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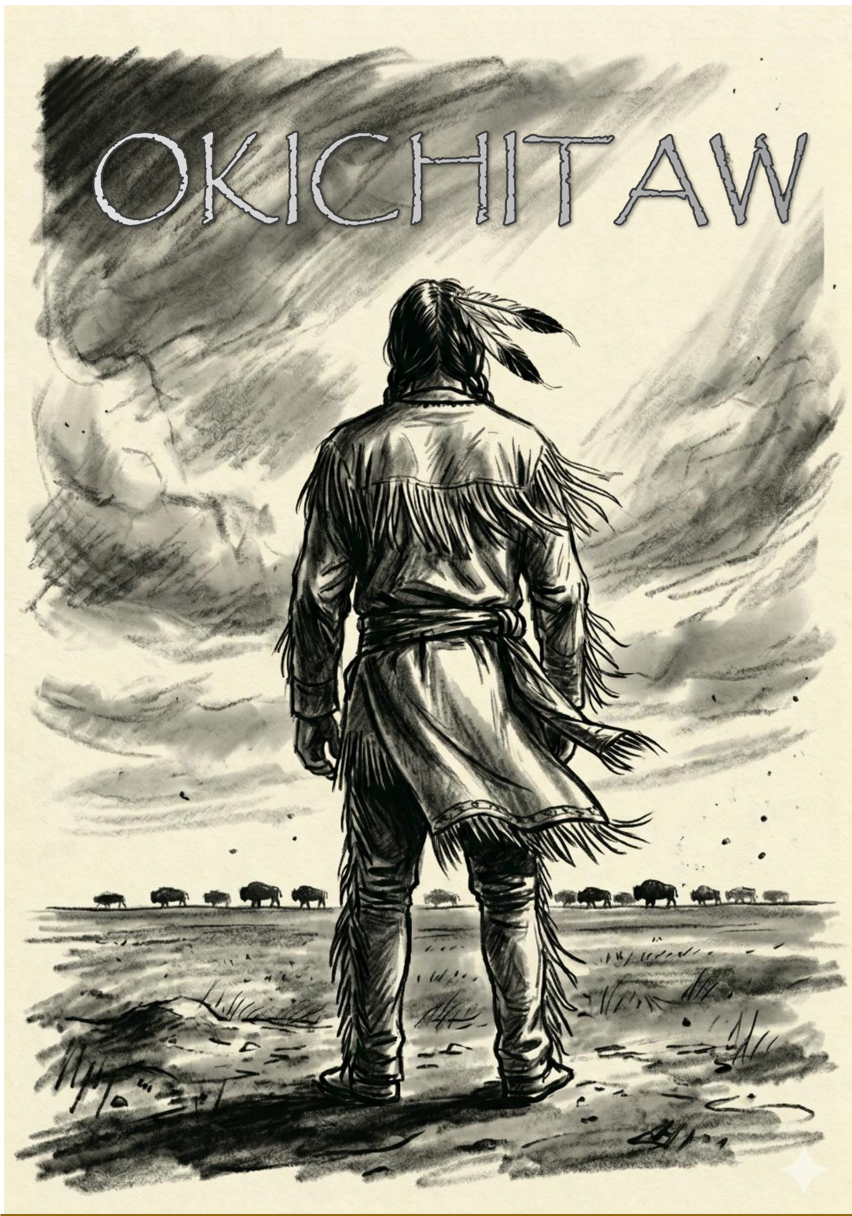

VOLUME I

The World of the Nêhiyawak

History · The People · The Land · Philosophy · Cosmology · The Founder

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Preface

> *"Nimiyâwâkan kî-pâhpihkêmâkahêkoyan."*
>
> *"My Ancestors fought for me."*
>
> *— Nêhiyaw Oral Tradition*

The Encyclopaedia of the World's Martial Arts — EMAM — was born from a simple question that no existing encyclopaedia could answer to any satisfying degree: how many martial traditions exist in the world, where were they born, how did they develop, and what do they tell us about the peoples who created them? The available literature — vast for the Asian traditions, almost entirely absent for the African, American, and Oceanic ones — reflected a deep and stubborn prejudice: that the "real" martial arts were the ones from Japan, China, and Korea, and that the rest of the world had at best primitive fighting systems without the philosophical and technical depth of the Asian traditions. The EMAM is an attempt to correct that prejudice through the most effective method available: rigorous documentation.

The project was born within CSAM.ONLINE — Centro Studi Arti Marziali — with the goal of producing a systematic, scientifically grounded record of the world's martial traditions. Not a superficial catalogue — a paragraph for each system, a photograph of a warrior in costume — but a deep analysis that places every tradition within its

historical, cultural, geographical, and cosmological context. An encyclopaedia that would treat Okichitaw with the same seriousness that an academic handbook devotes to Kendo: not as exotic curiosity, but as a coherent and complex system with its own internal logic and its rightful place in the heritage of humanity.

The choice to begin with Okichitaw — the traditional martial art of the Canadian Great Plains — was not the obvious one. One could have begun with Brazilian Capoeira, already widely documented; with Malay Silat, supported by a rich academic literature; with Māori Mau rākau, recognised as New Zealand national heritage. Okichitaw was chosen for three reasons that reinforce one another. First: it is the system most poorly documented relative to its historical and cultural importance. Second: its recognition by WoMAU/UNESCO in 2002 provides a solid institutional reference point. Third: its Founder, George J. Lépine, is still living and has collaborated in the making of this volume through the material he prepared for the OIMA/UNESCO documentation. His voice is not absent from these pages. It is present in every line that speaks of what Okichitaw truly is.

The Structure of the Work

The EMAM is designed as a multi-volume work, each volume dedicated to a specific martial system or to a family of systems from the same cultural region. Volume I, presented here, is devoted entirely to Okichitaw and to the Nêhiyaw culture that generated it. The decision to dedicate a full volume to a single system — rather than grouping several systems in a geographical or thematic collection — is deliberate: no martial system can be understood without understanding the people who created it, the territory that formed

that people, and the history that determined the conditions under which the system survived — or nearly vanished.

Volume I is the foundation. It carries fourteen chapters that analyse the people, the territory, and the history from which Okichitaw emerged: from the precolonial world in full sovereignty, through the long shadow of the Fur Trade, the signing of Treaty No. 6, the Resistance of 1885, the sixty-six years of the Indian Act during which every Nêhiyaw ceremony was a criminal offence, and the long, difficult road of cultural resurgence that finally brought Okichitaw back into the open in 1997. The volume closes with three chapters on the philosophy of the system: the Medicine Wheel, the Seven Teachings of the Grandfathers, and the ethical code of the warrior.

A second volume — "The Art of the Warrior" — will enter the Lodge itself: the Four Gates, the weapons, the techniques, the pedagogy, and the living transmission of the system as it exists today. The two volumes are conceived as a unity. The reader who wishes to understand the second must have read the first, because technique without the culture that generates it is like syntax without vocabulary: precise, perhaps, but empty of meaning.

The Sources and the Method

The sources of this volume fall into four categories, clearly distinguished throughout the text through the epistemological classification system adopted by the OIMA/UNESCO for the Okichitaw curriculum and extended here to the full critical apparatus of the work. The C1–C4 classification — described in detail in the Methodological Note that follows this Preface — indicates the degree

of certainty behind every piece of information: from independently verifiable primary sources (C1) to the author's interpretation (C4). This epistemological transparency is the most important methodological contribution of this volume: not to claim a certainty one does not have, but to show exactly on what grounds every statement rests.

C1 sources — primary, independently verifiable — include the historical documents of the period: the journals of traders and explorers, the reports of federal agents, the official texts of the Treaties, court decisions, and the direct testimonies of the protagonists of the events described. They include also contemporary institutional sources: the Okichitaw International Martial Arts website, official Canadian government documents, and the Supreme Court decisions cited in Chapter 7. For these sources, citations are precise and verifiable.

C2 sources — OIMA/UNESCO documentation — refer primarily to the manuscript prepared by George J. Lépine and Okichitaw International Martial Arts for UNESCO documentation purposes. This document — unpublished and therefore not available to the general public — was made available to the author by Lépine himself for the purposes of this volume. It is the most complete document on the Okichitaw system currently available, and it provided the foundation for many of the technical and historical aspects analysed in this work. Its statements are recorded as C2 — OIMA documentation — to distinguish them from independent historical sources.

C3 sources — academic sources — include the historical, anthropological, and linguistic literature produced by Canadian Indigenous Studies and by the scholarly tradition of research on the

history of the Great Plains. The works of David Mandelbaum, Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, James Daschuk, Sarah Carter, and many others provided the historical framework within which to situate the specific history of Okichitaw. The linguistic scholarship of H.C. Wolfart and Freda Ahenakew provided the tools for understanding Nêhiyawêwin and its relationship to Nêhiyaw cosmology and culture. The complete bibliography is in the closing apparatus of the volume.

C4 interpretations — the author's own — are the most numerous, but also the most clearly identified. Every time this volume makes a statement that is not directly supported by one of the three preceding categories — every time it proposes an interpretive connection, a comparative analysis, or a synthetic conclusion — that statement is marked as C4. The reader is therefore always able to distinguish what this volume knows from what it proposes. This distinction is more than academic honesty: it is the respect owed to the Nêhiyaw tradition, which classifies statements according to the degree of certainty with which the speaker makes them.

A Note on Positionality

The author of this volume is a non-Indigenous person writing about an Indigenous culture. This position requires an explicit reflection that many similar volumes omit as if it were irrelevant. It is not irrelevant: it is one of the most important methodological questions in contemporary Indigenous Studies. The risk of cultural appropriation — presenting as one's own the knowledge that belongs to another — and the risk of exoticisation — presenting Indigenous culture as curiosity for an outside audience — are real risks that this volume has sought to navigate with awareness and care.

The measures taken to reduce these risks are of three kinds. First: direct collaboration with Lépine, and the treatment of the material he himself prepared for the OIMA/UNESCO as the privileged source for describing the system — his words before mine, always. Second: the epistemological transparency of the C1–C4 system, which clearly identifies what comes from the tradition and what comes from the author. Third: the choice to present Nêhiyaw culture in its complexity and internal diversity rather than as a homogeneous monolith — showing the internal conflicts, the differing positions of the Chiefs, the tensions between tradition and modernity is an act of respect for the richness of Nêhiyaw thought.

This volume was not written for the Nêhiyawak. It was written primarily for practitioners of martial arts, for historians, for anthropologists, and for readers curious about the diversity of the world's warrior cultures. If some Nêhiyaw communities were to find it useful in their own processes of cultural documentation and revitalisation, that would be an unplanned and deeply welcome result. But it is not the audience for which it was written, and so it does not claim to be what it is not: a voice from within the tradition. It is a voice from outside — looking with the greatest possible respect and rigour at a system that deserves to be known, studied, and remembered.

Acknowledgements

The most important intellectual and human debt of this volume is to George J. Lépine, Founder of the Okichitaw system and Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew — Warrior Chief Teacher — of the Nêhiyaw martial tradition. His willingness to share the material prepared for the OIMA/UNESCO, his reflections on the principles of the system, and

his openness to dialogue with a non-Indigenous researcher were indispensable. Without his generosity, this volume would not be what it is.

George carries within him the blood of Ambroise-Dydime Lépine, the Adjutant General of Louis Riel. He carries the memory of his uncle Ted, who kept the martial tradition alive through the long silence of the prohibition, passing it to his nephew when it was still, technically, a criminal act. He carries the mandate of the Elders who recognised him as the rightful transmitter and gave him the title that is both a name and a responsibility. He carries all of this into every Lodge he opens, every student he teaches, every demonstration he gives. This volume is, in part, an attempt to make that weight visible — so that those who read it understand that Okichitaw is not a system someone invented: it is something someone protected, at a cost, so that it could survive.

A specific debt belongs to the historians who built the academic foundation on which this volume stands: Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser for the history of the 1885 Resistance, James Daschuk for the documentation of the politically induced famine, Sarah Carter for the analysis of agricultural policies on the reserves, and Katherine Pettipas for the history of the prohibition of ceremonies. Their research made possible the historical narrative of Chapters 5 through 10. Any errors in the use or interpretation of their work are the sole responsibility of the author.

A final acknowledgement goes to the community of CSAM.ONLINE that has supported this project from its earliest stages; to the institutions that made their archives accessible — Library and Archives Canada, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, the Saskatchewan Archives Board; and to all the martial arts practitioners

in the world who have understood that their own tradition has much to learn from the traditions of others.

Francesco Dore
Founder, CSAM.ONLINE
Sardinia, 2026

Introduction

A Teacher Who Stopped Teaching — and Began to Write

I. The Floor as a Starting Point

Everything I know about combat I learned by falling. That is not a metaphor: it is a precise technical description.

Years of Traditional Karate — the white gi, the stubborn pursuit of perfect Kime, the liturgical silence of a dojo I built with my own hands — taught me that the floor is the only partner that never lies. It always receives you, as long as you accept coming down to its level.

I left active teaching after years of believing I had the answers. In truth, I only had the wrong questions. The day I closed the dojo was not the end of something: it was the moment I stopped pretending to know and began, truly, to learn.

That transition — from the physical space of the dojo to the mental space of research — is the origin of everything you hold in your hands.

I came to understand that writing is no different from fighting. It demands the same discipline, the same brutal honesty with oneself, the same capacity to strip away what is unnecessary in order to reach what is essential. The blank page is my new tatami. And this volume is the first serious result of that practice.

II. The Question No Encyclopaedia Could Answer

Every martial arts practitioner, sooner or later, asks the same question: what lies beyond one's own discipline? How many traditions exist in the world? Where were they born? What do they tell us about the peoples who created them?

When I began searching for answers, I found something uncomfortable: the available literature was vast for the Asian traditions, and almost non-existent for all the others. This was not accidental. It was the product of an old prejudice — what postcolonial theory calls epistemic Eurocentrism: the implicit conviction that the "real" martial arts were the ones from Japan and China, and that the rest of the world had at best primitive fighting systems without the philosophical depth of the Asian traditions. A bias so pervasive it had become nearly invisible, even to someone like me who considered himself open and curious.

From that moment of clarity, CSAM.ONLINE was born — Centro Studi Arti Marziali. Not a dojo. Not a federation. A research and documentation centre with one precise goal: to produce the Encyclopaedia of the World's Martial Arts, treating every tradition on earth with the same rigour that an academic devotes to Kendo, with the same depth that an anthropologist devotes to any other form of cultural knowledge.

III. The Encounter with Okichitaw

I did not find Okichitaw. Okichitaw found me. I was searching for martial systems of North American Indigenous cultures when I came across a piece of news from 2002: an Indigenous Canadian martial

system had received recognition from the World Martial Arts Union, connected to UNESCO. The name of the system: Okichitaw. The name of its Founder: George J. Lépine.

My first impression was one of academic curiosity: a system recognised at an international level, virtually unknown in Italian literature. An open field.

The second impression — as I began reading the available materials — was something much stronger. Okichitaw is not simply a combat system. It is the product of a history of extraordinary depth and complexity.

A people decimated by epidemics. A Treaty systematically violated. A century of legislative suppression. A tradition passed in secret from uncles to nephews when practising it was still a criminal offence. And then the resurgence, the recovery, the international recognition.

I reached out to Lépine. He responded with openness and with materials. The manuscript prepared for the OIMA/UNESCO — an unpublished document, dense with historical, technical, and cosmological information — was placed at my disposal.

That generosity, I understand now, was entirely consistent with the philosophy of Okichitaw itself: the transmission of knowledge is not an act of ownership. It is an act of responsibility. Lépine wanted this history documented. I wanted to document it faithfully. This volume is the result of that meeting.

IV. The Decision to Write an Encyclopaedic Treatise

I could have written an article. A forty-page essay on Okichitaw as a case study. I did write one, as an intermediate step. But every time I tried to compress the history into a smaller space, I lost something essential.

I lost the people. I lost the territory. I lost the decades of suppression that make the recovery not a folkloric curiosity but a political and cultural act of the first order.

Okichitaw cannot be understood without the Nêhiyawak. The Nêhiyawak cannot be understood without the history of the Canadian Plains. The history of the Canadian Plains cannot be understood without Treaty No. 6. Every simplification produced a distortion.

I decided to write the encyclopaedic treatise I had wished to find when I began searching: one that treats every martial system not as a list of techniques but as the product of a specific civilisation — its people, its land, its history, and its cosmology.

The EMAM is a long-term project. This Volume I — devoted entirely to Okichitaw and to the Nêhiyaw culture that generated it — is the first in a series that will cover martial systems from every continent. Each volume will follow the same structure: first the people, the territory, and the history; then the technical system in its specificity. Because technique without the culture that generates it is like syntax without vocabulary: precise, perhaps — but empty of meaning.

V. How This Book Was Written

The method governing this volume is the C1–C4 system: the systematic distinction between what is verified and independently documented, what comes from the OIMA/UNESCO primary source, what comes from the academic literature, and what is my own interpretation. Every statement carries its own epistemological marker. Not out of an excess of formalism: out of respect for the reader.

Writing this volume required years of research I had not anticipated. I read Canadian historians I had never heard of. I studied the transliteration system of the Nêhiyawêwin language without being able to pronounce it correctly even after months. I moved through the history of the Residential Schools with the uncomfortable feeling of something one would rather not read — but must.

Part of the method was the choice not to conceal what I do not know. I am a non-Indigenous person writing about an Indigenous culture. I do not speak Nêhiyawêwin. I have never been to Saskatchewan. I have never trained in a Lodge. The Declaration of Positionality that follows this Introduction lists these limitations formally. Here I say only this: honesty about who one is and what one knows is the first possible act of respect toward what one studies.

VI. For Whom This Book Was Written

This book was written for anyone who wishes to understand Okichitaw in its full integrity. The martial arts practitioner who wants to know where what they practise truly comes from. The Indigenous Studies scholar who finds in the martial tradition a cultural

dimension rarely examined. The historian of the Canadian Plains who encounters here an unusual perspective on familiar ground. The curious reader who has heard the word Okichitaw and wants to understand what it really means.

It is not a book for those seeking combat techniques. Those are in Volume II. This is the book of context: the world that made the system both possible and necessary. The two volumes are conceived as a unity — separable in format, inseparable in meaning.

I wrote this book in the conviction that the martial arts of the world — all the martial arts of the world, not only the Asian ones — are part of the intellectual and physical heritage of humanity. To document them with rigour and respect is a cultural act as much as an academic one.

In this specific case, it is also a political act: to document a tradition that was prohibited by law is to state, clearly and on the record, that that law was wrong.

I do not need more than that to justify the years I have devoted to writing what you are now reading.

Francesco Dore
Founder, CSAM.ONLINE

Declaration of Positionality

A formal statement required by the EMAM editorial framework

The EMAM editorial framework requires that every volume include a formal declaration in which the author specifies their position relative to the subject of study: who they are, from which perspective they write, what they are not, and what they do not know.

This declaration is not a rhetorical gesture. It is an epistemological requirement: every source of knowledge has a position, and making that position explicit is the first possible act of intellectual honesty.

Who I Am

Francesco Dore is Italian — born and raised in Italy, formed within a Western European cultural tradition. He practised Traditional Karate for years and was an active instructor. He founded CSAM.ONLINE with the goal of producing encyclopaedic documentation of the world's martial arts traditions. He is the editor and principal author of the EMAM.

From Which Perspective I Write

I write as a scholar who is external to the tradition. I am not Nêhiyaw. I am not Indigenous. I am not Canadian. I have never trained in

Okichitaw inside a Lodge. I do not speak Nêhiyawêwin. I have never lived on the Canadian Plains.

My perspective is that of someone who has studied this tradition through the available sources — written, oral, and institutional — with the greatest possible rigour and with full awareness of their own limits.

I was granted access to the OIMA/UNESCO manuscript through the generosity of George J. Lépine. That generosity allowed me to reach information that would otherwise have been inaccessible. It did not make me an insider of the tradition. The distance between having access to a document and living inside a tradition is the same distance that exists between reading a manual on swimming and knowing how to swim.

What I Am Not

I am not a spokesperson for the Nêhiyaw community. I am not authorised to speak on behalf of the Nêhiyawak, and I do not represent their political positions or their legal claims. The political positions of the Nêhiyawak present in this volume are documented through their sources and attributed to the people who expressed them.

I am not an Indigenous Studies academic. This volume draws on that scholarly literature as a C3 source, not as a peer contribution. I am not a linguist: the treatment of Nêhiyawêwin in this volume is based on secondary sources and not on direct linguistic expertise. Any

errors that a specialist would find are my responsibility, not the responsibility of the sources I used.

The Known Limits

The primary limit is one of physical distance. Never having stood on the Saskatchewan plains produces an understanding that remains, to a certain degree, a bookish one. I cannot eliminate this limit. I can only name it.

The second limit is one of language. The nuances of the Nêhiyawêwin — its animate and inanimate grammatical categories, its evidential system, its polysynthetic structure — can be described but not fully understood by someone who does not use them as instruments of daily thought. What this volume says about the language is true, but it is incomplete.

The third limit is one of perspective. This volume was written primarily through the lens of written European and Canadian sources, supplemented by the OIMA/UNESCO documentation. The Nêhiyaw oral tradition — which carries different and complementary versions of many of the events narrated here — is present in the available C1 and C2 sources but not in its full richness. There are stories this volume does not know, because they were never written down, or because they are not accessible to someone writing from the outside. This is a structural limit, not one that more bibliographic research can resolve.

Why I Wrote This Volume Despite These Limits

These limits exist and will remain. But the available sources also exist. The collaboration of Lépine exists. The serious academic literature built over decades by Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians alike exists. To document Okichitaw with the limits of this perspective is better than not documenting it. The absence of documentation does not protect a tradition: it renders it invisible.

