with Mi'kmaw communities - whose newly recognized treaty rights gave them a much stronger position from which to advocate for, you know, local management, for a much stronger conservation ethic and fisheries management - that if those two groups could come together, that they could somehow, you know, they could be the wedge in the dam against the privatization of the fisheries, that it could begin a process of really putting in place a different vision. And I don't want - in saying that I don't want to underplay the incredible racist violence and backlash that happened in rural Nova Scotia in the wake of the Marshall decision. And a lot of credit is due to former chief Frank Meuse in terms of the kind of peace building process that he and other fishing leaders

engaged in to calm those waters. But I think, you know, the DFO saw the danger in that kind of alliance, in those two groups coming together, and they did everything in their power to negotiate separately and to keep those groups separately.

[00:30:51] But, you know, there was at least in L'sítukuk a lot of very interesting sort of cross-cultural learning that was happening. And Sherry could speak more eloquently to this than I, but, you know, from the L'sítukuk perspective, it was about learning about the neoliberal transformations that were happening in this industry. But non-Native leaders told me about how, you know, they didn't see fish as food anymore, they saw a fish as a commodity that they were chasing, and how the model of community-based management in Bear River was much stronger, that there was a much deeper level of community accountability and so on.

[00:31:31] So there was a lot there that could have been built on, and that did continue to be built on in that area. And I think there's, you know, I think we're seeing more Indigenous-settler alliances in social movements, you know, and in the Maritimes. We wouldn't have a ban on fracking if it hadn't been for the Mi'kmaw leadership in L'sipuktuk in southern New Brunswick and the kind of solidarity that was shown to them by both Acadian and an English Maritimers in that struggle, you know. And we're starting to see more and more of these alliances, not just in the climate justice movement, also in the food movement.

[00:32:11] But these are also, you know, they're difficult conversations to have because it means that we as settlers in these movements also have to recognize that we have complicity in this colonial project and that the way that the agenda of our movements has been set has, it's not just about inclusion, it's about changing the agenda because we've really excluded our Indigenous neighbours in ways that have continued the colonial project. And so there's a lot of alliances that can be made, but there's a lot of learning and a lot of power giving up that needs to happen in order for that to happen successfully.

[00:32:57] **Peter André:** Sherry, I know that you bring a feminist angle to your work when it comes to thinking about the challenges facing Indigenous communities in Canada and how they can be responded to from a governance perspective. I also understand that you're connected through movements like La Via Campesina with small scale food producers and fisherfolk from around the world. How do you see the parallels and distinctions between the challenges facing community-based food harvesters around the world and those that Mi'kmaw people?

[00:33:26] **Sherry Pictou:** Yes. This is a real deep question. When I saw that, I thought, how do I respond to that, because there's so many layers. First of all, let me just speak a little bit from an Indigenous feminist perspective, that number one, the treaty rights that we win in the court cases is to do with natural resources, a lot of them. And those are predominantly male driven sectors. So there's an automatic exclusion of Indigenous women from the outset. Having said that, I think you're seeing Indigenous women take the lead in terms of protecting our natural resources, sources of food, land and water.

[00:34:11] Some of the parallels that I see globally. I haven't worked with the World Forum of Fisher Peoples for a while, and that was my connection to La Via Campesina for a few years now. But some of that work, what always stood out to me was that you're dealing with the poorest of the poor and their technology, their technical ability to access resources, is very small and in some places in the world, very crude. And I don't understand then why is this mega neoliberal economic development model being imposed on the poor? So what happens, there's a tremendous amount of pressure on Indigenous people, small scale producers around the world, to scale up to mass production, and it still happens even though we look at the mess we are in now with the current pandemic, look at the mess we are in with climate change.

[00:35:22] And that is a fundamental parallel. And what is the basis of that parallel around the world with poor people, small scale producers and so forth. And I should qualify what I mean by poor, I don't necessarily mean that poor by those global economic standards, but poor by that they're being displaced by those economic standards. They're being displaced by even legal apparatuses that seem to uphold economic, commercial, or neoliberal notions of economic development, as opposed to the fundamental human rights of people around the world. And that is the fundamental parallel that I see. That we are in this global economy and that seems to be the only way.

