

Acknowledging Where I Stand

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On April 25, 2020, Day 40 of what has become known as Lockdown, I went on my daily and early morning walk to watch the sun rise on the Lake Ontario shoreline. As the still cold water lapped the gathering of stones, I laid down tobacco I received in 2016 from Woodland Cultural Centre's first crop along with some cedar from a tree in my backyard; the offering was bundled in the pink, green, and gold batik fabric that came from the Indonesian city where my mother was born. I put the tobacco down to acknowledge my bond, responsibilities, and gratitude as I live, work, create and build meaningful relationships on the traditional territories of many Nations for more than 15,000 years. As a non-Indigenous scholar of mixed race origins (Indonesian and Dutch) my intercultural work with Indigenous communities across Canada started fifteen years ago during my undergraduate studies at the University of Guelph. I was researching nineteenth-century Canadian government policies, the media, and connections to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. Over the years my relations continue to grow not only as a collaborative member across artistic, theatre, research, and educational endeavours, but also as an ally and advocate. I've learned to mobilize my privilege as a citizen, but also as an educator. From my first day of teaching classes over eleven years ago to the ones I develop for my current and future courses, my syllabi are inclusive of Indigenous voices and critically integrated. My connection to the land changes and so to does the way I synthesize and express my acknowledgement in my classrooms (whether that be in person or over Zoom). To have a whole, comprehensive, and generative educational experience, students must not only understand and acknowledge the land they study, work and live on, but they must also do the sometimes hard self-reflexivity of discovering their changing connections to it and the communities that live upon it. The acts of citizenship are ones of conscious engagement and self critical assessment to develop an intercultural understanding about the multiplicity of Indigenous sovereignties, worldviews, epistemologies, historical contexts, present celebrations, ongoing challenges of colonialism, and future paths forward toward well being, equity, and justice.

Teaching in-class or remotely offer unique opportunities to guide students to learn about themselves as they discover their relationship with, and responsibilities to the world they live in. Learning about the land they stand on locally [wherever that might be] is an important place to start.

As I write this, I'm sitting at my kitchen table in my make shift office. From here, I can look out my window and see the street I live on and also acknowledge that I am on the territories of Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Chippewa, Anishinabek, and Haudenosaunee Peoples. It is the territory that holds the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Confederacy of Ojibwe, and allied nations to care for the Great Lakes. I am grateful to teach and guide students as they learn their potential; I am grateful for the borrowed stones I find at the lake each morning, the ever-changing water and sky, and shoreline I walk along as I make my way back home.