The Nêhiyaw People survived sixty-six years during which their ceremonies, their languages, and their martial practices were criminal offences. They transmitted what mattered through the silence, through the uncles, through the long patience of those who knew that the prohibition would not last forever. They survived not because the world documented them — it did not — but because they refused to let themselves be erased.

This volume is not what saved Okichitaw. George J. Lépine saved Okichitaw — and his uncle Ted before him, and the Elders who gave him the mandate, and the students who enter the Lodge and begin again. This volume is only the written record of what they kept alive. Written by an outsider, with respect, with rigour, and with the full weight of knowing how much it cost them.

If a Nêhiyaw reader finds errors, simplifications, or distortions in these pages, they are mine. If they find information that is useful, precise, and respectful, that belongs to the sources I tried to use well. This asymmetry of responsibility is part of the positionality of someone who writes from the outside about a tradition that is not their own.

How to Use This Book

A practical guide for the reader

This volume has a layered structure that can be navigated in different ways depending on what the reader is looking for. This guide explains how to find your bearings.

1. The C1-C4 System in the Section Notes

Every section of this volume ends with a note inside an ochre-bordered box. The note lists the sources and precedes each reference with an epistemological marker:

[C1] independently verifiable primary sources — historical documents, official texts, court decisions

[C2] OIMA/UNESCO manuscript — unpublished documentation provided by George J. Lepine

[C3] peer-reviewed academic sources — historical, anthropological, and linguistic literature

[C4] the author's interpretation — a connection or conclusion that goes beyond the sources

The reader who wants only the narrative can ignore the notes entirely: the text stands on its own. The reader who wants to verify a specific statement will find the exact reference in the note. A [C4] marker signals that the author is interpreting, not merely reporting: that statement can be questioned, discussed, or contested.

For George J. Lepine and any Knowledge Keeper reading this volume: wherever you find a [C4] marker, that is the place where the author's voice is most visible — and where your correction or guidance would be most valuable.

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2. The Structure of the Volume

The volume is divided into five parts:

Part One Chapters 1-2
The system defined: what Okichitaw is, in all its layers of meaning.

Part Two Chapters 3-4
The People and the Land: the Nehiyawak in their own terms, and the territory that formed them.

Part Three Chapters 5-10
Five centuries of history: from the precolonial world through the Fur Trade, the Treaty, the Resistance, the century of suppression, and the long resurgence.

Part Four Chapter 11
George J. Lepine: the man who brought Okichitaw back into the open.

Part Five Chapters 12-14
Philosophy and cosmology: the Medicine Wheel, the Seven Teachings, and the ethical code of the Warrior.

Suggested reading routes depending on available time and purpose:

Essential overview -- Ch. 1, 3, 7-8, 11, 12
Six chapters that give the full arc of the story: the system, the people, the Treaty, the Resistance, the founder, the cosmology.

The historical thread -- Ch. 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Five centuries from precolonial sovereignty to the birth of Okichitaw in Toronto in 1997.

The philosophy -- Ch. 12, 13, 14
The Medicine Wheel, the Seven Teachings, and the Warrior's ethical code — the three chapters that reveal the intellectual architecture of the system.

For the practitioner -- Ch. 1, 11, 12, 13, 14
What Okichitaw is, who built it, and the cosmological and ethical framework that every Lodge session embodies.

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3. The Closing Apparatus

The closing apparatus of this volume includes several reference tools designed for different types of use.

The **Glossary** lists Nêhiyawêwin and technical terms with CRO transliteration, English translation, and a short definition. Terms appear in italics at their first occurrence in each chapter. The Glossary is divided into four sections: A (Nêhiyawêwin terms), B (Okichitaw technical terms), C (institutions and historical/legal terms), D (key concepts of the system).

The **Analytical Index** lists over 110 subject entries — persons, places, institutions, concepts, and Nêhiyawêwin terms — with page references verified directly against the PDF of the volume. It is the preferred entry point for anyone using the volume as a reference work rather than reading it sequentially.

Appendix A contains the full text of Treaty No. 6 (1876), translated into Italian with the original English provided in italics for each article, and a critical commentary on all 23 articles. Appendix B contains selected primary documents: the suppression clauses of the

Indian Act (1884–1951) and the TRC Calls to Action nos. 88, 89, and 90 (2015).

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4. The CRO Transliteration Conventions

The CRO — Cree Roman Orthography — is described in full in the preceding Note on the Nêhiyawêwin Language. For reading purposes, two things are sufficient to know:

> Vowels with a macron *(a, e, i, o with a bar above)* are long vowels. The length changes meaning — it is not a decoration.
>
> The vowel *e-circumflex* has no equivalent in English. It sounds approximately like the "e" in the French word "le".

Nêhiyawêwin terms marked with **(?)** are present only in the OIMA manuscript and cannot be verified against the academic dictionaries. The marker alerts the reader that the orthographic accuracy of those forms cannot be confirmed.

A Note on the Nêhiyawêwin Language

The CRO standard adopted in this volume

This volume uses the Nêhiyawêwin language — Plains Cree, Y-dialect — systematically: for the technical terms of the Okichitaw curriculum, for proper names in their original form, and in quotations from the oral tradition. The transliteration follows the CRO standard — Cree Roman Orthography — as specified below.

A note for readers who already carry the language: this volume is written primarily for an audience with no prior knowledge of Nêhiyawêwin. The explanations that follow are offered in that spirit — not to instruct those who already know, but to give those who do not the tools to encounter it with respect.

The CRO Standard

The CRO is the system for transcribing Plains Cree into Roman characters, adopted by H.C. Wolfart and Freda Ahenakew in their 1998 dictionary and recognised as the international academic standard for Plains Cree. This volume uses it as its primary transliteration system.

Long vowels carry the macron: **ā, ē, ī, ō**. Vowel length is phonologically distinctive in Nêhiyawêwin — it changes meaning. For example: *nêhiyāw* (a Cree man) and *nêhiyawêwin* (the Cree language) differ precisely in the length of the final vowel. A macron is not a typographical choice: it is carrying the sound faithfully.

The vowel **ê** indicates the central mid vowel of Cree, with no direct equivalent in English. It is pronounced approximately like the “e” in the French word “le” — a soft, central sound.

Consonants follow their standard English phonetic values, with two exceptions: **/c/** represents the affricate /ts/ — never /k/ or /ch/; **/y/** is always a semivowel (as in “yes”), never a fricative. The glottal stop is indicated with a reversed apostrophe **(’)** where phonologically relevant — as in *Zaagi’idiwin* (Love), one of the Seven Teachings.

Variants in the OIMA Materials and Forms Marked (?)

The OIMA/UNESCO manuscript occasionally uses spellings that differ from the CRO standard, particularly for the technical terms of the Okichitaw curriculum. When the two systems diverge, this volume adopts the CRO standard as the primary form and notes the OIMA variant in parentheses at the first occurrence.

Forms not attested in CRO or in C1/C3 sources — present only in the OIMA manuscript and not independently verifiable — are marked with a question mark: *form (?)*. The marker signals that the form has been faithfully reported from its source, but cannot be considered orthographically verified. The principal forms marked (?) in this volume are: *okimahkan (?), kiskinahumakew (?), mâmahkâpimisiw (?)*.

Proper Names, Place Names, and Nation Names

Proper names of historical persons follow the established English-language spelling when that is the form attested in the historical sources: Poundmaker, Big Bear, Mistawasis, Batoche. The Nêhiyawêwin form is added in parentheses at the first occurrence when available.

Nation names follow the denomination preferred by the Nations themselves. This volume uses:

> **nehiyawak** not "Cree"
> **Niitsitapi** not "Blackfoot"
> **Nakoda** not "Stoney Sioux"

Place names use the official Canadian denomination as the primary form, with the Nêhiyawêwin name in parentheses at the first occurrence: Saskatchewan River (Kisiskatchewanisipi). Where the Nêhiyawêwin name carries direct cultural significance for the text, it is used as the primary form.

An Approximate Pronunciation Guide

This guide is offered for readers with no prior knowledge of Nêhiyawêwin. These are approximations only — a Cree speaker would hear the differences clearly. For accurate audio pronunciation, the Plains Cree Dictionary online provides recorded examples:

plainscree.massey.ac.nz

nehiyawewin --> *neh-hee-YAH-oh-WEH-win* (the Cree language)

nehiyawak --> *neh-hee-YAH-oh-wak* (the Cree People)

Okichitaw --> *oh-KI-chi-TAU* (the martial system)

okichitawak --> *oh-KI-chi-TO-wak* (the worthy warriors)

pakamahakan --> *pa-ka-ma-HA-kan* (the war club)

okimaw --> *oh-KI-mau* (civil leader)

okimahkan --> *oh-ki-MAH-kan* (war leader (?))

Kisiskatchewanisipi --> *ki-SIS-ka-tche-WAH-ni-si-pi* (Saskatchewan River)

Wanuskewin --> *wa-NUS-ke-win* (ceremonial site near Saskatoon)

Wisahkechahk --> *wi-SAH-ke-chahk* (the Trickster)

Methodological Note

How this volume is built and how to read it

The logic of the C1-C4 classification system and its four source categories are described in the Preface. This note covers everything the Preface does not: how to read the section notes, how the Nêhiyawêwin is transliterated, how oral sources are treated, the editorial conventions, and the terminological choices made throughout the volume.

1. How to Read the Section Notes

The notes appear at the end of each section (H2), inside the ochre-bordered box. They are not footnotes: that choice is deliberate. The text flows without interruption; the reader can move through each chapter continuously and return to the notes at the end of each section to verify or explore further.

Each note opens with the epistemological marker — [C1], [C2], [C3], or [C4] — immediately before the reference to which it applies. When a single note draws on sources from different categories, each reference carries its own marker. The note is therefore readable both as a list of sources and as a map of certainty: the reader can see at a glance which pieces of information in that section are independently verifiable and which are interpretation.

An example of how a note reads:

> *[C1] Morris (1880), Appendix A. [C3] Stonechild & Waiser (1997), ch. 1. [C4] The analysis of deliberate vagueness as administrative discretion is the author's.*

References follow the author-date format. The full citation is in the Bibliography. Page numbers are given only when the citation concerns a localised fact or a direct quotation. Direct quotations in the main text are always in italics and quotation marks, with a cross-reference to the section note.

2. Transliteration of the Nêhiyawêwin

This volume adopts the Wolfart-Ahenakew system — the international academic standard for Plains Cree, established in the 1998 dictionary — as its primary transliteration framework. A full explanation of the system, including pronunciation guidance, is in the preceding Note on the Nêhiyawêwin Language. This section covers only the conventions specific to this volume.

Nêhiyawêwin terms appear in italics at their first occurrence in each chapter and in roman type in subsequent occurrences, following standard academic practice for technical terms integrated into the text. Terms from other Indigenous languages — Lakota, Anishinaabemowin, Nakoda — are italicised every time they appear, to distinguish them visually from the Nêhiyawêwin.

Forms marked with (?) are present only in the OIMA manuscript and cannot be verified against the CRO standard or

independent C1/C3 sources. They are reported faithfully from their source; the marker alerts the reader that their orthographic accuracy cannot be confirmed.

3. The Treatment of Oral Sources

The Nêhiyaw oral tradition is not reducible to the categories of written sources. This volume applies three distinct criteria depending on the type of oral source.

Recorded and published oral testimonies — the collections of Freda Ahenakew, the transcripts of TRC hearings, the texts gathered by academic linguists — are treated as C3 when they come from systematic, peer-reviewed collections. When they are direct testimonies from eyewitnesses to the events described, they are C1.

Oral traditions reported by Lépine in the OIMA manuscript or in publicly verifiable interviews are C2. They cannot be independently verified, but they come from an identified source with a name, a position, and community legitimacy.

When the Nêhiyaw oral tradition contradicts the European written sources on the same event, this volume does not resolve the contradiction by automatically privileging one over the other. It presents both versions and identifies the reasons for the divergence — different perspectives, different purposes at the moment of recording, different historical moments of transcription.

The history of the Canadian Plains was written predominantly by those who won. The sources of those who did not win deserve the same space on the page — not uncritical faith, but the same space.

4. Editorial Conventions and Abbreviations

Dates follow the Gregorian calendar. Approximate dates are indicated with "ca." Extended historical periods use the form "the 1870s" or "the latter half of the nineteenth century" rather than a specific year, to avoid false precision. Centuries are written in full: the nineteenth century, not the 1800s.

Direct quotations in the main text are in double quotation marks and in italics. Translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated. For the Nêhiyawêwin, translations are verified against the Wolfart-Ahenakew dictionary (1998) and the Plains Cree Dictionary online.

Recurring abbreviations:

HBC = Hudson's Bay Company
NWC = North-West Company
NWMP = North-West Mounted Police
CPR = Canadian Pacific Railway
TRC = Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
OIMA = Okichitaw International Martial Arts
WoMAU = World Martial Arts Union
CRO = Cree Roman Orthography

5. Terminological Choices

The terms used to name Indigenous peoples carry a political history that this volume does not ignore. The choices made throughout are as follows.

Nêhiyawak is preferred to "Cree" throughout the volume. "Cree" appears only in direct quotations or in official designations such as "Cree Nation." Nêhiyaw is the endonyme — the name the People use for themselves. Cree is an exonym of uncertain origin.

"Indigenous Peoples," "Indigenous Nations," and "Indigenous communities" are used as synonyms throughout. "Aboriginal" appears only in direct quotations from Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, which uses that term. "Indian" appears only in quotations from historical sources and in the official title Indian Act, where modernisation would alter the meaning of the document being cited.

"Settler" and "colonial" are used in a descriptive sense, not as simplified moral judgements. They describe historical structures that the documents of the period itself — including those of the Canadian government — recognised as such. Using these terms does not imply that every individual involved in those processes was morally condemnable: it means that the processes had precise structural characteristics which historiography designates with these words.

A final note on capitalisation: this volume capitalises Elder, Knowledge Keeper, Lodge, Circle, Medicine Wheel, Seven Teachings, and Treaty when referring to specific cultural and institutional concepts within the Nêhiyaw tradition. This is consistent with the practice of the communities themselves and with the growing standard in Canadian Indigenous literature and journalism.

PART ONE

IDENTITY AND DEFINITION

Chapter 1 — What Is Okichitaw: A Layered Definition

This chapter does not have one answer. It has fourteen. The question "what is Okichitaw?" cannot be answered in a single sentence without

sacrificing most of what makes the system significant. This is not because the subject is obscure: George J. Lépine, the Founder of the system, has produced more written, audiovisual, and institutional documentation than many Asian martial arts of comparable reach. The difficulty lies in the structure of the system itself. Born within a worldview — that of the Nêhiyaw Plains Cree — in which the categories “sport,” “art,” “ceremony,” “therapy,” and “politics” are not separate compartments but dimensions of a single integrated reality, Okichitaw resists by definition any one-dimensional framing. Every reading that reduces it to just one of these dimensions captures part of the system and loses the whole.

The method of this chapter is therefore that of layered definition: fourteen perspectives on the same object, arranged in an order that moves from the general to the particular, from the outside to the inside, from the definitional to the classificatory. Each section can be read on its own, but the full meaning emerges only from the whole. The reader who has moved through all fourteen sections will have a conceptual map rich enough to read the historical, technical, and philosophical chapters that follow without reducing the system to something already familiar.

A necessary methodological note. The statements in this chapter are of different epistemological kinds: some are historical facts documented by primary or peer-reviewed sources (marked C1); some describe the Founder’s codification choices (C2); some reflect the Nêhiyaw worldview as gathered by identified researchers (C3); some are the author’s interpretive analysis (C4). A reader who encounters a statement that seems bold can trace its category and evaluate its weight. This marking system is the primary tool through which an encyclopaedic work ensures its own intellectual honesty.

1.1 — The Impossibility of a Simple Definition

The term "martial art" is a relatively recent and profoundly Eurocentric taxonomic category. In its modern form, it spread globally through three converging channels: the Japanese mediation of the concept of budō ("way of the warrior"), codified as a modern pedagogical system between 1880 and 1930 by figures such as Kanō Jigorō and Morihei Ueshiba; the cinematic diffusion of Asian arts in the 1960s and 1970s, through Hong Kong cinema and Bruce Lee; and the inclusion of certain disciplines in international sports structures, culminating in Judo's entry into the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. This triple genealogy produced a category that carries embedded within it the assumptions of a specific tradition and presents them as universal.

Japanese budō, as codified in the Meiji period and then exported to the world, is founded on certain premises that martial arts practitioners tend to regard as obvious: individual progression through formalised grades; a clear separation between practice and real application through kata and randori; a dedicated and ritually separate training space (the dōjō) distinct from ordinary life; a hierarchical teaching structure with the sensei at the apex. These structures are not universal features of human combat: they are specific cultural choices of second-half nineteenth-century Japan, rationalised and diffused globally for precise historical reasons related to Meiji nationalism, modernisation, and subsequent international sportification.

Martial systems developed in different cultural contexts follow radically different logics. Kalarippayattu of Kerala (southern India) is inseparable from Ayurvedic medicine, Brahminic cosmology, and devotional rituals to ancestral spirits: one cannot "learn Kalarippayattu" in the way one learns Judo, because

transmission occurs within a guru-disciple relationship that is also a spiritual relationship. Brazilian Capoeira does not separate combat from music and dance: the berimbau dictates the rhythm of the fight, the cadence of the exchange is determined by the music, and removing the music destroys the very structure of the combat. The Indonesian Pencak Silat has versions that include Islamic rituals as an integral part of training, not as an optional ceremonial addition.

Okichitaw takes this problem to its logical extreme. It is a system born within a worldview — that of the Nêhiyaw Plains Cree — in which the Warrior is not a professional of violence but the armed servant of the community; in which the Land is not a backdrop for action but a subject of relationships (the principle of wâhkôhtowin — the extended kinship that includes the Land, the animals, and the Ancestors); in which time is not a linear arrow but a cycle of returns in which the Ancestors participate in the present; in which knowledge is not an individual asset but a communal responsibility that is earned and transmitted. None of these premises is compatible with the category "martial art" in its standard form, which presupposes an individual acquiring skills progressively and using them for personal ends.

The practical consequence for this volume is that the question "what is Okichitaw?" cannot receive the answer "it is a combat system of the Canadian Plains" without losing 90 per cent of what makes the system significant. It can instead receive fourteen partial and complementary answers, each illuminating an aspect the others do not capture. The sum of these fourteen answers is still not Okichitaw — it is only the map of Okichitaw. But a rich and accurate map is the prerequisite for not getting lost in the territory.

A final observation before proceeding. Some readers might object that the definitional difficulty has been overstated for rhetorical effect. The objection is understandable but does not survive empirical verification. Comparing two definitions proposed by authoritative sources reveals the extent of the divergence. The OIMA manuscript describes the system as "an Indigenous martial art combining the culture and traditions of the Plains Warriors with the techniques of Eastern martial arts." Researcher Jennifer Adese, in her article on the recovery of Indigenous warrior practices (American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 2014), describes it as "a project of decolonisation through the body." Both definitions are accurate. Neither is sufficient on its own. This is the problem the fourteen sections try to solve.

> [C4] The genealogy of the term "martial art" through Meiji budō: Inoue, S. (1998). "Budō: Invented Tradition in the Martial Arts." In Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds). The Invention of Tradition. Cambridge University Press. [C4] Non-Japanese martial systems as counter-evidence: Green, T.A. and Svinth, J.R. (eds). (2003). Martial Arts in the Modern World. Praeger. [C2] The OIMA manuscript definition: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, "Introduction" section. [C4] The Adese definition: Adese, J. (2014). "Reclaiming Indigenous Warrior Traditions." American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 38(3).

1.2 — Deep Etymology: okichitawak, the Worthy Warrior

The name Lépine chose for his system is not an invention: it is an existing Nêhiyaw word, with a documentable semantic history traceable through the lexical corpora of Plains Cree and through the ethnographic sources. Analysing its morphology means analysing the system itself in its deepest structure, because in the Nêhiyaw worldview the name of a thing is not a conventional label but a description of its nature.

The Algonquian language family — of which the Nêhiyawêwin is a member of the Cree branch — builds its terms through the agglutination of morphemes with precise meanings. The term okichitawak breaks down into three verifiable morphological elements. The root okichi- belongs to the semantic field of demonstrated capacity, proven worth, fitness recognised by the community: not an innate quality but a recognition earned through time and through concrete actions. The component -taw- is associated with the function of agent, of active carrier of something. The plural suffix -ak transforms the concept into a category of persons. The most morphologically faithful translation is therefore: "those who have proven themselves worthy," or "the carriers of worth recognised by the community."

This etymology has implications that go far beyond linguistics. The term okichitawak is structurally different from "warriors" or "fighters." It does not describe what a person does, but what a person has become through community recognition. The distinction is fundamental: an ordinary warrior may be any individual who fights; an okichitaw is specifically someone to whom the community has formally attributed the title of worthy. In the Nêhiyaw social system documented by Mandelbaum (1940), this recognition was neither automatic nor hereditary: it was earned through specific acts — courage demonstrated in war or in situations of extreme danger, generosity toward the community, protection of Elders and the vulnerable, the capacity to maintain order during collective hunts — and could in theory be revoked if subsequent behaviour did not confirm it.

The term is also distinguished from nahâyawak — ordinary warriors, all those who fought — which the OIMA manuscript uses to identify the lower rung of the warrior hierarchy. The nahâyawak were

warriors by function; the okichitawak were warriors by recognition. The difference is analogous to that between "soldier" and "hero" in Western military culture: the soldier fights out of duty or necessity; the hero is someone to whom the community has attributed superior moral quality through their acts. But even this analogy is imperfect, because in Western use "hero" is often an individual and narrative category; in Nêhiyaw use, the okichitaw is an institutionalised communal function with precise duties and specific authority.