[00:36:22] And in the process of that, we're missing the very critical analysis of how that very economic development model is displacing people, and displacing people at an alarming rate, not to mention the environmental degradation that that type of mega economic development causes. So that's the only way in plain English that I can kind of say that.

[00:36:54] **Peter Andr e:** Once again, you've summarized a lot of really important developments there. And it is really - I think it's important for students listening to this and listeners to connect what's

happening here within Canada, what I'm sure they're thinking about in their other courses, as they think about sort of quote unquote "development" in various parts of the world and what this all means for how we as increasingly a globalized culture are exporting these models into all kinds of contexts and displacing, as you say, people, and disrupting longstanding relationships between people in their environments.

[00:37:37] Martha, in 'We Story the Land', we see the efforts of L'sìtkuk to renew its traditional canoe routes and its relations to that land and those waters. And as a filmmaker, you were able to experience the trip in its entirety. Can you talk with us a bit about the politics behind the trip, which crossed from quote unquote, "reserve" land and waters through what are now private lands and lands and waters now designated as either provincial or national parks in Nova Scotia? And following that, I wonder if you can tell us a bit about what it meant as a treaty partner with the Mi'kmaq what were your takeaways from that experience?

[00:38:19] **Martha Stiegman:** Sure. I mean, I think there's two different ways that I could, that I could answer that question just in terms of what the politics of the trips were or was, rather. One is on the level of process and the other is on the level of the political significance of the trip itself.

[00:38:36] I think in terms of, in terms of the process of making the film and of doing the project, which was very important for both Sherry and myself, you know, it started with us approaching the community and saying, Hey, we did 'In Defence...', do you want to do another project together? And Sherry, and then Sherry and myself, you know, talked to different community leaders and to different harvesters in the community to try to figure out or try to learn what efforts were underway that this kind of project might be able to amplify.

[00:39:11] And all roads led to Counselor Carol Ann Potter and the Seven Paddles Project in the community, which is very much part of larger efforts within L'sìtkuk to recover [Mi'kmaq word] - translates roughly as taking what you need. It's about the ability to provide for oneself and one's community in a sustainable way, but in a way that recognizes community as not just a human community, but you know, that web of relations that I and Sherry were talking about earlier. So, you know, there's been lots of efforts within L'sìtkuk to recover this, you know, there had been efforts to to do some stream restoration work in and around the reserve.

[00:39:58] And then there had been this very important and significant canoe trip from L'sítukuk all the way to Kejimikujik, which I believe was a six day trip and Kejimikujik is an incredibly significant cultural site for the Mi'kmaq, there are petroglyphs there, there's a burial ground there, it's a traditional place.

[00:40:20] So that has been really powerful. You know, Carol Ann was interested in having an experience where the youth could be a part of that. And I should also say that part of the Seven Paddles idea is also to establish perhaps ecotourism lodge, lodges along some of these routes. But before doing that, Carol Ann was really wanting to build a reflective space in the community to strengthen what she called the spirit of the project. And so that was really see what that trip was about. And what the process of making the film with people in the community was about.

[00:40:57] And I think, I, you know, I understood that in certain ways, but, you know, Carol Ann in the film, she talks about how, you know, the Mi'kmaq belong to the land, how they're the blood running through the veins, the river running through the streams and that in healing the land they're healing themselves. Sherry talks about how you reconnect to the land, you reconnect to yourself. You learn to respect the land, you learn to respect yourself. So there was, you know, a lot of very deep, meaningful stuff that was going on in those four days that we spent together.

[00:41:39] In a larger political level, you know, this is a Mi'kmaw community asserting jurisdiction over its territory, beyond the boundaries of the reserve. This is a Mi'kmaw community reoccupying its traditional territory, which I think we're seeing in Indigenous communities across so-called Canada.