The historical function of the okichitawak was twofold. In war, they were the warrior elite of the band: the first to fight, the most skilfully armed, the most courageous. But the function most fully documented by Mandelbaum is that of internal policing during the collective Buffalo hunts. The collective hunts — the buffalo jump and the buffalo pound — required absolute discipline: if a single hunter moved before the established moment, the herd scattered and the entire band lost critical food resources for the winter. The okichitawak were authorised to punish transgressors immediately and publicly: to destroy their bow, confiscate their arrows, strike them physically if necessary. This authority was legitimate and recognised: it was not arbitrary violence but the application of community order by those who had been invested with that responsibility.

In the modern system codified by Lépine, this etymological root translates into a conception of the training path as aspiration to a title, not as acquisition of techniques. Students of the Lodge are not "learning Okichitaw" in the sense of absorbing a set of combat techniques. They are walking a path of personal transformation that — if completed successfully and recognised by the community — moves the practitioner closer to the title of okichitaw in the moral sense of the term. Technique is necessary but not sufficient; character is necessary but not sufficient; only the integration of both, assessed

over time and in daily behaviour inside and outside the Lodge, moves the practitioner toward recognition. This principle distinguishes Okichitaw structurally from combat sports, in which grade advancement measures exclusively technical performance.

It was precisely during the consultations with the Elders of Manitoba at the end of the 1980s that Lépine received the mandate to use the name okichitawak for the system. As he stated in the Cowboys & Indians interview of May 2022: “The Elders wanted the name to express not only the structure of combat but the whole of the values of the Indigenous way of life.” This statement illuminates the logic of the choice: a name that indicates not what one does but what one has become, not a technique but a quality recognised by the community, was the right name for a system that aspires to form people, not fighters.

> [C1] The morphology of okichitawak: Wolfart, H.C. and Ahenakew, F. (1998). The Student’s Dictionary of Literary Plains Cree. Memoir 15, Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics. [C1] The historical function of the okichitawak as hunting police: Mandelbaum, D.G. (1940, repr. 1979). The Plains Cree. Canadian Plains Research Center, ch. 5. [C2] The Elders’ mandate for the name: Lépine in Cowboys & Indians (May 2022).

1.3 — The Systemic Duality: Two-Eyed Seeing

Among all the characteristics of Okichitaw, the one that most clearly illuminates its nature is its deliberate hybrid structure: the explicit choice to use the pedagogy of Eastern martial arts as a “container” and the Nêhiyaw cultural content as its “content.” This choice is not the result of a compromise or of casual cross-contamination: it is a conscious project that has a name and a theory in North American Indigenous academic tradition. That name is Two-Eyed Seeing.

The concept of Two-Eyed Seeing was formalised by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall of Eskasoni First Nation (Nova Scotia) in the early 2000s. His original formulation reads: "the capacity to look with one eye towards the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and with the other eye towards the strengths of Western knowledge, and to use both those eyes together, for the benefit of all." The concept was systematically developed by Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall (2012) in the context of science education and health, where Indigenous researchers learned to integrate the methods of modern biology with traditional ecological knowledge. The result, in that context as in Okichitaw, is a system richer than any unilateral approach.

Lépine does not explicitly use the term "Two-Eyed Seeing" in his public materials: he uses formulations such as "combining my Indigenous heritage with my knowledge of martial arts" (Cowboys & Indians, 2022). But the structure he has built corresponds precisely to the principle. From the Eastern side, he took: the curriculum structure with progressive levels (the kyū and dan of Judo), the concept of formalised training space with ritual protocols (the dōjō), the belt grading system with colour symbolism, the opening and closing protocols of the session, and systematic drilling as a method of motor memorisation. From the Nêhiyaw side, he retained: the weapons (Gunstock War Club, tomahawk, knife, lance), the philosophy (the Seven Teachings, the Medicine Wheel), the terminology (the curriculum is taught in Nêhiyawêwin), the ceremonial protocols (smudging, recognition of Elders), and the cosmology (the Four Gates as cardinal directions).

The operation is methodologically analogous to what Kanō Jigorō did for Judo in 1882. Kanō had received the fragmented transmission of jūjutsu from several different schools; he codified it into a unified pedagogical system that maintained the technical

content of the original traditions but organised it into a structure accessible and transmissible to modern students. Lépine had received fragments of Nêhiyaw warrior knowledge from oral family tradition; he codified them into a structured curriculum that maintained the Nêhiyaw cultural content but organised it into a structure that a modern student in Toronto can follow. The difference is that Kanō operated within his own culture; Lépine operated across two cultures, and the decision to use the Eastern container rather than inventing a new Nêhiyaw pedagogical structure from scratch was a precise strategic choice.

The reason for this strategic choice is documented in Lépine's own statements. The Nêhiyaw oral transmission of combat techniques had survived through the century of suppression (1885–1951) in fragmentary form: technical fragments passed from uncles to nephews, embodied knowledge without formalised pedagogical structure. Reconstructing a Nêhiyaw pedagogical structure from scratch would have required decades and expertise that was not available. Using instead the pedagogical structure of Eastern arts — already tested, already familiar to urban students, already capable of transmitting complex content progressively — allowed the energy to be focused on the content, not the container. Two-Eyed Seeing, in this sense, was not an abstract philosophical choice: it was a pragmatic solution to a concrete problem of transmission.

The potential tension in this choice is acknowledged in the literature on Indigenous tradition recovery. A Nêhiyaw martial art that uses the structure of the Japanese dōjō risks being a Nêhiyaw art "in Japanese form" rather than a Nêhiyaw art "in Nêhiyaw form." This tension is real. What can be stated here is that Lépine's choice received the support of Nêhiyaw Elders, and that the result — a system practised by urban Indigenous youth who recover through it the

language, the ceremonies, and the cultural identity of their Ancestors — suggests that the tension has been managed successfully, at least in the current phase of the system.

> [C1] Two-Eyed Seeing: Bartlett, C., Marshall, M. and Marshall, A. (2012). “Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned.” Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences, 2(4), 331-340. [C2] The hybrid structure of the system: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; Lépine in Cowboys & Indians (2022). [C4] The parallel with Kanō Jigorō is the author’s. Reference for Judo codification: Kano, J. (2013). Judo Memoirs of Jigoro Kano. Trafford Publishing.

1.4 — The Land as Biomechanics: The Art of the North

No combat system is independent of the physical environment in which it was born. This may seem obvious, but it is rarely translated into concrete analysis in the martial arts literature. Karate manuals do not explain why the biomechanics of the zuki are optimised for the polished wooden floors of Okinawan dōjō. Silat treatises do not analyse how tropical heat and humidity conditioned the preference for low, wide movements that disperse body heat. Okichitaw is one of the few systems in which this environmental-biomechanical connection is declared explicitly in the official materials. The “Training Environment” section of the OIMA manuscript states: “Okichitaw is an art of the Plains. The Plains are in the system.”

The Great Canadian Plains (paskwâw in Nêhiyawêwin) present climatic conditions with no parallel in temperate Europe. The average January temperature in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, is -16.5°C, with absolute minimums regularly reaching -40°C and, during Arctic cold waves, -50°C. The average July temperature is +18.5°C, with maximums exceeding +35°C. The annual temperature range therefore exceeds 55°C — a variation that imposes radical adaptations on living beings in every aspect of material life. Added to this is the wind: the northwest wind is persistent for most of the year, with wind

chill reducing perceived temperature by 20-30°C below the measured temperature. At -20°C with wind at 50 km/h, the perceived temperature is approximately -35°C.

These conditions produce four direct and verifiable biomechanical consequences in the technical system of Okichitaw. The first is the low, rooted posture: the fundamental movements of Okichitaw maintain the centre of gravity significantly lower than standard Eastern arts. On icy or snowy surfaces, any sudden upward shift of the centre of gravity exposes the fighter to the risk of falling: a fighter with a low centre of gravity has a more stable base and can maintain mobility on terrain that would make the vertical movements and acrobatic jumps of gym arts dangerous. The second is the preference for sliding movements: “foot sliding” (gliding the foot across the ground) rather than “foot lifting” (fully raising the foot). On ice, any landing on a single foot is potentially catastrophic; the footwork of Okichitaw keeps at least one foot in contact with the ground for as long as possible.

The third consequence concerns the material selection for weapons. The Okichitaw arsenal is dominated by hard, dense woods: sugar maple (Acer saccharum), black walnut (Juglans nigra), tamarack (Larix laricina). This selection is not accidental: at temperatures of -20°C and below, metals change their mechanical properties in ways not predictable at room temperature. Thin tempered steel blades can chip or break on impact with hard objects in conditions of extreme cold. Hard dense wood, by contrast, maintains its resistance and flexibility across a much wider temperature range. The weapons of Okichitaw — the Gunstock War Club in particular — are biomechanically optimised for the climate of the Canadian Plains, not merely culturally connected to it.

The fourth consequence is total environmental awareness as a structural component of the curriculum, not an optional addition. The OIMA manuscript specifies that some training sessions take place outdoors by requirement, in any weather conditions. This is not a pedagogical eccentricity: it is the modern translation of a Nêhiyaw warrior principle documented by Mandelbaum and by all available ethnographic sources. The Nêhiyaw Warrior did not fight on the territory: he fought with the territory. The direction of the wind modifies the trajectory of any throwing technique. The position of the sun creates asymmetries in visibility. The type of terrain — ice, packed snow, soft snow, mud, tall grass, rock — determines which footwork strategies are available and which are prohibited. Training exclusively in a controlled indoor environment means producing Warriors who function only in an environment rarely found in nature.

The use of moccasins during advanced training sessions is the most visible expression of this principle. The moccasin — the traditional soft-soled footwear of tanned Buffalo or deer hide — is not a folkloric accessory: it is a technical choice with precise biomechanical reasons. The soft sole allows a quality of plantar proprioception far greater than that of hard-soled training shoes. The toes and the arch of the foot perceive variations in the terrain — irregularities, inclines, surface consistency — and transmit this information to the motor system in real time. In the Okichitaw system, this proprioceptive capacity is considered the foundation of advanced footwork: one learns to "feel" the ground before learning to move across it.

> [C1] Climate data: Environment and Climate Change Canada, Climate Normals 1981-2010, Saskatoon and Regina stations. [C2] Mandatory outdoor training: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, "Training Environment" section. [C4] The analysis of the mechanical properties of wood at low temperatures is the

> author's, with reference to: Forest Products Laboratory USDA (2010). Wood Handbook. Report FPL-GTR-190.

1.5 — The Primacy of the Weapon: A Weapon-Based System

The most fundamental distinction in the ecology of the world's martial arts is not between kicking systems and punching systems, nor between grappling and striking systems, nor between armed and empty-hand systems. It is between systems that conceive of the body as the starting point and the weapon as its extension, and systems that conceive of the weapon as the organising principle of movement and the body as its bare projection. Okichitaw belongs unequivocally to the second category, and this belonging has technical, pedagogical, and philosophical consequences that run through the entire system.

In most widely practised Eastern martial arts, the didactic progression follows the logic codified by Kanō Jigorō for Judo in 1882 and then standardised: first one learns empty-hand combat, then the weapon is introduced as an extension. In Karate, the weapons systems (kobūdo) are advanced specialisations added after years of empty-hand technique. In Taekwondo, weapons are not part of the standard curriculum. In these systems, the weapon is a prolongation of the body: the body learns to move, and then the weapon is added to that movement. The paradigm is body-centred.

In Okichitaw the principle is inverted, and the OIMA manuscript states it with precise formulation: "The hand positions and techniques learned in the empty-hand combat of Okichitaw are the foundations that are applied and built upon when weapons are introduced into the system." Read superficially, this sentence might seem to confirm the standard paradigm. But its logical structure is exactly the opposite: empty-hand techniques derive from the weapon,

they do not precede it. The body learns to move as if it were gripping a heavy object in rotational motion, and then that object is introduced to fill the gesture the body has already developed. The paradigm is weapon-centred.

The biomechanical difference between the two approaches is measurable. A Karate punch is a linear force vector: generated by shoulder rotation, the weight transfer from rear to front leg, and the final contraction of the triceps and forearm muscles. The point of maximum force is at impact, and the trajectory is a straight line. An Okichitaw strike derived from the geometry of the Gunstock War Club follows instead a rotational arc: the force is generated primarily by trunk rotation, and the point of maximum peripheral velocity — and therefore maximum force — is not at the beginning of the movement but at the apex of the arc. These are two physically different types of force: the linear punch is more explosive in initiation; the rotational strike is more powerful at the moment of impact against objects requiring penetration, such as a helmet or a leather armour.

The weapon-first paradigm also has profound pedagogical consequences that manifest from the very first session. In the standard approach, the beginning student starts with the bare body and develops over time the strength, speed, and coordination necessary to handle a weapon. In Okichitaw, the beginning student learns the weapon's trajectories by managing the weight of the weapon itself — which forces the body to adopt correct postures (low centre of gravity, trunk rotation as the primary source of force) from the start, not as a goal to be gradually reached. The weapon teaches posture through physics: whoever attempts to move a 1.2 kg war club incorrectly discovers this immediately from the vibrations in the wrist, the loss of trajectory control, and the rapid fatigue in the forearm.

The Nêhiyaw system conceptualises the body-weapon relationship through the term Mistik (wood, tree, and by extension wooden weapon in the martial context). The weapon is not mistik in the sense of an inert wooden object: it is mistik in the sense of a living entity that carries with it the material memory of its origin. In the Nêhiyaw worldview, every significant object carries the history of its becoming: maple wood carries the hardness and flexibility of the maple; walnut wood carries the density and striking force of the walnut. Treating the weapon as an animate partner — not as a tool to be used — is a cultural posture with practical consequences in training: the practitioner who respects the weapon as a living entity will handle it with greater care, precision, and safety. And will never leave it on the floor without care.

On the historical level, the weapon-first paradigm reflects the documented reality of Nêhiyaw warfare. In the wars of the Canadian Plains, a Warrior rarely faced combat completely unarmed. Empty-hand combat was the extreme exception, not the rule. Designing a pedagogical system in which the bare body is the starting point means preparing the Warrior for the least probable case. The historical Nêhiyaw system — and its codified heir — begins instead from the most probable case: the Warrior who fights with the weapons available, and who knows how to use their own body when those weapons are not.

> [C2] The weapon-first paradigm: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, "Training Philosophy" section. The "foundations" quotation is translated by the author. [C4] The comparative biomechanical analysis between the linear punch and the rotational strike is the author's, with reference to: Zatsiorsky, V.M. and Kraemer, W.J. (2006). Science and Practice of Strength Training. Human Kinetics. [C3] The concept of Mistik as living entity: OIMA/UNESCO materials; adapted from Nêhiyaw ethnography in Mandelbaum (1940).

1.6 — Okichitaw as a Linguistic Ark

Among the functions that Okichitaw serves in the contemporary Nêhiyaw community, the linguistic one is the least obvious and the most urgent. The Nêhiyawêwin — the Plains Cree, Y-dialect of the Algonquian linguistic family — is classified by UNESCO as a “vulnerable” language: the 2021 Canadian Census records approximately 86,475 speakers of all Cree varieties, within a Plains Cree population estimated at approximately 34,000 people. The proportion of fluent speakers — distinct from passive speakers or semi-speakers who understand but do not produce the language — is significantly lower than these already concerning numbers. And the trend is downward: every generation counts fewer fluent speakers than the previous one.

The principal cause of this decline is documented with precision by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). The Residential Schools system (1870–1997) imposed for nearly a century the prohibition of Indigenous languages, accompanied by physical punishment for transgressors. A generation of children who should have passed the Nêhiyawêwin to their own children grew up without using their mother tongue, developing in many cases an association between their own language and shame, danger, and punishment. Linguistic trauma is one of the most documented forms of cultural genocide perpetrated through the Residential Schools: it is not limited to the interruption of transmission, but produces in subsequent generations an active resistance to re-learning the language of their Ancestors, perceived as a source of pain.

In this context, the Okichitaw Lodge functions as a space of partial but real linguistic immersion. The training commands are given in Nêhiyawêwin. The names of the techniques and postures use

Nêhiyaw terminology. The Four Gates have their own names in the language. The Seven Teachings are presented with their Anishinaabemowin terms and the Nêhiyaw variants. The opening greeting of the session uses the Nêhiyawêwin. The name of the training space — Mistiko-Kamik — is Nêhiyaw. In some advanced sessions, instructions are given exclusively in the Indigenous language.

For many young Nêhiyaw people who have grown up in Toronto, Winnipeg, or Calgary — far from the communities where the language is still transmitted within families — the Lodge is the first context in which they hear their own mother tongue used functionally: not as an object of academic study, not as family nostalgia, but as a real instrument of communication in a concrete situation. This experience has a psychological value that goes beyond linguistic learning: it is the embodied recognition that one's own language is alive, that it exists in the present and not only in the past, that it is worthy of being spoken in public by adults. For those who have internalised the colonial message that the language of their Ancestors was inferior and useless, this experience can be transformative.

Okichitaw functions as a linguistic ark also in a more technical sense. In the Nêhiyawêwin, certain conceptual relationships — certain connections between ideas, certain shades of meaning — exist in the language and have no direct equivalent in English. The term wâhkôhtowin (kinship as cosmic law governing all relationships, including those with the Land and the animals) has no single-word English equivalent. The term pimâtisiwin (the Good Life as a state of balance with the environment, not merely individual well-being) cannot be translated as "the good life" without losing the ecological and cosmological dimension. Maintaining these terms in the original

language in the Okichitaw curriculum is not folklore: it is the preservation of concepts for which the Nêhiyaw language is the only unapproximated vehicle.

The linguistic ark function of Okichitaw extends also to the transmission of specific martial terminology. The names of the weapons, the techniques, the postures, the levels of competence — all these terms are documented, used, and transmitted through the curriculum. In an era in which the Nêhiyaw language loses fluent speakers every year, every lexical domain that survives is a fragment of a linguistic system that remains available to future generations of speakers. The Okichitaw Lodge maintains a living technical vocabulary that, without it, could disappear within a generation.

> [C1] The state of the Nêhiyawêwin: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census; UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2010). [C1] Linguistic trauma of the Residential Schools: TRC (2015), vol. 6 "Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy." [C2] The use of Nêhiyawêwin in the curriculum: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; Lépine in Cowboys & Indians (2022). [C4] The concept of linguistic ark is the author's.

1.7 — Non-Verbal Communication: The Hand Signals of Silent Warfare

In the warrior cultures of the North American Plains, communication during hunting and warfare required solutions that would not compromise the element of surprise. Vocal sound revealed the position of the group to the enemy or to the prey. The solutions developed independently by many Plains peoples converge on a common principle: a system of visual signals transmissible at a distance through the movements of the hands, the body, and sometimes objects. Okichitaw incorporates this system as a structural component of the curriculum, not as a decorative addition.

The Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL) — also called Hand Talk in historical sources — is the gestural communication system shared among nations of different languages across the North American Great Plains: Nêhiyawak, Lakota, Cheyenne, Crow, Arapaho, Comanche, and dozens of other peoples who speak mutually incomprehensible languages. It is not a simple gestural code: it is a language with its own grammar, sentence structures, derivational morphology, and the capacity to express abstract concepts, temporal relationships, and semantic nuances. Linguists Brenda Farnell (Do You See What I Mean?, University of Texas Press, 1995) and Jeffrey Davis (Hand Talk, Cambridge University Press, 2010) classify it as a genuine language in the technical senses of the term.

PISL was the lingua franca of the North American Plains for centuries. The accounts of the first European explorers document it systematically: Lewis and Clark noted in their 1804–1806 journals that different peoples communicated with each other through hand signs with surprising fluency. The Medicine Lodge Creek Council of 1867, in which the American government negotiated Treaties with five Plains Nations, took place primarily through PISL. The fact that a sign language mediated diplomatic negotiations of this scope is indicative of the level of complexity and legitimacy the system had reached within its communities of use.

Okichitaw incorporates elements of PISL in at least two documented contexts. The first is group tactical training: sequences of hand signals that allow multiple practitioners to co-ordinate — to lie in wait, advance, flank, withdraw, attack simultaneously — without making sound. These sequences are not choreographic: they are functionally analogous to the hand signals used by modern special forces in operations where silence is an operational requirement. The second context is ceremonial: certain PISL signals are integrated into

the opening and closing protocols of the session, contributing to the overall cultural immersion of the Lodge.

The reason PISL survives within Okichitaw goes beyond simple historical preservation. Training the capacity to communicate without words develops a cognitive quality that the sports literature calls non-verbal situational intelligence: the capacity to read the intentions and positions of partners and opponents through the movements of the body, without depending on verbal communication. This capacity is fundamental in real combat, where the processing time of verbal language is too slow to be useful, and where explicit communication may reveal one's intentions to the opponent. PISL in the Lodge trains this capacity systematically.

The preservation of PISL through Okichitaw also has urgent linguistic value. As Davis (2010) notes, PISL is today at risk of extinction: the number of fluent speakers is estimated in the hundreds, concentrated in the older generations. Its decline is directly connected to the loss of the social contexts in which it was functional — collective hunting, inter-tribal gatherings, shared ceremonies. Every system that keeps PISL alive, even in partial and adapted form, contributes to the survival of a language that is the shared heritage of dozens of Plains Nations.

> [C1] PISL as a language with its own grammar: Farnell, B. (1995). Do You See What I Mean? University of Texas Press; Davis, J.L. (2010). Hand Talk. Cambridge University Press. [C1] PISL at Medicine Lodge Creek (1867): Prucha, F.P. (1994). American Indian Treaties. University of California Press. [C2] The integration of PISL in the Okichitaw curriculum: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript.

1.8 — The Science of Animal Movement: Bear, Wolf, Eagle

Biomimetics — the systematic adoption of movement principles observed in animals for the development of human technologies or

techniques — is a modern academic research field (the journal Bioinspiration & Biomimetics of IOP Publishing was founded in 2006). But the hunting cultures of the North American Plains have practised it for millennia, without giving it this name. A hunter who observes how the Wolf co-ordinates the pack to exhaust prey, how the Eagle chooses the moment of attack after prolonged observation, how the Bear uses its own body weight to bring down prey larger than itself, is collecting biomechanical data that can be applied to their own practice of hunting and warfare. Okichitaw has codified this tradition into three formal technical principles.

The principle of the Bear (maskwa — black bear; mistahi-maskwa — grizzly bear) governs close-range combat and bodily control. The adult bear — between 200 and 400 kg depending on the species — is not the fastest or most agile predator of the North American Plains. Its effectiveness derives from three ethologically documented characteristics: the exceptionally low centre of gravity (the front legs shorter than the rear legs naturally incline the body downward), body mass as the primary attacking force (the paw strike uses the full weight of the body, not just the muscular strength of the shoulders), and persistence under pressure (the Bear continues the attack absorbing blows that would stop a lighter predator). In the Okichitaw system, the principle of the Bear translates operationally into: lower the centre of gravity, use body weight rather than muscular force alone, maintain contact with the ground, do not yield under the opponent's pressure.

The principle of the Wolf (mahihkan) governs group tactics and lateral movement. The ethology of the Grey Wolf (Canis lupus) documents sophisticated hunting strategies: the pack does not chase prey frontally but divides it from the group, surrounds it at a distance maintaining positions at the flanks and rear, exhausts it with a "relay

action" in which the Wolves alternate applying pressure without tiring themselves, and attacks only when the prey is isolated and already weakened. The solitary Wolf can bring down prey of comparable size; the co-ordinated pack can bring down prey five or ten times its own size. In the Okichitaw system, the principle of the Wolf translates into: avoid the frontal attack when possible, use diagonal movement to reach the opponent's blind spots, co-ordinate action with partners through hand signals, exploit the opponent's fatigue rather than depleting one's own resources in a test of brute force.

The principle of the Eagle (kihêw) governs strategic perception and timing. The Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) has vision estimated at ten times sharper than human vision: it can identify a 30-centimetre fish at the surface of the water from 300 metres altitude. But the Eagle does not attack the moment it spots prey: it observes, assesses the situation (the position of the sun, the direction of the wind, the distance, the posture of the prey), and chooses the moment of attack. The attack itself reaches 120–150 km/h: once begun it does not change trajectory. It is the assessment phase that determines its effectiveness, not the speed of execution. In the Okichitaw system, the principle of the Eagle translates into: see the situation in its totality rather than focusing on a single detail, wait for the right moment rather than acting prematurely, and when acting do so with absolute precision.

These three animal principles have a dual function that deserves specific attention. On the technical level, they are a functioning biomechanical classification system: an Okichitaw instructor can identify and correct a student's technique by saying "you are using the Wolf — lower the centre of gravity and add body weight," or "you are using the Eagle before the time — wait until the opening is real." These are precise technical instructions, verifiable in

practice. On the cultural and spiritual level, the same animals are the guides of the philosophical Teachings of the system: the Bear is the guardian of Courage (Fourth Teaching), the Eagle is the guardian of Love (Second Teaching), the Wolf is the guardian of Humility (Sixth Teaching). The practitioner working on the "Bear principle" activates simultaneously the biomechanical, the philosophical, and the historical dimension.

This deliberate overlapping of technical and symbolic dimensions is not a complication: it is the load-bearing structure of the integrated learning the system proposes. When a biomechanical technique is associated with an ethical principle and with a sacred animal, it is memorised more deeply than a technique that is only a motor sequence. The body remembers through meaning, not only through repetition. This is also why drilling in Okichitaw is never mechanical: every repetition is also an act of connection with the philosophical principle and with the natural tradition the animal represents.

> [C1] Grizzly bear ethology: Servheen, C. et al. (1999). Bears: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan. IUCN/SSC. [C1] Wolf ethology: Mech, L.D. and Boitani, L. (eds). (2003). Wolves: Behaviour, Ecology, and Conservation. University of Chicago Press. [C1] Eagle ethology: Buehler, D.A. (2000). "Bald Eagle." The Birds of North America, No. 506. [C2] The three principles as technical system: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, "Animal Science" section.

1.9 — The Lodge as Sanctuary: Intergenerational Healing

The use of the term "therapeutic" in relation to a combat system requires a premise that avoids misunderstanding. This is not "martial yoga" or "mindfulness with sticks." It is a sociologically and psychologically documented phenomenon: the practice of a culturally grounded martial system produces, in specific populations and in specific contexts, measurable effects of identity recovery, reduction of

self-destructive behaviours, and rebuilding of the sense of communal belonging. In the Nêhiyaw context, this effect is particularly documentable because the trauma from which the Lodge helps to heal is historically precise and documented.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) identified intergenerational trauma as the primary causal factor in the contemporary difficulties of Indigenous Canadian communities: addiction, compromised mental health, domestic violence, suicide, family fragmentation. The epidemiological data are documented: Indigenous peoples in Canada have suicide rates two to seven times the national average (depending on age group and region), significantly higher rates of alcohol and drug dependency, and much higher mortality rates from preventable causes. These phenomena are not "natural" characteristics of Indigenous populations: they are the clinically documentable consequences of a century of policies deliberately designed to destroy Indigenous cultural and family cohesion.

The therapeutic mechanism of Okichitaw is identifiable with relative precision. The practice of a culturally grounded martial system offers young urban Nêhiyaw people — often raised far from reserve communities, in contexts where Indigenous identity is frequently associated with social marginalisation, poverty, and stereotype — a model of positive identity grounded in the culture of their Ancestors. The okichitaw Warrior is not the victim of colonialism, not the "Indigenous problem" of the newspapers, not the "noble savage" stereotype of western films. They are someone who carries in their own body the competencies of their Ancestors, who has earned those competencies through commitment, and who is recognised by their community for that commitment.

The testimony of Johnathan Whittaker, an Okichitaw student cited in the CBC News report of November 1, 2018, is exemplary of this mechanism: "This system is great for those wounded Warriors — including people struggling with substance abuse or ashamed of their heritage. Okichitaw helped me strengthen myself and re-establish the belief that I come from a proud culture." This testimony describes a path of recovery that does not pass through traditional psychotherapy but through the embodied practice of one's own cultural elements: movement, language, weapons, ceremony. It is a recovery that happens in the body, not only in the mind.

This observation is corroborated by the clinical literature on trauma. Bessel van der Kolk, in his The Body Keeps the Score (Viking, 2014) — one of the most cited works in the psychology of trauma — documents that complex trauma is registered in the body as well as in the mind, and that somatic approaches (which work through bodily movement) are often more effective than exclusively verbal approaches for the treatment of intergenerational trauma. Martial practice is a structured somatic approach: it regulates the nervous system through breath and controlled movement, produces states of psychophysical coherence, and incorporates the physical response to danger (the fight-or-flight instinct) within a structure of control and meaning. These are exactly the mechanisms van der Kolk identifies as therapeutic for trauma.

The Lodge as sanctuary is not a metaphor: it is a physically separated space from ordinary life through the entry and exit protocol, temporally bounded by the ceremonial opening and closing, relationally structured through the Circle and mutual responsibility, and culturally dense through language, the Seven Teachings, and the Medicine Wheel. This structure reproduces, in a reduced and modern scale, the characteristics of traditional Nêhiyaw healing ceremonies.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (The Ritual Process, Aldine, 1969) identified these spaces as “liminal”: places where participants are temporarily separated from ordinary structure and can experience transformations not accessible in daily life. The Lodge is a liminal space where transformation is simultaneously technical, philosophical, linguistic, and spiritual.

> [C1] Epidemiological data on Indigenous communities: Statistics Canada (2018). “First Nations People, Métis and Inuit in Canada: Diverse and Growing Populations.” [C1] Whittaker testimony: CBC News, November 1, 2018 (author: Lorenda Reddekopp). [C1] Bodily trauma: van der Kolk, B.A. (2014). The Body Keeps the Score. Viking. [C4] The application of Turner’s concept of liminality (1969) to the Lodge is the author’s.

1.10 — The Temporal Dimension: The Presence of the Ancestors

The Nêhiyaw conception of time is radically different from the linear one that dominates Western scientific and legal thought. In Western thought, time is an arrow: the past is closed and irretrievable, the present is the transition point, the future is open. The Ancestors are dead, and the dead are separated from the living by an ontological boundary that only poetic metaphors cross. In the Nêhiyaw worldview, this boundary is not so sharp. The âtayôhkanak — ancestral spirits — are not “dead” in the Western sense of the term: they are entities that continue to participate in the world of the living through the ceremonies, traditions, and practices that concern them.

This conception is not to be romantically exoticised or dismissed as superstition. It is to be understood as a coherent epistemological structure that produces concrete and verifiable behaviours. When Nêhiyaw Elders speak of the “presence of the Ancestors” in a ceremony, they are not using a poetic metaphor: they are describing an experiential reality that their tradition considers

literally true. The difference from the Western scientific position is not that one is "right" and the other "wrong": it is that they operate on different epistemological frames, with different validation criteria. An encyclopaedic work has the duty to document these positions with equal seriousness, without hierarchising them.

In the Okichitaw system, the temporal dimension manifests in three concrete and documented ways. The first is the protocol of recognition of the Ancestors at the opening of every session: before training begins, the facilitator formally acknowledges the presence of the Ancestors of the Nêhiyaw of the Plains — the historical okichitawak Warriors, the Knowledge Keepers who kept the knowledge alive through the century of suppression, the families who transmitted fragments of technique through private networks. This recognition is not ornamental: it is the declaration that what happens in the Lodge is continuous with that history, that every training session is part of a chain of transmission that did not begin in 1997.

The second way is the conception of sweat as an offering. The sweat shed in the Lodge is not — in the Nêhiyaw cultural perspective — merely an indicator of physical effort. It is an offering to the Ancestors who safeguarded the knowledge under conditions of persecution; to the Elders who validated the system with their authority; to the Nêhiyaw community that still carries the historical traumas of which the Lodge is also a healing instrument. This sense of debt to history is not oppressive in the Nêhiyaw perspective: it is a source of meaning. One sweats because the practice is worthwhile, and it is worthwhile because it is the fruit of sacrifices one does not want to render vain.

The third way is the narrative continuity of the tradition. The techniques codified by Lépine are not presented — in the OIMA

materials or in his public statements — as modern inventions. They are presented as recoveries and reconstructions of ancestral practices that the Founder received the mandate to bring back to light. This posture is not rhetorical modesty: it reflects the Nêhiyaw principle that knowledge belongs to the community and to the Ancestors who developed it, not to the individual who codifies or transmits it. Lépine is the channel of knowledge, not its author.

The temporal dimension has immediate practical consequences for the identity of practitioners. When a young Nêhiyaw person enters the Lodge for the first time and hears the Nêhiyaw names of the postures, when they perform for the first time a gesture with the Gunstock War Club that has the same geometry as the gestures of their great-grandparents' Warriors, when they participate in the smudging ceremony that their Ancestors practised for centuries — they are experiencing a historical continuity that no textbook, no museum, no school lesson can produce with the same intensity. It is embodied continuity, lived in the body, and this is its therapeutic and identity-building force.

> [C3] The Nêhiyaw concept of âtayôhkan and the presence of the Ancestors: Mandelbaum, D.G. (1940). The Plains Cree, ch. 7 "Religion"; OIMA/UNESCO materials. [C2] The protocol of recognition of the Ancestors at opening: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The epistemological reflection on different conceptions of time is the author's, with reference to: Cruikshank, J. (2005). Do Glaciers Listen? UBC Press.

1.11 — The Combat Structure: Close Quarters Combat

Okichitaw is technically classifiable as a Close Quarters Combat (CQC) system — combat at close range — with primary and secondary weapons. This classification, used by the armed forces and law enforcement services of many countries, is more precise than the generic label "martial art" because it captures the operational

orientation of the system: designed for real conflict situations rather than regulated sporting competition.

CQC is distinguished from combat sports — boxing, sport Judo, MMA, kickboxing — by at least three structural characteristics that the OIMA manuscript explicates. The first is the absence of safety rules designed to prolong the exchange: in combat sports, the rules deliberately exclude the most effective techniques (strikes to the eyes, the throat, the locked knee, the joint in a vulnerable position) in order to allow extended competition under safe conditions. In a CQC system, these are precisely the techniques the system teaches, because they are the most effective for rapidly resolving a situation of real danger. The second is the absence of referees: in a real situation, there is no third party who stops the fight. The third is unpredictable terrain: real combat rarely takes place on a flat, dry, uniformly lit mat.

The technical structure of CQC in Okichitaw is organised around three operational principles declared in the manuscript. The first is immediate neutralisation: not the prolonged exchange of blows characteristic of the logic of sport sparring, but the application of one or two high-effectiveness techniques that resolve the situation in the shortest possible time. Every second of prolonged combat increases the risk of being struck, of being reached by the opponent's partners, of losing environmental advantage. The second is economy of movement: no unnecessary gesture, no decorative movement. Every action has a precise purpose. This principle explains why Okichitaw does not emphasise the high kicks and spectacular acrobatic movements that characterise some Eastern systems: they sacrifice economy for spectacle. The third is trapping: rather than responding to blows with blows, the system favours intercepting the attacking limb, controlling it through joint levers, and using this control to destabilise the opponent's body.

An element that distinguishes Okichitaw from many military CQC systems is the principle of ethical proportionality built into the system. Military CQC systems — Krav Maga, MCMAP, Systema — are designed to eliminate the threat in the fastest and most definitive way possible, without considerations of proportionality. Okichitaw incorporates the Seven Teachings into the curriculum: one ceases to act when the threat is neutralised, not when the opponent is destroyed. This proportionality is not a limitation of the system's effectiveness: it is the ethical distinction between the protective Warrior — the okichitaw — and the aggressive fighter.

CQC training in Okichitaw takes place through light contact: the contact is light but the control is real. There is no full-contact sparring, no competitions with referees, no scores. Practitioners simulate techniques to the point of contact, and the assessment of effectiveness is entrusted to mutual honesty: when an action succeeds, the struck practitioner acknowledges it without the need for a referee to declare it. This system of assessment based on mutual honesty is one of the concrete ways in which the Seventh Teaching — Debwewin, Truth — manifests in physical training.

> [C2] CQC as technical structure: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, "Combat Philosophy" and "Technical Principles" sections. [C4] The comparison with Krav Maga, MCMAP, and Systema as CQC systems: Nonato, A. and Gruss, S. (2010). Complete Krav Maga. Ulysses Press; Skogorevsky, M. (2006). Russian Martial Art: Systema. Systema Headquarters.

1.12 — The Medicine Wheel as the Architecture of the System

The Medicine Wheel is one of the most powerful and most misunderstood symbols of North American Indigenous cultures. Its power derives from the elegance of the structure — a circle divided into four quadrants, each associated with a direction, a colour, a

season, an aspect of the human being. The misunderstanding derives from the indiscriminate and universalising use that New Age culture made of it in the 1970s and 1980s, separating the symbol from its specific cultural context and standardising it into a "pan-Indigenous" system that corresponds to no specific tradition. This volume adopts a critical position: the Medicine Wheel is a real symbol, grounded in real traditions, but it is not a uniform symbol shared by all First Nations.

The physical structures classified as medicine wheels — configurations of stones arranged in circular form with spokes radiating from the centre — are documented at 100 to 200 sites across the North American Great Plains, from South Dakota to Saskatchewan. The most studied, the Bighorn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, was analysed by astronomer John A. Eddy in 1974 (Science, 184, 1035-1043) in relation to stellar alignments at the summer solstice. The Moose Mountain Medicine Wheel in Saskatchewan — in traditional Nêhiyaw territory — shows analogous structures. The attribution of these sites to specific Nations and the interpretation of their cultural significance remain subjects of academic debate.

The commercial and New Age use of the Medicine Wheel — the association of the four colours with the four human races, the standardisation of symbolic associations into a "universal" system — has been widely criticised by Indigenous researchers. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Dancing on Our Turtle's Back, ARP Books, 2011) identified it as a form of cultural appropriation that erases the specificities of different traditions to create a marketable product. The association of the four colours with human races is documented as a projection of nineteenth-century scientific racism onto an Indigenous symbol, not as an original Indigenous tradition.

In Okichitaw, the Medicine Wheel is used in a specific and operational way that must not be confused with its commercialised versions. As declared in the OIMA manuscript, the Wheel governs the curriculum through the Four Directions as progressive levels of training: East (Waabanong, Yellow) for Level 1 — Awareness; South (Zhaawanong, Red) for Level 2 — Combat; North (Kiiwedinong, White) for Level 3 — Preservation; West (Epangishimog, Blue) for Level 4 — Building. The sequence is not arbitrary: it follows the path of the sun (East–South–West) with the North as the point of challenge and transformation, the point furthest from the light, which in the curriculum corresponds to the level of greatest difficulty before the final synthesis.

But the Medicine Wheel in Okichitaw does not only describe the curriculum: it describes the whole person. The OIMA manuscript associates with the Four Directions four dimensions of the human being that every training session should develop simultaneously: the Physical (the capacity to execute technique), the Mental (the understanding of biomechanics and strategy), the Emotional (the control of fear, anger, and ego), the Spiritual (the connection with the tradition and with the community). A practitioner who excels in the Physical but is deficient in the Spiritual is, on the map of the Wheel, "out of balance": and an imbalance in the Wheel is a tactical vulnerability, not only a moral shortcoming.

This conception of the whole person as the objective of the system — not the effective fighter but the Warrior balanced in four dimensions — also determines the grade advancement system. As stated explicitly in the OIMA manuscript: "One cannot advance in grade if one is an excellent fighter but an emotionally unstable or spiritually empty person." This statement distinguishes Okichitaw structurally from combat sports where athletic performance is the

only advancement parameter. It is closer instead to the model of classical Eastern martial arts in their most authentic sense: not the modern sporting form, but budō as a path of character transformation through combat.

> [C1] The medicine wheels of the Plains: Eddy, J.A. (1974). "Astronomical Alignment of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel." Science, 184(4141), 1035-1043. [C1] Critique of the commercial use: Simpson, L.B. (2011). Dancing on Our Turtle's Back. ARP Books. [C2] The Wheel as curriculum architecture: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, "Medicine Wheel" section.

1.13 — Institutional Recognition as an Act of Cultural Sovereignty

The recognition of Okichitaw by the World Martial Arts Union (WoMAU) at the Chungju Festival in 2002 was not an ordinary diplomatic event in the world of martial arts. It was, in the context of Nêhiyaw history, an act of symbolic inversion of considerable historical significance. To understand it, it is necessary to recall the chronology: in 1885 — 117 years earlier — Nêhiyaw warrior practices had been criminalised, their practitioners hanged at Fort Battleford, the communities confined to reserves. In 1895 the ceremonies had been explicitly prohibited. In 2002, a Plains Cree martial system was formally recognised by the international martial arts community as cultural heritage worthy of promotion.

WoMAU was founded in 2002 in Chungju, South Korea, by representatives of 28 countries with the support of the UNESCO programme for intangible cultural heritage. Its declared mission is the promotion and safeguarding of traditional martial arts around the world. The Chungju Festival protocol is structured on a national basis: each martial art is presented by the country of origin and only by that country. As Karate is represented by Japanese teams and Taekwondo by Korean teams, Okichitaw is — and can only be — represented by

Canadian teams. This protocol implicitly recognises that each art belongs to a specific culture and that that culture has an exclusive right over its own representation.

A distinction this volume has the obligation to clarify with precision: Okichitaw is recognised by WoMAU (2002). Okichitaw does not appear on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which requires a formal nomination procedure by a member State and an evaluation by the intergovernmental body. WoMAU operates in collaboration with UNESCO within the promotion of martial heritage, but this collaboration does not equate to direct UNESCO recognition. Describing WoMAU recognition as "UNESCO recognition" is an inaccuracy that some secondary materials commit and that an encyclopaedic work cannot repeat.

Lépine led demonstration delegations to the Chungju Festival in 2002, 2004, and 2008 — three consecutive presences documenting a sustained commitment. These demonstrations exposed the system to an international audience of martial arts practitioners and scholars, helping to build a global credibility that has allowed Okichitaw to be known and studied beyond the Nêhiyaw community of Canada. The Academie Duello report of 2015, the CBC reports of 2018 and 2019, the Cowboys & Indians profile of 2022: each of these journalistic documents is the fruit, at least in part, of the international visibility built at Chungju.

The second institutional recognition is the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, received by Lépine in 2012 for the sixtieth anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne. The medal is awarded to "Canadians who have made significant contributions to their community, their province, or Canada." It is not a recognition of the martial art as such: it is the recognition of Lépine's work as a

custodian and transmitter of Indigenous cultural heritage. Its symbolic relevance is considerable: in a country that had criminalised Nêhiyaw cultural practices for nearly a century, a royal medal is awarded to the man who rebuilt and codified the warrior system of that People.

The road toward formal UNESCO recognition remains open. The most instructive precedent is that of Indonesian Pencak Silat, inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage list in 2019 after a formal nomination submitted by the Indonesian government. The nomination required a dossier compiled according to precise criteria, the active support of the Indonesian Ministry of Culture, and several years of preparatory work. An analogous path for Okichitaw would require the support of the Canadian government and collaboration with the First Nations of Treaty No. 6 and with OIMA.

> [C1] The founding of WoMAU and the Chungju Festival: official WoMAU website (womaukorea.org). [C1] The OIMA delegations of 2002, 2004, 2008: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; CBC News (2018). [C1] The Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal: Rideau Hall, award criteria (gg.ca). [C1] The inscription of Pencak Silat on UNESCO: UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage, entry no. 01504 (2019). [C4] The WoMAU/UNESCO distinction and the strategic recommendations are the author's.

1.14 — Taxonomic Classification in the World Martial Arts Ecosystem

After thirteen different readings of the same system, it is possible to attempt a taxonomic classification that places Okichitaw within the world martial arts ecosystem. This classification is not an act of reduction: it is a tool for the reader who wishes to understand where the system stands relative to what they already know. Taxonomies are maps, not territories: a useful map helps one find one's bearings without claiming to be identical to the landscape.