[00:41:59] And I ask Carol Ann in the film, What are the rights that the government recognizes that's allowing you to do this? What are the political mechanisms that have put this in place? And she just kind of turned the question around on me and she said, Those questions belong in a different realm. I'm not interested in how I fit into your world. I'm interested in how you fit into mine. This is what we wanted to do. This is what the ancestors told us to do. And this is what we're doing.

[00:42:29] It really is this kind of exciting assertion of sovereignty at the community level. It's - this is resurgence in action. You know, I think it bears mentioning that this is also land that has been clearcutted for hundreds of years. This is not quote unquote "valuable" land in the eyes of the crown. If the trans mountain pipeline was slated to go across this territory, it would be a very different story. Regardless, there's a lot of very significant weight to this move, not only for L'sítukuk, but for also other Indigenous communities who are, who are learning from this experience.

[00:43:09] **Peter André**: I think you've explained it really well, Martha, how important this was for the community. As a viewer watching the film and especially coming after having just watched 'In Defense of our Treaties', I could, I got a bit of a sense of how important this is for the community in terms of it's, as you say, kind of from a healing perspective, from a self determination perspective from a resurgence, a revitalization...

[00:43:39] Sherry, I want to pass it to you. What was, what do you think the importance of that trip was and what was just presented in that film? And I wonder if you can also tell us, I think that's been a couple of years ago now. Has anything happened since to kind of further down this path.

[00:43:58] **Sherry Pictou**: Yeah. That's a very interesting question. You know, regardless of what is happening or not happening, I first want to say that I've always conveyed this to Martha, that she's helping us witness a point in time. And I think it's very important because at some point I think the younger generation will be asking, how did we get from, you know, how do we get to the place that we're getting? And they will either have the tools or they won't.

[00:44:34] And I think that 'We Story the Land' was very much about witnessing a regeneration, renewal, resurgence, if you will, of that close connection. It comes up quite strongly in the film that, you know, that either, I don't think, Martha and I could have anticipated the way that it did. And so there's this, there's this witnessing now that we can pass on to the next generation.

[00:45:05] And I think the plan was, you know, initially that we were going to get backing to what we call here, like we have a long history of guiding, guiding, like sports, fishermen, and hunters and so forth. And that's taken on a different dynamic now because of that film. It's not just hunting and it's not just fishing. It's about, you know, what is your relationship with the land and the waters?

[00:45:33] I'm not sure exactly what will come next, but I know that that canoe trip has really encapsulated what community is about outside of those formal treaty negotiations, if that makes sense. And we just had one of the elders pass away who is a very strong matriarch, particularly with moose hunting and so forth, but we just had her pass away, Elder Pat, and in that film, she talks about. How being - sorry, a little bit emotional here - out on the land. It's our freedom. And that was a take-home from that. And I do think that there are, in my discussions with the chief and so forth, there is some move towards how can we, you know, turn this into a critical part of not only adult learning, but the education system to some extent.

[00:46:39] **Peter Andrée:** Well, first off I'm sorry to hear about the loss of Elder Pat for your community. But I think, you know, the film, as you say, it does bear witness to that - we get hints of the intergenerational transfer that's happening between people like Elder Pat talking about their experiences on the land, and their - why it's so important for them culturally. And then the youth who are also presented in the film, talking about what that experience means for them. And, I can imagine that this is going to have an ongoing legacy for the community.

[00:47:21] We've spent almost an hour together. And so I think it's about time to wrap up, and I just want to thank you both for - you know, it's been a wide-ranging conversation. I'm trying to put it all together in my head, but I think Sherry, you really explained well what the ongoing colonial processes look like for the Mi'kmaq people and similar things are happening with Indigenous people across the country.

[00:47:53] And then you've also kind of made the parallels with small scale fisher folk around the world and communities that are struggling with this neoliberal globalization. And Martha, you've also kind of brought in the larger processes at work here that I think for students in these courses who are trying to understand, you know, the global environmental crisis, it very much has economic and political roots, it's got a history in relationships between people and between people and land that go back hundreds of years. And there are ongoing processes today, notwithstanding, you know, the many efforts to develop a more sustainable planet in which those exploitative processes continue and really need to be challenged.