The most systematic academic literature on the classification of martial arts is that of Donn Draeger, who in the three volumes of his series on Japanese systems (Classical Bujutsu, Classical Budō, Modern Budō and Bujutsu, Weatherhill, 1973–1974) distinguishes between: bujutsu (real war systems, designed to kill in combat contexts); budō (ways of the warrior as paths of self-perfection); and sporting systems (martial arts transformed into sports with safety rules). Green and Svinth (Martial Arts in the Modern World, Praeger, 2003) expand this classification to non-Japanese systems. Applying these criteria, Okichitaw sits in the bujutsu category for its operational orientation (designed for real CQC, not for sport), but with a budō dimension in its function of character formation and in the pedagogy of the Seven Teachings.

A more specific classification can be built on five analytical axes that allow any martial system to be positioned relative to others. The first axis is the relationship between the system and real warfare: Okichitaw sits at the "operational" extreme of the spectrum, designed for CQC without rules, not for regulated sporting competition. The second is the relationship between the system and its culture of origin: Okichitaw sits at the "integrated" extreme, in which the system is inseparable from the culture (language, ceremony, cosmology, ethics), in contrast with systems such as Boxing or Wrestling that can be practised in any cultural context without losing their technical structure. The third is the relationship between the system and modernity: Okichitaw sits as a "modern codification of precolonial tradition," analogous to Kalarippayattu in its modern codified form, different from both uncodified traditional arts and from arts created from scratch in modern times.

The fourth axis is the pedagogical paradigm. On this axis, Okichitaw stands out for the coexistence of two apparently

contradictory paradigms: the Watch and Do of the Indigenous tradition (embodied knowledge transmitted through imitation) and the systematic drilling of the Eastern tradition (technical knowledge transmitted through structured repetition). This coexistence is the pedagogical expression of Two-Eyed Seeing: one does not choose between the two paradigms, both are used in a complementary fashion. Watch and Do is predominant in the early phases and in cultural content; drilling is predominant in the motor memorisation of technical sequences.

The fifth axis is the relationship with cultural transmission. Okichitaw positions itself at the "culturally bound" extreme: it is a system that cannot be practised "as exotic gymnastics" without losing most of its content. This distinguishes it from systems such as Tai Chi Chuan (often practised in the West as exercise without the original martial and philosophical content) or Judo (which in its Olympic version has almost completely separated the sporting structure from the philosophical dimension of budō).

The definitive classification this volume proposes is as follows: Okichitaw is an Indigenous martial system of modern codification, designed for Close Quarters Combat with weapons and empty-hand, structured according to a weapon-based paradigm, culturally integrated in the Nêhiyaw (Plains Cree) tradition of the Canadian Great Plains, with simultaneously technical function (combat), pedagogical function (character formation according to the Seven Teachings), linguistic function (preservation of Nêhiyawêwin), communal function (intergenerational healing), and political function (cultural sovereignty). Every attempt to reduce this classification to a subset of its elements produces a distorted representation. Okichitaw is all of this together, or it is not Okichitaw.

The closest parallels in the world martial arts ecosystem are: Māori Mau rākau (same typology — Indigenous system of modern codification with identical experience of colonial suppression and 1980s revival), Kalarippayattu (same integration of medicine, cosmology, and combat), and Capoeira Angola in the version of Mestre Pastinha (same tension between cultural authenticity and modern accessibility). The reference systems as institutional models are Kanō's Judo (same type of modern codification of a fragmented tradition) and Pencak Silat as an achievable goal (UNESCO recognition, millions of practitioners, national identity).

> [C4] The proposed taxonomic classification is the author's, based on the frameworks of: Draeger, D.F. (1973–1974). Classical Bujutsu; Classical Budō; Modern Budō and Bujutsu. Weatherhill; Green, T.A. and Svinth, J.R. (eds). (2003). Martial Arts in the Modern World. Praeger. [C4] The parallels with Mau Rākau, Kalarippayattu, Capoeira Angola, and Pencak Silat are developed in the comparative analysis of Volume II.

Chapter Summary

Fourteen readings of the same system. The reader who has moved through all of them has a map rich enough to read the chapters that follow without reducing the system to something already familiar.

Okichitaw is simultaneously: a weapons-based combat system with historical roots in the warrior traditions of the Plains Nêhiyawak; a modern pedagogical project that uses the container of Eastern martial arts to transmit Indigenous cultural content; a linguistic ark for the Nêhiyawêwin and the Plains Indian Sign Language; a system of non-verbal communication rooted in the warfare of the Plains; a system of martial biomimetics that translates the ethology of Bear, Wolf, and Eagle into verifiable technical principles; a therapeutic space for healing from intergenerational trauma; a system of connection with the temporal dimension of the Ancestors; an ethically

regulated Close Quarters Combat; a spatial cosmography that aligns the time of training with the time of the cosmos; an act of cultural sovereignty recognised by the international community; and a martial system classifiable as Indigenous, modern codification, weapon-based, and culturally integrated.

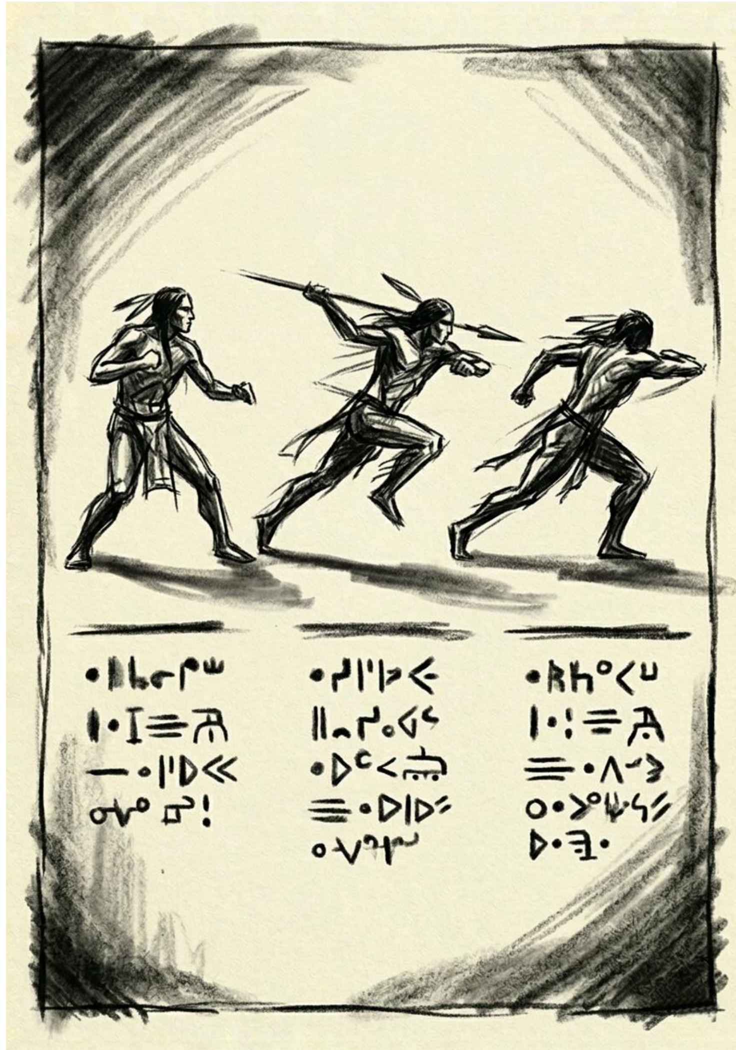
The concept that captures this multidimensional structure is that of cultural hologram: a system in which every perspective reflects the whole, in which the technical dimension contains the spiritual, the spiritual contains the political, the political contains the communal, the communal contains the technical. Removing any dimension does not leave a purer system standing: it leaves an incomprehensible one. The Warrior is the fighter who fights for the community, who is formed through the Seven Teachings, who carries in their body the knowledge of the Ancestors and the language of their People. This is Okichitaw.

* * *

Chapter 2 — Nomenclature, Variants, and Linguistic Questions

The name of a martial art is never an arbitrary label. It is a historical document that carries within it the traces of the language from which it comes, of the political choices of those who codified the system, of the distortions introduced by transliteration and by diffusion through intermediary languages. In the case of Okichitaw, the name carries something more: the traces of a linguistic crisis — that of the Nêhiyawêwin, which lost generations of speakers in the Residential Schools — and of an institutional crisis, the absence of a shared writing standard between the materials produced by the OIMA and the academic linguistic sources. These traces are not defects to be corrected with embarrassment: they are data to be documented with precision.

The need for a standalone chapter on nomenclature might seem an excess of philological pedantry. It is not. An encyclopaedic work that uses terms inconsistently, that does not signal the variants attested in the sources, or that presents unverified spellings as if they were standard, cannot be used as a reliable reference by secondary literature. Linguistic taxonomies are the load-bearing structure of academic citàbility: without them, a work that aspires to be the first treatise in the world on Okichitaw cannot fulfil its encyclopaedic function. And, in a deeper sense, care for names is a form of respect for the Indigenous languages these names inhabit.



The chapter is organised in four sections. The first conducts a rigorous etymological analysis of the primary term, descending into the morphology of the Nêhiyaw language to its deepest Algonquian roots. The second systematically maps the orthographic variants attested in the corpus of available sources, seeking to explain the reasons for each divergence rather than merely recording it. The third examines the alternative denominations by which the system has been designated in different contexts, distinguishing between acceptable equivalents, partial descriptions, and potentially

misleading uses. The fourth addresses the conceptually most complex question: the structural distinction between the historical title designating a category of persons and the name of the codified system that category inspired.

2.1 — Rigorous Etymological Analysis

Analysing the etymology of a term belonging to an oral language like the Nêhiyawêwin requires a method that combines comparative Algonquian linguistics, Cree lexicography, and historical ethnography. None of these three disciplines is sufficient on its own: linguistics provides the tools to decompose the morphological structure, lexicography verifies the correspondence with the documented corpus, and ethnography provides the semantic context in which the term was used. The analysis that follows integrates all three perspectives and declares explicitly where each ends and where interpretive hypotheses begin.

The Nêhiyawêwin is a polysynthetic and agglutinative language: it builds its terms through the juxtaposition of morphemes with precise meanings, producing words that in other languages would correspond to entire phrases. This constructive principle is not ornamental: every morpheme adds a specific semantic piece of information that must be correctly identified and interpreted in order to understand the meaning of the overall term. The term okichitawak is no exception: it is a compound of at least three distinct morphological elements, each with its own history in the Algonquian language family.

The Root okichi-

The root okichi- is the semantic core of the term. In the standard Cree Roman Orthography (CRO), this root belongs to the semantic field of demonstrated capacity and recognised worth. Linguist H.C. Wolfart,

in his systematic analysis of Plains Cree (Sketch of Cree, an Algonquian Language, 1996), identifies semantically adjacent roots that suggest a field of meaning centred on active fitness — not power received by birth or by external appointment, but capacity demonstrated through action and then recognised by the community. The University of Alberta Plains Cree Dictionary (Cree Language Archive) confirms this semantic field.

The distinction between innate capacity and demonstrated capacity carries profound weight in Nêhiyaw culture. In the social structure of the bands, as documented by Mandelbaum (1940), individual prestige was not inherited but earned. The children of leaders did not automatically become leaders: they had to demonstrate the qualities — generosity, courage, diplomatic wisdom — that the community expected from a leader. This meritocratic principle is directly reflected in the root okichi-: one was not an okichitaw by right of blood, but became one through actions verifiable by the community. The semantics of the root is therefore intertwined with the ethical structure of Nêhiyaw society.

Some secondary English-language sources translate okichi- simply as "worthy" or "capable." These translations capture one dimension of the meaning but lose another: "worthy" in English suggests a static quality, while the Nêhiyaw root implies a dynamic process of demonstration and recognition. A more precise rendering, though longer, would be "one who has proven themselves adequate" or "one whose capacity is recognised." This volume uses "worthy" as a conventional abbreviation, aware of this loss of precision.

The Morpheme -taw-

The component -taw- is the second identifiable morphological element in the term. In Algonquian morphology, this form is

associated with the agentive dimension — the active carrier of something, the one who acts in a certain capacity. Its presence transforms okichi- from abstract quality to concrete function: not simply "something worthy" but "somebody who carries the quality of worthiness into action." Not the worthy as an attribute but the worthy as an active role.

This distinction between attribute and role is crucial for understanding the position of the okichitawak in Nêhiyaw society. They were not simply people worthy of respect: they were people to whom the community had delegated specific functions that only worthy individuals could fulfil. The internal policing during the great Buffalo hunts, the leadership of raids into enemy territory, the protection of the most vulnerable during seasonal movements: each of these functions required not only technical capacity but also the explicit trust of the community. The morpheme -taw- encodes this delegated trust directly into the structure of the word.

It should be noted that the identification of the morpheme -taw- as an autonomous element is supported by the morphological derivation system of Plains Cree documented in academic linguistic corpora, but has not been specifically verified for the term okichitawak by a Nêhiyaw linguist within dedicated research. This volume classifies it as C2-C4: plausible on the basis of general morphological principles, but not formally confirmed. The specialised linguistic review indicated in Section 2.4 is necessary to elevate this analysis from hypothesis to documented fact.

The Plural Suffix -ak

The suffix -ak is the most easily identifiable of the three elements: it is the plural of the animate category in Plains Cree, documented uniformly in all available dictionaries and corpora. The animate

category is a fundamental grammatical category in the Nêhiyawêwin: the language systematically distinguishes between animate entities (persons, animals, and some ritual objects considered spiritually alive) and inanimate entities (ordinary objects). The choice of the suffix -ak rather than -a (the inanimate plural) is not neutral: it designates the okichitawak as animate beings, living, endowed with spirit — not as an abstract category.

The singular of the term is okichitaw (without suffix, or with the animate singular suffix -iw in some forms). In contemporary communicative practice — in the OIMA materials, in the Canadian press, in international communication — the form used for the name of the system is *Okichitaw* (capitalised, without plural suffix): a choice that isolates the semantic core from the original grammatical context and uses it as the proper name of the system. This is the reference form adopted in this volume for the codified system, with the capital letter distinguishing it from the historical title *okichitaw* (lowercase, singular) and from the social category *okichitawak* (lowercase, CRO plural).

The CRO Transliteration System and Vowel Length

An element that any rigorous etymological analysis must address is the question of vowel length. The Nêhiyawêwin is a language with distinctive vowel quantity: the difference between a short and a long vowel can change the meaning of a word. The standard Cree Roman Orthography (CRO) indicates long vowels with a macron. If the initial vowel of okichitaw is long, the correct CRO form would be ôkichitaw; if short, the form without macron is correct. The OIMA materials do not use macrons — which means it is not possible to determine from the official source whether the initial vowel is long or short. Audio recordings of training sessions available online suggest a first syllable

with a short vowel, but this is a preliminary phonetic assessment that would require confirmation from a phonologist specialised in Plains Cree.

This gap is significant because in Algonquian linguistic literature vowel length is often the factor that distinguishes terms with different meanings. Without the review of a specialised Nêhiyaw linguist, this volume cannot resolve the question and signals it as a gap to be filled in subsequent editions.

The Semantic Field in the Algonquian Linguistic Ecology

To complete the etymological analysis, it is useful to position the term okichitawak within the wider semantic field of the Algonquian language family. The family comprises dozens of languages distributed across North America, and many share analogous morphological structures for designating socially prominent figures. In Ojibwe (Anishinaabemowin), the term okichida designates warriors who distinguish themselves by courage; in Naskapi, semantically adjacent forms designate figures of community protection. This semantic convergence across languages of the same family does not prove that the terms share the same etymological origin, but suggests that the root okichi- or analogous roots were widespread in the semantic field of demonstrated capacity and community service across different Algonquian cultures.

This comparative perspective has a practical implication for the Okichitaw system. If the root okichi- belongs to a pan-Algonquian semantic field — not exclusive to the Plains Cree — then the system codified by Lépine is not only recovering a specific Nêhiyaw tradition: it is drawing on an ethical vocabulary shared by many North American Indigenous cultures. This does not dilute the specific cultural identity of the system — which remains Nêhiyaw in its

contents, its ceremonies, and its philosophy — but connects it to a wider tradition of Indigenous warrior values that crosses tribal boundaries. It is consistent with the principle of Two-Eyed Seeing: a system that looks both to its own specific tradition and to the wider tradition from which it comes.

The standard pronunciation of the term is trisyllabic: the accent falls on the first syllable according to the OIMA indications. In the recordings of Lépine available online, the pronunciation shows an accentual variation between the first and third syllable that has not been standardised in the official materials: even the Founder's own pronunciation shows flexibility depending on the communicative context.

> [C1] Plains Cree morphology: Wolfart, H.C. (1996). "Sketch of Cree, an Algonquian Language." In Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 17. Smithsonian Institution Press. [C1] The animate vs. inanimate category in Nêhiyawêwin: Wolfart, H.C. and Ahenakew, F. (1998). The Student's Dictionary of Literary Plains Cree. Memoir 15. [C1] Algonquian parallels for warrior figures: Rhodes, R.A. (1993). Ojibwe (Chippewa) Dictionary. Mouton de Gruyter. [C4] The analysis of the root -taw- as agentive morpheme and the pan-Algonquian comparative are the author's: hypotheses classified C4 pending specialised linguistic review.

2.2 — Orthographic Variants in the Sources: Systematic Documentation

Orthographic variability is a normal characteristic of any system whose transmission has been predominantly oral for centuries. It is not a problem to conceal: it is data to be documented with the same precision that a geologist applies to documenting the stratigraphic variations of a terrain. Every variant carries information: about the history of the transmission, about the choices of different transcribers, about the cultural and institutional context in which the term was used. The corpus of available sources on Okichitaw shows

significant variability that this volume maps systematically for the first time.

The principal sources analysed for the construction of the comparative table are: the official OIMA/UNESCO manuscript (undated, available through okichitaw.com); the official website of the organisation; the CBC News reports (2018, 2019); the Cowboys & Indians article (2022); the Academie Duello profile (2015); the academic sources that cite the system; and the lexical corpus of Plains Cree documented by Canadian university linguistic archives.

Okichitaw
Source: Official OIMA website; OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; WoMAU; international media
Use: Name of the modern martial system; name of the organisation
Status: Non-CRO; conventional capitalisation
Note: *Reference form adopted in this volume for the system*

okichitaw
Source: English-language academic literature; Wikipedia EN
Use: Historical honorary title (singular)
Status: Approximately CRO; lowercase
Note: *Used in this volume for the historical title*

okichitawak
Source: CRO standard; Mandelbaum (1940); university corpora
Use: Plural of historical title; warrior social category
Status: CRO verified
Note: *Most linguistically rigorous form; used for the historical category*

okichitatawak
Source: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript (passim, alternated with okichitawak)
Use: Internal OIMA variant; same semantic reference
Status: Non-CRO; unexplained additional -ta-
Note: *Three hypotheses: incorporated verbal morpheme, dialectal variant, typographical error*

Okichitawak
Source: Some OIMA materials; Canadian media in hybrid contexts
Use: Hybrid: proper-name capitalisation + CRO plural
Status: Non-CRO; hybrid form
Note: *Acceptable in some contexts; not used in this volume*

Okichitaw I.M.A.
Source: OIMA document headers; formal correspondence

Use: Abbreviation of the organisation
Status: n.a.
Note: *Do not use as a synonym for the martial system in isolation*

The most problematic variant — and the most linguistically interesting — is okichitatawak with the additional -ta-. This form appears multiple times in the OIMA/UNESCO manuscript in alternation with okichitawak without the document explaining the difference. The three hypotheses this volume proposes for its origin — classified C4 pending specialised verification — each require some development.

The hypothesis of the incorporated verbal morpheme is the most linguistically sophisticated. In Algonquian languages, verbs can be incorporated into nouns producing compounds with distinct semantic nuances. The component -tat- could represent a verbal morpheme that modifies the meaning of the compound: from "one who carries the quality of being worthy" to something like "one who acts as if worthy" or "one who behaves in a worthy manner." If so, okichitatawak could indicate not a fixed category but an active process: the constant acting up to the level of one's title. This nuance would be semantically rich and culturally significant, but requires verification from an Algonquianist linguist.

The dialectal variant hypothesis is the most pragmatic. The Nêhiyawêwin is not a monolithic language: it has significant variations among the bands of different geographic areas of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. A form with an additional -ta- could be attested in a specific regional dialect — for example, in the northern Manitoba variety that is the area of origin of the Lépine family. If Lépine received the terminology from the Elders of that specific region, the variant with -ta- could be authentically

documented in that dialect even if not in the standardised university corpora.

The typographical error hypothesis is the simplest but not the least plausible. The OIMA manuscript is a document produced without the resources of a professional publisher, without a specialised linguistic reviewer, and probably under time constraints. A double consonant or an additional syllable could have slipped into the text and then remained in subsequent versions through typographical inertia. This type of transcription error is documented in many corpora of oral languages transcribed by non-linguists.

The Variant in the Founder's Name

A further documented variant concerns not the name of the system but the surname of the Founder. English-language sources oscillate between Lepine (without accent) and Lépine (with acute accent on the e). The correct form from the standpoint of French orthography — and of the Métis identity the surname represents — is Lépine with the accent. The surname belongs to the Franco-Canadian tradition of the voyageurs and the settlers of the Red River area, where the acute accent is an integral part of the spelling. Omitting the accent is an inaccuracy that this volume systematically avoids.

The question of the accent is not purely typographical. The Métis identity — which Lépine carries — is a distinct cultural identity, neither purely Indigenous nor purely European, with its own history, its own language (Michif, a Franco-Cree Creole), and its own traditions. To write the surname without the accent means, in the context of this identity, erasing the Franco-Canadian component of a family history that is also the history of the Red River community and of the Métis Resistance of 1869–1885. In a volume that consistently

pays attention to nominal precision as a form of cultural respect, the choice of correct spelling is not a minor detail.

The Cree Roman Orthography: Why It Exists and Why This Volume Uses It

The Cree Roman Orthography (CRO) is the writing system developed by linguists in collaboration with Cree communities from the 1960s onwards, progressively adopted by Canadian university archives and by many communities that have initiated literacy programmes in their own language. It is not the only writing system for Cree: it coexists with the syllabic writing developed by missionary James Evans in 1840, still used in some Eastern Cree and Swampy Cree communities. But it is the academic standard for the Plains Cree relevant to this volume.

The OIMA materials do not use CRO consistently. Macrons are almost always absent. This absence is not a gross error in the context of public communication: it reflects the practical reality of a system born from oral transmission that uses writing primarily for a non-Cree audience, for whom macrons add no practical information since pronunciation is acquired through imitation. But for an academic encyclopaedic work that aspires to international citàbility, consistency with the verifiable standard is a credibility requirement.

The methodological position of this volume is as follows: CRO with macrons is used for all Glossary entries and for terms analysed in depth in the text. When the OIMA materials are quoted verbatim, the OIMA forms are reproduced with the variant noted. When the CRO form is not verifiable because the term does not appear in the documented corpora — the case of much technical terminology specific to Okichitaw — the term is marked with “?” in the Glossary.

A tension that must be declared explicitly: the choice to use CRO by a volume external to the Nêhiyaw community is not without political implications. The CRO is a system developed predominantly by academic linguists (many of them non-Indigenous in its early phases) in collaboration with Cree communities: it is not an "Indigenous creation" in the full sense of the term, even though its adoption by many communities makes it today a system legitimised by internal use. This volume uses CRO as a verifiable academic standard, not as the "correct" form in an absolute sense. The authority over one's own language belongs to the Nêhiyaw community, not to external authors.

> [C1] The variant okichitatawak: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, passim (alternated with okichitawak without explanation). [C4] The three hypotheses for the -ta- variant are the author's, classified C4. [C1] The CRO: Wolfart, H.C. (1996). "Sketch of Cree." Smithsonian. [C1] Evans' syllabic writing (1840): Murdoch, J. (1981). "Syllabics: A Successful Educational Technology." The Archivist, 8(1). [C4] The note on the political tension of external CRO use is the author's.

2.3 — Alternative Denominations and the Risk of Confusion

The corpus of available sources on Okichitaw shows a proliferation of alternative denominations that is worth mapping and classifying. Some are acceptable equivalents of the official name, used in contexts where the proper name would not be immediately recognisable. Others are partial descriptions that capture one aspect of the system while sacrificing others. Still others are potentially misleading uses that this volume signals so the reader can evaluate them correctly.

Equivalent and Descriptive Denominations

The denomination "Indigenous Combat Art of Canada" or "Indigenous Martial Art of Canada" appears in OIMA

communications and in WoMAU presentations as a functional description of the system for an audience unfamiliar with the proper name. It is an acceptable equivalent in contexts where the cultural specification (Plains Cree) is implicit or assumed to be known. The limit of this denomination is that it suggests a uniqueness — "the Indigenous martial art of Canada" as if there were only one — that does not reflect the diversity of the warrior practices of the Canadian First Nations.

The denomination "Plains Cree Martial Art" is used in some English-language academic sources and is geographically and culturally accurate. It is not official but is descriptively precise, and in academic contexts where one wishes to emphasise the specific cultural belonging of the system it may be preferred to the generic "Indigenous martial art." Its main limit is that it does not uniquely identify the system: theoretically, other Plains Cree martial systems could exist that are uncodified or undocumented. In practice, Okichitaw is the only Plains Cree system with a formal curriculum and institutional recognition, so the denomination is de facto unique in the contemporary context.

The denomination "Aboriginal Martial Art" was common in sources predating 2015. Following the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the progressive institutional adoption of the term "Indigenous" in Canadian law and public communication, the terminological preference has shifted. The term "Aboriginal" remains legally valid in Canada (it appears in the Constitution of 1982 at Section 35) but is perceived by many Indigenous communities as less respectful than "Indigenous," which recognises the historical primacy of Indigenous peoples relative to the colonisers. This volume uses "Indigenous" throughout.

The Academie Duello Case (2015) and the Question of Uniqueness

The Academie Duello profile of June 2015 uses the title: "Okichitaw: Canada's only (Ab)original Martial Art System." The spelling "(Ab)original" — with the parenthesis that includes but problematises the prefix — was an attempt to manage the terminological transition then underway between "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous" in Canadian public communication. The uniqueness claim ("Canada's only") is verifiable in its terms: at the time of the profile's writing, Okichitaw was the only First Nations martial system in Canada with a codified pedagogical structure, a documented curriculum, and formalised international recognition (WoMAU 2002). No comparable system existed.

Whether this uniqueness persists in 2025 is more complex. The decade that followed saw significant growth in interest in the recovery of Indigenous warrior practices in Canada, stimulated by the TRC and its 94 Calls to Action. It is possible that other Canadian Indigenous Nations have initiated processes of codification of their own warrior practices. A systematic investigation of this point falls outside the scope of the present volume, but the formulation "Canada's only" should be considered accurate for the period 2002–2015 and in need of verification for the period that follows.

The Niedermann Volumes (2024) and Unauthorised Publication

A documented case of the use of the name "Okichitaw" by an author not certified by the OIMA appeared in 2024. Available on Amazon are at least two volumes by Adams Christoph Niedermann using the name "Okichitaw" to designate their content.

This volume does not judge the content of these texts, which has not been directly examined. What is noted here is the structural

question: the name "Okichitaw" does not appear to be registered as a commercial trademark in accessible databases, which means that anyone can theoretically use it to designate their own combat system without incurring formal legal violations. This creates a risk of confusion for readers and prospective students seeking the OIMA-certified system, and raises a question of cultural sovereignty: the name okichitawak belongs to the cultural heritage of the Nêhiyaw People, and its use to designate systems not authorised by the Nêhiyaw community is culturally problematic regardless of formal legal legitimacy.

The most documented precedent in the history of martial arts is Capoeira. After the death of Mestre Pastinha (1981) and with the growing global popularity of the system, schools proliferated that called themselves "Capoeira Angola" without connection to the documented authentic tradition. The response of the Afro-Brazilian community was the production of historical documentation and authenticity criteria that allowed the authentic tradition to be distinguished from imitations. An analogous path, adapted to the Nêhiyaw and Canadian context, could be considered for Okichitaw: not as legal action but as the production of documentation that makes the authenticity of the system recognisable relative to its imitators.

The Indigenous Languages Act (2019) and the Legal Framework

The Indigenous Languages Act — passed by the Canadian Parliament on June 21, 2019 (S.C. 2019, c. 23) — explicitly recognises the rights of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples over their own languages and provides federal funding for their revitalisation, documentation, and teaching. The Nêhiyawêwin is among the languages covered by this legislation.

The technical terminology of Okichitaw — the names of the techniques, the Gates, the weapons, the philosophical concepts in Nêhiyawêwin — is protected in the broadest sense by Canadian linguistic legislation and by the cultural sovereignty of the Nêhiyaw Nation. An academic work that documents this terminology respects its nature as cultural heritage of the community: it cites it, analyses it, explains it. It does not own it, does not standardise it autonomously, does not use it for unauthorised commercial purposes. This distinction — between academic documentation and cultural appropriation — is the fundamental methodological principle this volume applies to every Nêhiyaw term it encounters.

> [C2] The denomination "Indigenous Combat Art of Canada": OIMA materials; okichitaw.com. [C1] The Aboriginal/Indigenous terminological transition: TRC (2015), "Terminology" section. [C1] The Niedermann volumes: Adams Christoph Niedermann (2024), Okichitaw: Canada's Native Warrior Training. Amazon KDP. [C1] The Indigenous Languages Act: S.C. 2019, c. 23, text available at laws-lois.justice.gc.ca. [C4] The parallel with Capoeira Angola and the recommendation for authenticity documentation are the author's.

2.4 — The Distinction Between Historical Title and Name of the System

The most important distinction of the entire nomenclature chapter is also the least obvious: that between *okichitaw* as a historical honorary title designating a category of persons in precolonial Nêhiyaw society and *Okichitaw* as the name of the martial system codified by Lépine in 1997. This is not merely a typographical distinction — capital vs. lowercase — but a fundamental conceptual distinction that determines how every statement containing the term is to be read. Confusing the two levels produces historical and logical errors that propagate through the text.

The distinction can be formulated precisely: *okichitaw* (lowercase, historical) is what one **is**: a quality recognised by the community through a process of assessment of the whole person. *Okichitaw* (capitalised, modern) is what one **practises**: a codified system of techniques, philosophy, and pedagogy. One can practise Okichitaw for years without yet being an okichitaw in the historical sense of the term. One can have been recognised as an okichitaw by one's community without ever having heard of the system codified by Lépine. The two terms inhabit different temporal and ontological planes.

The Historical Title: Structure and Social Function

The title okichitaw in precolonial Nêhiyaw society was part of a wider system of social recognitions that Mandelbaum (1940) documented in detail. There were at least three distinct categories of warrior recognition: the nahâyawak — ordinary warriors, all those who participated in wars and hunts — who received no specific title but were recognised as part of the band's defensive force; the okichitawak — the worthy, those whose capacity had been formally recognised by the community — who held specific authority and corresponding responsibilities; and a superior category of legendary warriors whose names were transmitted in the historical narratives of the bands as examples of absolute excellence.

The process of conferring the title okichitaw was not standardised in a single universal ritual: it varied among bands and across historical periods. The sources converge, however, on certain common elements. Recognition occurred through the prolonged observation of the Elders and the council of the band: not an isolated act of courage but a constellation of behaviours over time. The qualities assessed included courage in war (demonstrated through

specific acts, especially the Counting Coup), generosity toward the community (sharing resources rather than accumulating them), the capacity to maintain discipline during collective hunts, and the protection of the most vulnerable (Elders, the sick, orphans) during seasonal movements.

The title carried with it not only privileges but precise obligations. Mandelbaum documents that the okichitawak had the duty to be the first to respond in the event of an attack on the band, regardless of personal circumstances. They had the obligation to maintain order during the collective Buffalo hunts, with the authority to punish immediately and publicly anyone who violated collective discipline. These obligations were not optional: they were the reason for which the title was conferred, and failing to fulfil them would have meant losing the recognition of the community.

An aspect particularly relevant to the modern system is that the title okichitaw was not permanent and guaranteed once obtained. It could be lost if subsequent behaviour did not confirm it. Mandelbaum reports cases in which once-respected warriors lost the respect of the community for behaviour incompatible with their title — cowardice in war, miserliness, or abandonment of their duties toward the vulnerable. This revocable character distinguishes the Nêhiyaw title from European noble titles, which once conferred were generally permanent regardless of subsequent behaviour.

The Name of the System: A Conscious and Non-Obvious Choice

When Lépine chose to call his codified system by the name of the historical title, he was not simply adopting a random Nêhiyaw word: he was making a precise philosophical declaration about what the system should be. The name okichitaw does not indicate the

technique one learns but the person one aspires to become. Adopting this name for the system means declaring that the system does not propose to teach combat techniques: it proposes to form persons who — through the practice of techniques, philosophy, and ceremonies — move closer to the quality that the Nêhiyaw community recognised in the historical okichitawak.

This choice was validated by the Elders. As Lépine stated in the Cowboys & Indians interview of May 2022, it was during the consultations with the Elders of Manitoba that the name emerged. Their motivation is documented: they wished the name to express "not only the structure of combat but the whole of the values of the Indigenous way of life." This is not a biographical detail: it is the source of legitimacy of the name. The system is not called okichitaw because Lépine decided it autonomously, but because the community — through its Elders — validated this choice. The name was conferred, not assumed.

This origin of the name also has an implication for the rights over the system. Lépine is not the "inventor" of Okichitaw in the sense that a designer is the inventor of a commercial product. He is the codifier of a system that belongs to the Nêhiyaw community, that bears the name of a historical category of that community, and that received its legitimacy through the traditional process of community validation. This distinction has practical consequences: the system cannot be sold, transferred, or transformed without the consent of the community from which it comes.

The Three-Level System: Okichitaw / okichitaw / okichitawak

To operationalise the distinction between historical title and name of the system throughout the text of this volume, a three-level system of

typographic conventions has been adopted that deserves explicit explanation.

Okichitaw (capitalised) designates the modern martial system codified by Lépine at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto from 1997. It is the system as institution, as curriculum, as contemporary practice. “I have been practising Okichitaw for three years.” “Okichitaw was recognised by WoMAU in 2002.” This is always capitalised Okichitaw.

okichitaw (lowercase, italics) designates the historical honorary title in precolonial and historical Nêhiyaw culture: a person to whom the community has recognised the title of worthy. “The historical okichitaw had the responsibility of maintaining order during the collective hunts.” “Becoming an okichitaw required years of exemplary behaviour.” The italics signal that this is a term in the Nêhiyaw language.

okichitawak (lowercase, italics, CRO plural) designates the plural social category: the worthy warriors as a group in Nêhiyaw society. “The okichitawak were the warrior elite of the band.” “The societies of the okichitawak had specific functions during the great hunts.”

This typographic distinction reflects a real semantic distinction. It is not pedantry: it is the system that makes it possible to write sentences such as “the Okichitaw system aspires to form persons who become okichitaw in the historical sense of the term” without ambiguity. Without the distinction, the sentence would be a tautology. With the distinction, the two levels are clear: the system (modern institution) that forms worthy warriors (historical category).

Implications for the Assessment of Progress

The distinction between the two levels is not only lexical: it determines how students' progress is assessed. In a system whose name is the name of a title conferred by the community, assessment cannot be only technical. A system called "Plains Cree Combat Techniques" could assess progress exclusively on the basis of technical competence: whoever knows how to execute technique X advances to level Y. But a system named after a quality that the community recognises in a person must assess the whole person.

The OIMA manuscript states it explicitly: "One cannot advance in grade if one is an excellent fighter but an emotionally unstable or spiritually empty person." This statement is the direct consequence of the naming choice. To call the system okichitaw means committing to assessing one's students with the same criteria that the Nêhiyaw community used to confer the historical title: not only technical competence, but generosity, moral courage, responsibility toward the community, the capacity to grow through error rather than defend against it. The name of the system carries within it, like DNA, the entire philosophy of assessment.

This principle also has consequences for those who teach. The Okichitaw instructor is not simply a technical expert transmitting competencies: they are someone whom the community of practitioners observes and assesses with the same criteria by which the Nêhiyaw community assessed the historical okichitawak. Generosity in teaching (not withholding knowledge to maintain power), the courage to acknowledge one's own limits before students, the responsibility toward the physical and psychological safety of those who train: these qualities are an integral part of the instructor's mandate, not optional additions to technical competence.

The distinction between historical title and name of the system is therefore, ultimately, the distinction between two conceptions of martial progress: the technical one (one advances by acquiring competencies) and the ethical one (one advances by becoming a more integrated person). The name Okichitaw declares that the system embraces the second conception as primary. This does not mean that technique is secondary: it means that technique is in the service of the formation of the person, not an end in itself. A practitioner who excels technically but fails ethically is not reaching the objective of the system, whatever their grade.

> [C1] The structure of Nêhiyaw warrior categories: Mandelbaum, D.G. (1940, repr. 1979). The Plains Cree. Canadian Plains Research Center, ch. 5 “Warfare.” [C2] The Elders’ declaration on the name: Lépine in Cowboys & Indians (May 2022). [C2] The multidimensional assessment of advancement: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript, “Grading System” section. The quotation “One cannot advance...” is translated by the author. [C4] The philosophical implications of the title/system distinction are the author’s.

Chapter Summary

Four sections, one unified message: the name is a historical, political, and philosophical document.

The etymological analysis revealed three levels of meaning in the morphological structure of the term: the root okichi- (demonstrated capacity), the morpheme -taw- (delegated agentive function), the suffix -ak (animate plural category). The orthographic variants table documented six distinct forms in the corpus of sources, with analysis of the reasons for each divergence. The section on alternative denominations classified the different labels used for the system, distinguishing between acceptable equivalents, partial descriptions, and problematic uses — including the signal of the Niedermann volumes as a documented case of unauthorised use. The

distinction between historical title and name of the system showed how a typographic choice — capital vs. lowercase — reflects a fundamental conceptual distinction that determines the philosophy of advancement assessment.

The conventions adopted by this volume are: Okichitaw for the modern system; okichitaw in italics for the historical singular title; okichitawak in italics for the historical plural category; CRO with macrons for Glossary entries and terms analysed in depth; "?" marking for unverifiable entries; Lépine with accent for the Founder's name. These conventions are not the only possible ones, but they are those that maximise transparency for the reader and respect for the linguistic traditions the text traverses.

The most open question — the systematic linguistic review of the OIMA terminology by a specialised Nêhiyaw linguist — is not one this volume can resolve autonomously. It requires a collaboration that the author recommends be initiated before the publication of the definitive version, preferably in coordination with the OIMA itself and with the Nêhiyaw language programmes at the University of Saskatchewan or the First Nations University of Canada.

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PART TWO

THE PEOPLE AND THE LAND

Chapter 3 — The Nêhiyawak

The Nêhiyawak are the most numerous People among the Nations of Treaty No. 6 in Canada. They are also the People whose warrior tradition George J. Lépine recovered and systematised in the Okichitaw system.

Understanding who they are, how they define themselves, how they developed across history, and how they preserved their identity through the century of suppression is the prerequisite for understanding the deep significance of Okichitaw.

This chapter is not an ethnographic catalogue: it is an introduction to a People presented in their own complexity and in their own contemporary vitality.

The sections that follow progressively cover the fundamental dimensions of Nêhiyaw culture. The first four sections address the language, the regional variants, the social structure, and the kinship systems. The central sections analyse leadership, educational practices, and the transmission of knowledge. The final sections treat spirituality, relations with other Nations, and the contemporary condition. In each section, where possible, the connection with the Okichitaw system is made explicit: this chapter is not a separate background from the main subject of the volume, but an integral part of the understanding of the system.

3.1 — The Name and Its Meaning: Endonyme and Identity

The term nêhiyaw — plural nêhiyawak — is commonly translated as "Cree" in the English-language literature, but this translation obscures a meaning that is essential for the understanding of the culture. "Cree" is an exonym — a name given from the outside — whose most plausible etymology connects it to a distortion of the

Ojibwe term *Kenistenoag*, used to designate a specific group, then generalised by Europeans to the entire Nation.

The Indigenous term nêhiyaw is instead an endonyme that carries a dense meaning: “one who speaks the same language,” “one who is like me,” “one with whom I share a way of seeing the world.”

The meaning of the term nêhiyaw goes far beyond linguistic description. In the Nêhiyaw worldview, sharing a language is not sharing only a means of communication: it is sharing the structure of thought, the categories through which experience is organised, the relationships of mutual obligation that the culture expresses.

To be Nêhiyaw is to speak a language but above all to inhabit a shared world: to respect certain values, to maintain certain relationships with the Land, with other human beings, and with the spiritual forces that animate the universe. Nêhiyaw identity is not biological or racial: it is cultural and relational.

The question of self-identification is particularly important in the contemporary context. The criteria for recognition as “Status Indian” under the Canadian Indian Act — based on biological criteria of descent — do not correspond to the Nêhiyaw cultural criteria of belonging, which were based on adoption, participation in community life, and respect for shared values. The Indian Act therefore produced the paradoxical situation in which persons with deep Nêhiyaw cultural ties are not recognised as such by the Canadian State, while persons with little or no cultural connection may hold “Status.” This tension between self-identification and state recognition is one of the most difficult challenges of contemporary Canadian Indigenous politics.

In the context of Okichitaw, the question of self-identification presents itself in a specific way. Lépine has stated explicitly that the Lodge is open to all: not only to Nêhiyawak, not only to Indigenous people. The transmission of Nêhiyaw warrior culture through bodily practice does not require that the practitioner be of Nêhiyaw descent. It requires instead respect for the tradition, the humility of the learner, and the willingness to receive knowledge in the way it is transmitted: with the ceremonies, in the Nêhiyawêwin language, in respect of the Seven Teachings. This openness is consistent with the Nêhiyaw conception of identity as practice rather than biology.

The word *nêhiyawêwin* designates both the People and the language: in the Nêhiyawêwin, the suffix -win transforms a term into an abstract concept. The People and the language are therefore intimately connected in the same term, indicating that language is not an instrument used by the People but a constitutive part of their identity. This is not a linguistic detail: it is an ontological declaration. The Nêhiyawêwin does not describe Nêhiyaw reality: it constructs it.

The grammatical categories of the language — the animate and inanimate, the degrees of evidence, the spatial relationships encoded in verbs — are the same categories through which Nêhiyaw culture organises the experience of the world.

The Nêhiyawêwin in the Okichitaw curriculum fulfils this ontological function beyond the communicative one. When Lépine teaches that the first posture of the Warrior carries a Nêhiyawêwin name, he is not simply assigning an arbitrary label to a bodily position. He is inscribing that posture within a network of cultural meanings that the term carries with it: the relationship with the East direction of the Medicine Wheel, the moment of day in which one is most open to perception, the quality of attention that posture

develops. The vocabulary of the system is not interchangeable with an English or Italian translation: it loses something essential in the translation.

> [C1] The etymology of Cree and the meaning of nêhiyaw: Wolfart, H.C. and Carroll, J.F. (1981). Meet Cree. University of Alberta Press, pp. 1-5. [C1] The “Status Indian” criteria and the tension with cultural criteria: Fixico, D.L. (1998). The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century. University Press of Colorado, ch. 3. [C2] The Lodge’s openness to non-Indigenous people: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The Nêhiyawêwin as constructor of Nêhiyaw reality and the ontological function of the Okichitaw vocabulary are the author’s.