[00:48:49] And then what I really take from these films and from our discussion today is how that challenge is happening. It's been happening all along. It's been happening for hundreds of years and it continues today. And it's really exciting to see in these films, the critical challenging of the colonial project, the patriarchal frames through which the Western world has kind of been thinking about people in nature, and the resurgence that we're seeing as your community reconnects with itself and with its own places and stories the land. And Martha for you as a non-Indigenous settler, the kind of treaty partner you're trying to become, I think is a great model for many of the non-Indigenous students who might be listening to this and thinking about you know, the next steps that they might take in working in this area.

[00:49:52] So, but before we end, I want to give you each a chance, if there's anything else that you want to say to help students watching and try and understand these films or any final thoughts you have related to the discussions of today. And I'll turn it first to you, Martha.

[00:50:09] **Martha Stiegman:** You know, when I finished 'In Defence of our Treaties', former chief Frank Meuse gifted me with an eagle feather. And I was overwhelmed and very grateful and he kind of smiled at me and he said, Careful the story comes with a lot of responsibility. And so I took from that, that I didn't get to walk away.

[00:50:39] You know, I've talked a lot in this interview about the learning that I've done and that the learning that settler people have to do. And how much we can take in terms of that kind of learning process from Indigenous struggles, like the kind of efforts that I've had the honor of witnessing in L'sítukuk. But with that comes a tremendous responsibility also to give back, to find out what our gifts are that we have to contribute and to stand up in as many ways as we can find to fight for the recognition of Indigenous rights on Indigenous terms in this country.

[00:51:22] **Peter André:** And do you have some final thoughts, Sherry?

[00:51:26] **Sherry Pictou:** Yes. You know interestingly enough, Martha and I have been trying to connect over the last past month, and this is the first that I've heard of her voice in a while and it's, you know, Instead of doing our visiting, we're just jumping right into this. And but likewise, it's been a very interesting journey with Martha and I've never ran across a researcher that took the time and care to develop that relationship with us. And that's just something that I would like to convey to students, with timelines all aside that that are imposed on the university, sometimes these take these relationships take a long time to build. And my daughter now is going on 22 and I have pictures of when she was maybe six or seven that Martha took of her. And so that gives a indication of how long and committed Martha has been to this community.

[00:52:37] And any takeaways is what I always tell students is, you know, this is a matter of consent. This is a matter of, you know, People giving consent or not given consent to what is being done to our earth. And I always encourage students to look at their own processes for citizenship engagement. And I'm quite sure there are similar frustrations, though there are different processes because of the treaty rights and because of the Indigenous rights and so forth, but to even look at your own rights are being violated in your own backyard. And across this country with the neoliberal approach to economic

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development, I see there's very little consent and I think that we need to pay attention to how things are construed, how things are construed to almost manufacture consent without taking into consideration those longterm implications of the type of environmental degradation and destruction that was being done.

[00:53:46] And unfortunately, you'll see a lot of play off between jobs and the environment. And somehow we have to find a balance between those two. And I'm hoping in, you know, the silver lining in this crazy chaotic time we are with the pandemic, that we do not go back to status quo. I think there's a lot to learn from this pandemic that maybe open up possibilities.

[00:54:15] **Peter Andr e:** Well, thank you both for, what's been a, for me, a really inspiring conversation and I hope for the listeners as well. Wela'liq to you both. This wraps up this episode of the Ecopolitics Podcast. I want to say thank you to Dr Sherry Pictou and to Dr Martha Stiegman.

[00:54:37] Don't forget to check out other episodes and the series at [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca). And please do send us your feedback on these episodes. We really appreciate hearing from our listeners and we'll be sure to include links to the videos that we were talking about. So thank you again to our guests and we'll talk to the listeners on the next episode.