3.2 — The Nêhiyawêwin Language: Structure and Thought

The Nêhiyawêwin belongs to the Algonquian language family, the most widely distributed geographically among the Indigenous language families of North America. Algonquian languages extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific and include Mi’kmaq of the Maritimes, Anishinaabe of the Great Lakes, Blackfoot of the Alberta Plains, and Naskapi of Labrador. This geographic distribution is the result of a historical expansion that linguists estimate occurred over the last 3,000 to 5,000 years from an interior continental core. The extraordinary diffusion of Algonquian languages testifies to the mobility and adaptability of the peoples who spoke them.

The Nêhiyawêwin is a polysynthetic language: one in which much information that in English would be expressed with separate words is incorporated into a single very long word, built by adding prefixes and suffixes to a root. This structure is not simply more economical than that of European languages: it is organised around different cognitive categories.

The Nêhiyaw verb incorporates information about the grammatical gender of the subject and object, about their spatial

distance from the speaker, about the degree of evidence with which the speaker knows the fact being stated (did they see it directly? Did they hear it said? Do they infer it from clues?), and about the social relationship between the participants in the conversation. Each of these categories reflects a different priority in the structuring of experience.

The grammatical distinction between "animate" and "inanimate" entities is perhaps the most significant aspect of the Nêhiyawêwin for the understanding of the culture. In English, the fundamental grammatical distinction is between masculine and feminine in some pronoun forms. In the Nêhiyawêwin, the fundamental distinction is between that which has spirit, agency, and life — animate entities — and that which does not. Significantly, the stone is grammatically animate in Nêhiyawêwin. Plants are animate. The ceremonial drum is animate. These objects that English grammar would treat as inert are endowed with a form of life in the Nêhiyaw worldview. This is not a grammatical quirk: it is the linguistic manifestation of a cosmology in which the entire natural world is animated by spirits and deserves respect as a carrier of that life.

The evidential grading system in the Nêhiyawêwin is particularly relevant for understanding the Nêhiyaw culture's relationship with knowledge and truth. In the Nêhiyawêwin, every statement must specify the degree of certainty with which the speaker makes it: whether they know it from direct experience, whether they heard it from others, whether they infer it from clues. There is no Nêhiyaw equivalent of an English statement like "It rained yesterday" that does not specify how the speaker knows. This grammatical system produces a culture that values epistemic humility — clarity about what one knows and how one knows it — as a fundamental value. The C1-C4 classification used in the OIMA/UNESCO

manuscript of Okichitaw, which distinguishes primary sources from the author's interpretations, reflects this same epistemic sensibility.

The current state of the Nêhiyawêwin is that of an endangered but vitally alive language. The 2016 Canadian Census recorded approximately 96,000 speakers of Cree in all variants, making Cree the most widely spoken Indigenous language in Canada. However, transmission to children is incomplete in urban communities and in many reserves. Most fluent speakers are middle-aged or older adults. Language revitalisation programmes in schools, universities, and through digital resources — apps, podcasts, YouTube channels in Nêhiyawêwin — seek to reverse this trend. The academic work of H.C. Wolfart and Freda Ahenakew, which produced the first systematic dictionary of Plains Cree in 1998, provided an essential documentary foundation for these efforts.

The main dialects of the Nêhiyawêwin are traditionally distinguished on the basis of the sound used in specific phonetic positions. The Y-dialect — Plains Cree — is the most widely spoken and the one Lépine uses in the Okichitaw curriculum. The TH-dialect — Swampy Cree — is spoken in the more eastern areas of the territory. The N-dialect — Moose Cree — is used in the area of Moose Factory in Ontario. These dialectal differences do not prevent mutual comprehension: a speaker of one dialect understands a speaker of another with moderate effort. This mutual intelligibility was historically important for diplomatic and commercial relations between bands from different regions.

Writing in the Nêhiyawêwin has a particular history. Before European contact, no writing system existed: Nêhiyaw culture was an oral culture. European missionaries developed several transcription systems in the nineteenth century, the most effective of which was the

syllabary invented by James Evans in 1840: a syllabic writing system — each symbol represents a syllable rather than a single sound — that the Nêhiyawak adopted quickly because it could be learned in a few days. The syllabary is still used in many Nêhiyaw communities alongside the Roman alphabet today. Its existence demonstrates the capacity of Nêhiyaw culture to selectively adopt useful European technologies without losing its own identity.

> [C3] The Algonquian language family: Mithun, M. (1999). The Languages of Native North America. Cambridge University Press, ch. 7. [C3] The animate/inanimate grammar and the evidential grading system: Wolfart, H.C. and Ahenakew, F. (1998). The Student's Dictionary of Literary Plains Cree. Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics. [C1] Evans' syllabary: McLean, J. (1890). James Evans: Inventor of the Syllabic System of Writing. Methodist Mission Rooms. [C4] The connection between the evidential grading system and the C1-C4 Okichitaw classification is the author's.

3.3 — Regional Variants and Nêhiyaw Groups

The Nêhiyawak are not a uniform people. They are traditionally distinguished into several regional groups that reflect the different ecological conditions in which they lived and the specific cultural adaptations to those conditions. This internal diversity is part of the complexity of the Nêhiyaw People and must be understood in order to avoid the simplification of a single homogeneous "Cree culture." The boundaries between the groups were not fixed: people moved, married across groups, and bands merged and separated in response to economic and political conditions. Internal diversity was an adaptive tool.

The Plains Cree — Paskwawi-nêhiyawak, "the people of the Plains" — are the group this volume primarily concerns. They inhabited the Great Plains of southern Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta and depended principally on Buffalo hunting. Their nomadic

economy required seasonal mobility that organised the entire life cycle: winter camps in forested valleys, collective summer hunts on the open Plains, ceremonial gatherings at the sacred sites of their territory. With the introduction of the Horse in the eighteenth century, their mobility increased and their capacity to exploit the Buffalo intensified, leading to a brief period of great prosperity before the disappearance of the Buffalo placed them in a structural crisis.

The Woodland Cree — Sakaw-nêhiyawak, "the people of the forest" — inhabited the boreal forest of northern Saskatchewan, northern Manitoba, and northwestern Ontario. Their economy was based on hunting caribou and moose, fishing, and gathering. The social organisation of the Woodland Cree was more fragmented than that of the Plains Cree: the basic units were small family groups that moved through the territory following the movements of the caribou. This fragmentation was not disorganisation: it was the optimal adaptation to an ecosystem in which resources were more dispersed than on the open Plains.

The Swampy Cree — Muskeko-nêhiyawak, "the people of the marshy areas" — inhabited the shores of Hudson Bay and Lake Winnipeg. They were the first Nêhiyawak to have systematic contact with the Hudson's Bay Company in the seventeenth century and played a crucial role as commercial intermediaries. Their geographic position made them more exposed to European diseases and missionary influence, but also more adapted to navigating colonial relationships. Some Swampy Cree developed a dual cultural competency — fluent in both traditional practices and the European commercial and institutional system — that made them effective mediators between the two worlds.

The James Bay Cree — Iyiyuu'ch/Eeyou, "the true beings" — inhabit the southern coast of Hudson Bay in northern Quebec. Although geographically separated from the Plains Cree, they share with them the same linguistic and cultural root. The Grand Council of the Crees, the political organisation that represents them, negotiated in 1975 the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement: the first modern agreement recognising Indigenous territorial rights in exchange for economic contributions for hydroelectric development. This experience of negotiating from a position of relative strength is a model that the Plains Nêhiyaw Nations observe with interest in the context of their own claims to the revenues from natural resources.

The Rocky Cree — Asini-Sakaw-nêhiyawak, "the people of the stone forest" — inhabited the transition zones between the Plains and the Rocky Mountains in western Alberta. Their geographic position placed them in contact with both the Plains Cree and the Mountain Nations such as the Kainai and Piikâni. Their culture was a creative synthesis of Plains and mountain traditions: they combined elements of Buffalo hunting with the techniques of hunting large mountain ungulates. This border position made them particularly skilled as diplomatic mediators between the Plains Nations and those of the Rockies.

The distinction between these groups was permeable and contested. Bands inhabiting the transition zones between different ecosystems developed hybrid identities that did not easily lend themselves to classification. The mobility of people between groups — through marriage, adoption, or voluntary migration — guaranteed the circulation of competencies and knowledge through the wider social fabric. A Nêhiyaw Warrior who had lived for years with a Nakoda band brought with him competencies and perspectives that enriched

the group to which he returned. This openness to inter-tribal mobility was a fundamental adaptive resource.

> [C1] The regional variants of the Nêhiyawak: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 1. [C1] The James Bay Cree Nation and the 1975 Agreement: Feit, H.A. (1980). "Negotiating Recognition of Aboriginal Rights." Canadian Journal of Anthropology 1(2). [C4] The analysis of permeability between groups as an adaptive resource and of the Rocky Cree as diplomatic mediators are the author's.

3.4 — Social Structure: Band, Kinship, and Leadership

The fundamental social unit of the Plains Nêhiyawak was the band: a group of twenty to one hundred people bound by kinship, marriage alliances, and shared history. The band was simultaneously the economic, political, and security unit. It hunted together, shared food on the basis of redistribution principles that valued generosity over individual possession, made decisions in assembly, and defended itself as a cohesive unit.

The boundaries of the band were fluid: people moved between bands through marriage or for reasons of affinity and opportunity. This fluidity guaranteed the circulation of people and prevented the endogamous closure of groups too small for biological and cultural reproduction.

The Nêhiyaw kinship system was bilateral: kinship affiliations were traced through both the paternal and maternal lines. This bilateral system was more adaptable to nomadic mobility than a rigid clan system because it allowed each individual to draw on a much wider network of relationships. A Warrior in difficulty could turn to both his father's relatives and his mother's relatives for hospitality, help, and protection. This dual affiliation increased individual and

collective resilience in the face of crises, because it multiplied the nodes of the available support network.

The civil leader — the *okimaw* — was the leader in everyday decisions: where to move, when to hunt, how to resolve internal disputes. Their authority derived from the reputation earned over time, from generosity in redistribution, and from the wisdom of their counsel. An okimaw who lost consensus lost their position: not through a formal vote but through the progressive erosion of those who followed. Anyone could dissent from the leader's position and follow a different path without formal sanctions. The leader did not command: they proposed, mediated, built consensus. The colonial officials who treated Nêhiyaw leaders as the equivalent of European rulers — capable of binding their community with a signature on a document — systematically misunderstood this structure.

The war leader — the *okimahkan* — held authority specifically in the context of raids and defence. During war expeditions, their word carried more weight than the okimaw's: in combat, decisions must be rapid and authority must be clear. But this authority was temporary: when the expedition ended, they returned to their ordinary responsibilities. No war leader held permanent authority in peacetime. This separation between military and civil leadership — a principle that modern democracies have laboriously constructed as a safeguard against militarism — was an integral part of the precolonial Nêhiyaw political system.

The healer or shaman — the *mâmahkâpimisiw* or *wiyâskês* — held a distinct type of authority: they were the mediator between the human world and the spiritual world. Their function was not only to cure illness but to maintain in balance the relationships between the community and the spiritual forces that surrounded it. They predicted

the movements of the herds, interpreted dreams, conducted ceremonies, and diagnosed the spiritual causes of collective misfortunes. Respect for the healer was enormous but not uncritical: a healer whose power seemed not to work lost credibility just as an okimaw whose advice proved wrong. Competence was assessed pragmatically.

The assembly decision-making system was the mechanism through which the community expressed its consent. Important decisions were discussed in assemblies attended by all the adults of the band, men and women. The process was slow: everyone had the right to speak and had to be heard. The objective was not a majority vote but a consensus: a position with which no one had insurmountable objections. This process produced decisions with high collective adherence but required time. Colonial officials — accustomed to the faster decision-making systems of European hierarchies — interpreted this process as inefficiency or as the absence of government. In reality it was the product of a different political philosophy: power belongs to the community, not to those who represent it.

The role of women in the Nêhiyaw governance system has been systematically underestimated by European sources, written predominantly by men who interacted predominantly with men. Women participated in band assemblies; some held formal leadership roles as healers, as Elder Knowledge Keepers of historical memory, or as warriors. The Nêhiyaw oral tradition preserves stories of women warriors and women leaders. The knowledge transmission system assigned women specific roles in the education of the young that were equivalent to those of men, not subordinate. In Okichitaw, which has accepted students of all genders since the founding of the Lodge, this tradition of equivalence is implicitly maintained.

> [C1] The structure of the band and the kinship system: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 4. [C1] The okimaw and the Nêhiyaw leadership system: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 4; Tobias, J.L. (1983). "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation." In Getty and Lussier (eds.), UBC Press. [C4] The colonial misunderstanding of the leaders' capacity to bind the community, and the parallel with modern democracy, are the author's.

3.5 — The Transmission of Knowledge and Education

Precolonial Nêhiyaw education did not take place in spaces separate from daily life. There was no equivalent of the European school: a distinct physical space in which specialised adults transmit abstract knowledge to children who lack it. The transmission of knowledge occurred through guided participation in the life of the community: children learned by observing adults, imitating them, gradually participating in simpler activities and progressing toward more complex ones as competencies matured. This pedagogy of participation — which contemporary anthropology recognises as the most effective learning method for many types of practical knowledge — was the fundamental structure of Nêhiyaw education.

Grandparents played a central educational role that contemporary urban nuclear families often undervalue. In a society without writing, Grandparents were the repositories of the historical memory of the band: they remembered the stories of the Ancestors, knew the names of places and the histories connected to them, carried the knowledge of the ceremonies and medicinal practices that required a lifetime of learning. Entrusting Grandparents with the education of grandchildren was not a choice of convenience: it was an optimisation of the transmission structure. Grandparents had the time that parents, engaged in daily economic activities, did not always have.

The educational role of the maternal uncle — the mother's brother — was specifically dedicated to transmitting the practical competencies of the Warrior and hunter. The uncle had a different perspective on his nephew than the father and could therefore offer more objective counsel; he had specific social obligations toward his sister's children that motivated him to invest in their formation; and his distance from the immediate authority structure of the father allowed a freer and more playful relationship. George Lépine's experience with his uncle Ted is the contemporary manifestation of this millennial pedagogical tradition.

Storytelling was the primary pedagogical instrument of Nêhiyaw culture. Stories were not entertainment: they were containers of knowledge, values, and identity. Through stories, the cosmology of the Medicine Wheel, the Seven Teachings of the Grandfathers, the rules of combat and hunting, the history of relations with other Nations, and the principles of appropriate behaviour in every situation were transmitted. The stories had their own seasons: some — the stories of *Wisahkechâhk*, the Nêhiyaw Trickster — could be told only in winter, when the Earth was covered in snow. This seasonal restriction was not arbitrary: the winter concentration of bands created the optimal conditions for collective storytelling.

Wisahkechâhk, the Nêhiyaw Trickster, is one of the most important figures of the Nêhiyaw narrative tradition. Not a hero in the European sense: an ambiguous figure, sometimes wise and sometimes foolish, sometimes a benefactor of humanity and sometimes a cause of disasters through their own stupidity or selfishness. Their adventures illustrate the consequences of not respecting the rules of the community, of nature, and of the spiritual world. Through the Trickster, Nêhiyaw culture transmits social norms

to children in an indirect and non-authoritarian way: not “you must do it this way” but “look at what happened to Wisahkechâhk when they did it that way.” This indirect pedagogy respects the autonomy of the child while transmitting the values of the community.

Bodily learning was distinct from verbal learning and had its own logic. The techniques of hunting, combat, tanning hides, and building the tipi were learned through observation and imitation, not through verbal explanations. An Nêhiyaw expert showed how to do something; the apprentice observed, imitated, erred, and corrected. The teacher did not continuously interrupt with verbal corrections: they waited for the apprentice to learn through their own errors and offered clarification only when necessary. This “show first, explain later” pedagogy reflects the priority that Nêhiyaw culture attributes to the body as the seat of knowledge, and is the model that Lépine incorporated into the structure of Lodge sessions.

The Vision Quest — the solitary search for a vision — was the most individual ceremonial element of the Nêhiyaw formative path. A young person who withdrew alone into the territory, fasted, and prayed for several days sought the encounter with a spirit guide that would define their specific relationship with the spiritual world for the rest of their life. Not everyone received a vision; not all visions had the same intensity. But the attempt itself — the willingness to face solitude, cold, hunger, and uncertainty in search of something greater than oneself — was a formative act in its own right. The Vision Quest placed the young person before their own vulnerability and prepared them to face the trials of adult life.

> [C1] Nêhiyaw pedagogy: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 6. [C3] The narrative of Wisahkechâhk: Ahenakew, F. (1987). waskâhîckâhk. Pemmican Publications. [C2] The "show first, explain later" pedagogy as a model for Lodge sessions: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The analysis of the Vision Quest as formation in itself regardless of the vision received is the author's.

3.6 — Nêhiyaw Spirituality

Nêhiyaw spirituality is not a religion in the European sense: it is not a set of doctrines one adheres to intellectually, it has no canonical sacred text, and it requires no formal affiliation to an institution. It is instead a way of being in the world: a set of practices, relationships, and orientations that define how one relates to oneself, to other human beings, to other living beings, and to the invisible forces that animate the universe. It is inseparable from daily life: every action, from hunting to combat, from healing to storytelling, has a spiritual dimension that cannot be removed without distorting the meaning of the action itself.

The concept of Kitchi Manitou — the Great Spirit or Great Mystery — is one of the fundamental cosmological principles of the Nêhiyaw tradition. It is not a personal God in the Christian sense: not an anthropomorphic figure who intervenes in human history. It is rather the vital force that permeates all things and connects all beings in a network of relationships. Every element of the natural world — the stones, the rivers, the animals, the plants, the wind and the stars — manifests the Kitchi Manitou in different ways and deserves respect as a carrier of that force. This vision produces a relationship with the natural world radically different from the European one: not dominion over nature but participation in nature.

The principle of the inter-relation of all beings — expressed in Anishinaabe as *Mitakuye Oyasin* and with equivalent terms in the

Nêhiyawêwin — is the practical consequence of this cosmology. If all beings manifest the same fundamental spirit, then all beings are relatives. The Buffalo is not inferior to the human: it is a relative, a being with its own spirit and its own function in the cosmos. To kill the Buffalo is therefore always an act that requires respect and gratitude: not the "conquest of nature" of European thought but participation in a relationship of gift and reciprocity. This cosmological principle is at the foundation of the ceremonial practices that accompanied the hunt.

The four sacred medicines of Nêhiyaw smudging — sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco — represent the material dimension of spiritual practice. Smudging — burning the medicines and purifying oneself in the smoke — is the most everyday ceremonial practice of the Nêhiyaw tradition. It is not reserved for special moments: it can be practised at the beginning of each day, before any important activity, at any moment when one wishes to purify the body, mind, and spirit from negative influences. In the Okichitaw Lodge, smudging opens every session: not as a symbolic gesture but as a real practice of preparation that orients participants toward the quality of presence required by the practice that follows.

The sweat lodge ceremony — called *mâsinahikasiwin* in the Nêhiyawêwin — is one of the most complete spiritual practices of the Nêhiyaw tradition. It takes place in a curvilinear structure built with branches and covered with hides or blankets, where stones heated in an outside fire are brought inside and doused with water to produce intense steam. Participants sing, pray, and sometimes receive visions through the extreme heat. The ceremony is simultaneously physical purification, spiritual meditation, and a healing instrument. Warriors preparing for an important expedition used the sweat lodge as a

psychophysical preparation tool: a pragmatic application of spiritual practice that reflects the Nêhiyaw unity of body, mind, and spirit.

The Sun Dance ceremony — prohibited by the Indian Act in 1885 and not legally restored until 1951 — was the most important collective ceremony of the Plains tradition. It lasted four days and required the participation of the entire community, both as dancers and as observers and supporters. Its significance was simultaneously cosmological — the renewal of the relationships between the People and the spiritual forces that govern the world — and social: the Sun Dance was the moment in which the different bands gathered, strengthened inter-tribal bonds, and renewed collective commitments. Its prohibition did not strike only a religious practice: it dismantled the social and cosmological structure that held the Nêhiyaw People together.

The spiritual dimension of Okichitaw is not an exotic addition to a combat system: it is the foundation of the system. Lépine has stated that Okichitaw without its spiritual dimension would be only violence: combat techniques without an ethical code, force without wisdom. The Medicine Wheel as cosmological structure, the Seven Teachings as ethical code, and the ceremonies of every session are the spiritual container within which the martial techniques acquire their authentic meaning. Okichitaw is therefore not only a martial arts system: it is a spiritual practice that uses the body as its primary instrument of growth and transformation.

> [C1] Nêhiyaw spirituality: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 7. [C1] The Sun Dance and its prohibition: Pettipas, K. (1994). Severing the Ties That Bind. University of Manitoba Press, chs. 3-5. [C2] The spiritual dimension of Okichitaw: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The prohibition of the Sun Dance as the dismantling of Nêhiyaw social and cosmological structure is the author's.

3.7 — Relations with Other Nations of the Plains

The Plains Nêhiyawak did not live in isolation: they were part of a system of complex inter-tribal relations that included alliances, rivalries, trade, and diplomacy. Understanding these relations is essential for understanding both the Nêhiyaw martial tradition — which developed in the context of specific conflicts and alliances — and the dynamics of the Resistance of 1885, in which inter-tribal relations played a decisive role. The Plains Nations were not isolated entities that clashed in chaotic fashion: they were actors in a complex geopolitical system with rules, protocols, and de-escalation mechanisms.

The Niitsitapi — the Blackfoot Confederation, composed of the Siksikâ (Blackfoot), the Kainai (Blood), and the Piikâni (Peigan) — were the most important and most feared neighbours of the Nêhiyawak. They occupied the Plains of western Alberta and northern Montana and had with the Nêhiyawak a centuries-long history of rivalry for the control of hunting territories. Conflicts were frequent but not constant: periods of hostility alternated with periods of truce and reciprocal trade. The Nêhiyaw-Niitsitapi rivalry was the principal line of tension on the Canadian Plains and profoundly shaped both cultures, producing more capable Warriors and more sophisticated combat systems.

The Nakoda — known also as Stoney Sioux or Assiniboine — had generally more cooperative relations with the Nêhiyawak. They occupied the Plains of western Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan, geographically overlapping with Nêhiyaw territory in several areas. Marriage alliances between the two Nations were frequent: Poundmaker himself had been adopted by the Blackfoot leader Crowfoot, but his band had close ties also with the Nakoda. The

genealogy of George Lépine includes the Nakoda component alongside the Nêhiyaw and Métis: a further manifestation of how inter-tribal boundaries were permeable at the individual level even when they were a source of collective conflict.

The Lakota — the most numerous of the Sioux Nations — had an intermittent presence on the Canadian Plains. Their presence became particularly significant after the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, when Sitting Bull and approximately 5,000 Lakota crossed the Canadian border seeking refuge from American forces. Their presence in Saskatchewan between 1876 and 1881 created a complex political situation for the Canadian government, which feared being drawn into American conflicts, and for the Nêhiyaw Nations, who found themselves sharing territory at a moment of growing scarcity of Buffalo. Big Bear and Sitting Bull met several times during this period, seeking to build an inter-tribal solidarity that could have changed the dynamics of the Resistance of 1885.

Inter-tribal diplomacy on the Plains had formal protocols and effective conflict resolution mechanisms. The primary diplomatic instrument was the ceremonial pipe: the exchange of the pipe between the representatives of two Nations formalised an agreement by invoking the spiritual authorities as witnesses. Violating an agreement sealed with the pipe had not only political but spiritual consequences: it was the violation of a promise made before Kitchi Manitou. These mechanisms of dependence of the stability of agreements on spiritual consequences — more effective than any military enforcement system for nomadic populations — made Plains diplomacy surprisingly stable in its periods of peace.

Inter-tribal ceremonies — the great summer gatherings in which peoples of different Nations met to trade, dance, and celebrate

— were spaces of relationship-building that transcended individual bands and Nations. In these gatherings, the martial techniques of the different Nations were compared: Nêhiyaw Warriors observed Niitsitapi and Lakota Warriors and vice versa. Innovations in combat techniques, weapon construction, and raid tactics spread through these occasions of encounter. The Nêhiyaw martial tradition did not develop in isolation: it was shaped by the comparison with the traditions of neighbouring Nations.

The Métis — the People born from the union of European traders and Nêhiyaw and other Nations' women — had a particular position in the Plains system of relations. They carried elements of both cultures and could navigate between the two worlds. Relations between the Nêhiyawak and the Métis were close and complex: they shared territories, Buffalo hunting practices, and kinship networks. The history of the Lépine family — with its genealogy including Nêhiyaw, Nakoda, and Métis — is emblematic of this complexity. Okichitaw carries within it this multi-tribal heritage: it is rooted in the Nêhiyaw tradition but was created by a Founder who carries within himself the convergence of multiple Plains traditions.

> [C1] Nêhiyaw-Niitsitapi relations: Dempsey, H.A. (1984). Big Bear: The End of Freedom. Douglas & McIntyre. [C1] Sitting Bull's presence in Canada: Turner, J.P. (1950). The North-West Mounted Police 1873-1893. King's Printer, vol. 1, ch. 7. [C1] The meeting between Big Bear and Sitting Bull: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 2. [C4] The inter-tribal permeability as context of the Nêhiyaw martial tradition and the multi-tribal genealogy of Okichitaw are the author's.

3.8 — The Nêhiyawak Today: Resurgence and Challenges

The Nêhiyawak of contemporary Canada number approximately 210,000 persons according to the 2016 Census, including all regional variants. This is the largest Indigenous group in Canada, distributed

over a vast territory stretching from western Quebec to Alberta. This population has a young demographic structure: half are under 28 years of age, compared to a Canadian average of 41. This demographic youth is simultaneously a challenge — requiring massive investments in education, health, and economic opportunity — and a resource: a young population with cultural roots that is reconnecting to its own tradition.

The socioeconomic conditions of contemporary Nêhiyawak are still characterised by significant disparities relative to the Canadian average. Rates of poverty, unemployment, chronic illness, conflict with the penal system, and addiction are significantly higher in Nêhiyaw communities. These disparities are not the result of intrinsic cultural characteristics: they are the measurable product of two centuries of colonial policies that eroded Nêhiyaw economic, cultural, and political autonomy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report documented this connection explicitly. The path toward parity passes through the recognition of the historical causes of the disparities and through policies that address those causes rather than only the symptoms.

Nêhiyaw cultural revitalisation is underway on multiple fronts. Nêhiyawêwin teaching programmes in reserve schools and universities are producing new partial speakers seeking to become fluent. The ceremonial resurgence — the recovery of spiritual practices that had been prohibited for half a century — is producing a visible cultural vitality. Nêhiyaw visual arts — painting, sculpture, craft — have reached international recognition. Nêhiyaw literature in English and in the Nêhiyawêwin is flourishing. And the Nêhiyaw martial arts, recovered by Lépine through Okichitaw, add another piece to this mosaic of revitalisation.

The legal situation of the Nêhiyawak is in constant evolution. The Supreme Court of Canada decisions — from Sparrow in 1990 to Haida Nation in 2004 — have progressively expanded the recognition of the Aboriginal rights guaranteed by Section 35 of the Constitution of 1982. The Nations of Treaty No. 6 are using the legal system to claim rights to the natural resources of their ancestral territory: oil, gas, minerals, water. These claims are meeting with partial success: the legal system recognises the rights but is slow to implement them, and provincial governments resist the economic implications. The process is slow but the direction is clear.

Decolonisation, in the sense theorist Frantz Fanon applied to the North American Indigenous context, is also a bodily question. The colonised body has internalised its own subordination: it has learned to occupy less space, to move with less authority, to wait rather than act. This "colonisation of the body" is documented in studies on intergenerational trauma: the generations that passed through the Residential Schools transmit to their children not only the memory of the trauma but the bodily patterns of those who have endured prolonged violence.

The recovery of the Nêhiyaw warrior tradition through Okichitaw is also the recovery of a way of being in the body with full presence and full authority: a specific response to the colonisation of the body.

The Okichitaw Lodge at the NCCT in Toronto is one of the places where this revitalisation occurs concretely. Young Indigenous people of the first or second urban generation — often disconnected from their own culture, sometimes not even knowing which Nation they come from — enter the Lodge and begin a path of reconnection that passes through the body. They do not read books about their

tradition: they practise it. They do not listen to lectures on the Medicine Wheel: they embody it in their own actions. This bodily learning — which mirrors the traditional Nêhiyaw pedagogy of guided participation — is the specific contribution of Okichitaw to the wider revitalisation.

> [C1] The Nêhiyaw population in contemporary Canada: Statistics Canada (2016). Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. [C1] Nêhiyaw cultural revitalisation: Alfred, T. (2009). Peace, Power, Righteousness. Oxford University Press Canada, ch. 5. [C3] Decolonisation as a bodily question: Fanon, F. (1961). The Wretched of the Earth. Grove Press; Duran, E. and Duran, B. (1995). Native American Postcolonial Psychology. SUNY Press. [C2] The Lodge as a site of bodily revitalisation: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; CBC News (2018). [C4] The connection between intergenerational trauma, colonisation of the body, and Okichitaw as a specific response is the author's.

Chapter Summary

The Nêhiyawak are the People whose warrior tradition Okichitaw recovers and transmits. Understanding this People in their complexity is the necessary condition for understanding the deep significance of Okichitaw. This is not nostalgia or folklore: it is the revitalisation of a living People.

Eight dimensions: the endonyme and its relational meaning; the polysynthetic language and its animate/inanimate cosmology; the regional variants from the Plains to the boreal forest; the band structure with its bilateral kinship and its forms of leadership; the pedagogy of guided participation and the role of Grandparents and maternal uncles; the spirituality centred on Kitchi Manitou; the inter-tribal relations that shaped the warrior tradition; and the contemporary condition of a People in resurgence.

Chapter 4 describes the Great Canadian Plains in their physical, ecological, spiritual, and cosmological dimension: the Land that made Okichitaw both possible and necessary.

* * *

PART THREE

HISTORY

Chapter 4 — The Land

The Land is for the Plains Nêhiyawak far more than a physical place: it is the condition of possibility of their cultural, spiritual, and economic existence.

One cannot understand Nêhiyaw culture without understanding the Land that formed it; one cannot understand Okichitaw without understanding the Land from which the cosmological principles that structure the system emerged.

The Medicine Wheel is also a map of the Land: the four directions correspond to four ecological zones, four seasons, four ways of relating to the natural world. When Lépine teaches Okichitaw in Toronto, he carries this geography with him: sublimated into cosmology, but never forgotten.

This chapter is organised in eight sections that progressively cover the dimensions of the Nêhiyaw Land. The first three sections describe the physical Land: the geomorphology of the Plains, the water system, and the climate with its seasonal cycle. The central sections analyse the Land as a living system: the fauna and flora that define its resources, the Buffalo as the central element of the ecosystem and the culture. The final sections treat the Land as human space: the sacred and ceremonial sites, the Nêhiyaw geographic nomenclature, and the cosmological significance of the Land for Okichitaw.

4.1 — The Geomorphology of the Great Canadian Plains

The Great Canadian Plains — that portion of Nêhiyaw Land stretching from eastern Manitoba to the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta — are the product of an extraordinary glacial inheritance. During the last great glaciations, concluded approximately 12,000 years ago, sheets of ice up to three kilometres thick advanced from the north, scraping and shaping the geological substrate and depositing the sediments that today form the soil of the Plains. The result is a landscape of rare topographic uniformity: a

surface extending for hundreds of kilometres with minimal variations in elevation, interrupted only by river valleys and the morainic ridges left by the retreating glaciers.

The geomorphology of the Plains is structured in three principal levels corresponding to different elevations. The first level — the most eastern, in the zones of Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan — lies at approximately 200 to 400 metres above sea level. The second level rises to the west, in central Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta, at elevations between 400 and 700 metres. The third level, the most western, reaches 900 to 1,000 metres at the base of the Rocky Mountains. This structure of graduated terraces influences the climate, the distribution of precipitation, and the movements of the Buffalo herds that followed the seasons, moving between the different levels.

The underlying geology of the Plains is predominantly sedimentary: sandstones, limestones, and clays deposited in ancient inland seas that covered the centre of the continent in the Cretaceous era. These marine sediments are rich in mineral resources: coal, petroleum, and natural gas that today represent the principal source of economic wealth for the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The same geology that today generates economic wealth is what the Nêhiyawak did not know they were ceding when they signed Treaty No. 6: the subsoil was not mentioned, and the value of petroleum was still unknown.

The Cypress Hills — one of the rare exceptions to the topographic monotony of the Plains — were a fundamental reference point for the Nêhiyaw Nations and other Plains peoples. These hills, reaching 1,392 metres above sea level at the Saskatchewan-Alberta border, had escaped glaciation and therefore preserved a flora and

fauna different from those of the surrounding Plains. For the Nêhiyaw bands, the Cypress Hills were a winter refuge: the forest cover offered protection from the wind, firewood was abundant, and game was more concentrated than on the open Plains. They were also a site of inter-tribal gathering and seasonal ceremonies.

The Plains landscape is deeply marked by the presence of the so-called medicine wheels: circular structures formed by stones arranged in precise patterns that dot the Canadian Plains. The most famous, the Bighorn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, has a diameter of approximately 25 metres with stone spokes pointing toward the solstices and equinoxes. Similar structures in Saskatchewan and Alberta document prolonged human presence in the territory and its ceremonial dimension. These structures — connected to the cosmology of the Medicine Wheel — are the physical expression of the relationship between the Nêhiyaw People and their Land: the Land was not only physical space but ceremonial and cosmological space.

The Nêhiyaw perception of the landscape is radically different from that of European cartography. While European cartography defines territory through coordinates, boundaries, and properties, Nêhiyaw geography defines the Land through relationships: the relationships between places and the events that occurred there, between places and the spirits that inhabit them, between places and the seasons in which life takes place there. A chain of hills was not merely a topographic feature: it was the place where an Ancestor had received a vision, where a specific ceremony took place, where an animal species gathered in a particular season. This relational map carried more useful information than any topographic chart.

The geomorphology of the Plains is still visible today in the structure of the Canadian agricultural landscape. The long

rectangular parcels of Saskatchewan farms, with their grain elevators and straight roads, follow the subdivision system introduced by the Dominion Lands Act of 1872: the Plains territory divided into one-square-mile sections and six-by-six-mile townships. This artificial grid, imposed on the natural landscape, is the visual materialisation of the colonial transformation of the Land: from lived Nêhiyaw space to divisible and sellable private property. To fly over the Canadian Plains today is to see from above this transformation: a landscape that carries the colonial grid over the glacial geomorphology.

> [C1] The geomorphology of the Great Canadian Plains: Cushman, R.C. (1999). Prairie, Mountain, Plain. Roberts Rinehart Publishers, chs. 1-2. [C1] The Cypress Hills: Marty, S. (1999). The Dome of Heaven. Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, ch. 3. [C1] The medicine wheels: Brumley, J.H. (1988). Medicine Wheels on the Northern Plains. Alberta Culture & Multiculturalism. [C4] The Nêhiyaw perception of the landscape as a relational map, and the colonial grid as materialisation of territorial transformation, are the author's.

4.2 — The Water System: Rivers, Lakes, and Wetlands

For the nomadic Nations of the Plains, water was the organising principle of presence in the territory. Rivers were not obstacles to cross but communication routes to follow; lakes were not merely water reserves but centres of economic and social life; wetlands were the sites of greatest biodiversity and greatest resource abundance. The Nêhiyaw geography of the Plains is essentially a geography of water: movement routes followed the river valleys, winter camps were established in forested valley floors, and the great summer gatherings took place where water was abundant and Buffalo hunting was easier.

The Saskatchewan River system — with its North and South branches that converge before emptying into Lake Winnipeg — is the principal artery of the Plains Nêhiyaw Land. The South Branch rises in the Alberta Rockies and crosses the Plains of central Saskatchewan

for approximately 1,400 kilometres before joining the North Branch. The North Branch also rises in the Rockies and traverses northern Saskatchewan through boreal forest territories that separate the open Plains from the subarctic. The Saskatchewan system provided Nêhiyaw bands with an east-west mobility corridor crossing the entire territory.

Lake Winnipeg, the largest of the lakes in the southern Nêhiyaw territory, was a fishing and commercial exchange centre of primary importance. With its 24,500 square kilometres, it is the sixth-largest freshwater lake in the world by surface area. Its shallow waters and their abundance of walleye, pike, carp, and other fish made it an essential food resource during the winter months when Buffalo hunting was more difficult. The Woodland Cree who inhabited the shores of Lake Winnipeg were the principal fish suppliers in the exchange networks with the Plains Nêhiyawak.

Lake Manitoba and Lake Dauphin — smaller but equally important — were at the centre of the territory that became the settlement region of the Lépine family in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is not a geographical coincidence: these lake zones were among the richest in resources in the entire Nêhiyaw territory, combining Buffalo hunting on the nearby Plains, fishing in the lakes, gathering in the wetlands, and firewood in the valley forests. It was a territory that allowed resource diversification more efficiently than the open Plains further west. The Lépine family's choice to root itself here was not random: it was the choice of those who knew the Land.

The wetlands of the Plains — the so-called "potholes" or "sloughs" that dot the surface of the Canadian Plains — were ecosystems of extraordinary biological richness. Formed by glacial depressions filled with water, these wetlands host enormous

concentrations of migratory waterfowl in spring and autumn: the Prairie Pothole Region of Saskatchewan and Manitoba is considered the most important nesting site on the North American continent for ducks, geese, and other waterfowl. For the Nêhiyaw bands, these zones provided eggs, birds, and aquatic mammals as a supplement to the Buffalo diet.

The Qu'Appelle River, which crosses southern Saskatchewan from west to east, was particularly important in the life of the Nêhiyaw bands because it flows through a deep valley that offered protection from the winter wind and an abundance of firewood. The winter camps along the Qu'Appelle were among the most populous in central Saskatchewan: the combination of shelter, fuel, and water made it one of the preferred localities for the coldest months of the year. The river's name in Cree, Katepwa, means "who calls?": a name that evokes the acoustic quality of the valley where voices echoed. This narrative designation is typical of Nêhiyaw geographic nomenclature, which captures the sensory experience of a place rather than its abstract position.

The water management practised by the Nêhiyaw bands is an aspect of their relationship with the Land that the colonial narrative has systematically ignored. The Nêhiyawak were not passive observers of their environment: they actively intervened to improve the availability of resources. Wetlands were preserved by avoiding overhunting within them; Buffalo watering sites were monitored and hunting in their vicinity was regulated so as not to frighten the herds. This active management — which contemporary science recognises as a sophisticated form of environmental stewardship — was invisible to European observers who saw "wild nature" where there was in reality administered Land.

> [C1] The Saskatchewan River system: Christensen, D. (2000). Ahtahkakoop. Shell Lake: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, ch. 1. [C1] Lake Winnipeg and fish resources: Petch, C.A. (1966). The Lake Winnipeg and Adjacent Waters. Queen's Printer, Winnipeg. [C1] The Prairie Pothole Region: van der Valk, A. (ed.) (1989). Northern Prairie Wetlands. Iowa State University Press. [C4] Active management of water resources as administered Land is the author's.

4.3 — The Climate and the Cycle of the Seasons

The climate of the Great Canadian Plains is among the most extreme on the North American continent for the breadth of its seasonal temperature variation. Summer temperatures can exceed 35 to 40 degrees Celsius; winter temperatures can drop to -40 and below, with wind reducing the perceived temperature even further. This thermal range of 80 degrees or more between summer and winter has no equivalent in most European countries and represented one of the principal challenges to the survival of the nomadic Plains bands. Their capacity to adapt to these extreme conditions required millennia of cultural and technological evolution.

Spring on the Plains is a brief but dramatic season. The thaw occurs rapidly — often within a few weeks — bringing spring floods to the river valleys and turning the low Plains into waterlogged expanses that made movement impossible. But spring also brought the return of migratory birds, the flowering of medicinal plants, and the birth of Buffalo calves: events signalling imminent abundance after the winter months of scarcity. The Nêhiyaw ceremonial calendar marked spring with ceremonies of thanksgiving and preparation for the great summer hunts. This was the moment when bands emerged from their winter camps and moved toward the open Plains.

Summer was the season of abundance. The Buffalo gathered in enormous herds on the open Plains, following the migrations that Nêhiyaw men had learned to predict with precision. The great

collective hunts — the cliff jump, or, after the introduction of the Horse, the mounted hunt — took place primarily in summer. The inter-band gatherings and the most important ceremonies — including the Sun Dance — took place in summer when the different bands could come together in a single place without the risk that scarcity of resources would make feeding a large group impossible.

Autumn was the season of preparation. After the great summer hunts, the bands worked intensively to produce the food reserves necessary for winter. Pemmican — that dense mixture of dried meat, fat, and berries that could keep for years — was produced primarily in autumn. Hides were tanned for winter clothing and tipis; medicinal herbs and edible roots were gathered; weapons and tools were repaired. Autumn was also the season of deer hunting, whose antlers served as implements and ornaments. The quality of autumn — the success of the hunts, the quantity of food prepared — determined the conditions of winter life.

Winter was the season of gathering and cultural transmission. Bands withdrew to their winter camps sheltered in river valleys, where firewood was abundant and the wind less fierce. In these conditions of winter semi-sedentariness, the generations mixed more intensively than during the summer months of mobility. Elders told the traditional stories, transmitting to the young the cosmology, the history, and the rules of the group. Young Warriors had their first combat experiences in the small winter raids to steal horses from neighbouring bands. Winter was hard but not inactive: it was the time for building competencies and cultural continuity.

The winds of the Plains are a constant and dominant presence in the Nêhiyaw climatic landscape. The northwest wind, which the Nêhiyawak call by a term meaning “the Great Breath,” brings Arctic

cold air in winter and produces the "blue northers": rapid and violent temperature changes that in a few hours can drop the temperature by 20 or 30 degrees. These extreme weather events were dangerous for those caught on the open Plains without shelter. Knowledge of the signals that anticipate a "blue norther" — certain types of cloud, certain changes in the wind, certain behaviours of animals — was survival knowledge: those who lacked it could die of cold.

The seasonal cycle is incorporated in the structure of Okichitaw through the Medicine Wheel. The four directions correspond to the four seasons: the East to spring and rebirth, the South to summer and abundance, the West to autumn and reflection, the North to winter and wisdom. The Four Gates curriculum mirrors this cycle: the First Gate (Awareness/East) corresponds to the spring awakening; the Fourth Gate (Building/North) corresponds to the winter wisdom accumulated over years. Understanding the seasonal cycle of the Plains is understanding the deep structure of the Okichitaw system.

> [C1] The climate of the Great Plains: Pomeroy, J. and Gray, D.M. (eds.) (1995). Snowcover Accumulation, Relocation and Management. NHRI Science Report, ch. 1. [C1] The seasonal cycle and Nêhiyaw band life: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 3. [C4] The connection between the seasonal cycle of the Plains and the structure of the Medicine Wheel and the Four Gates is the author's.

4.4 — The Flora of the Plains: Grass, Forest, and Medicinal Plants

The Great Canadian Plains are dominated by three principal types of vegetation corresponding to three climatic zones. The tall-grass prairies — concentrated in southern Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan — host grass species that can reach two metres in height and develop roots five or six metres deep. The mixed-grass prairies — the central zone of Saskatchewan — combine tall and short

species in a more varied mosaic. The short-grass prairies — in southern Alberta, the driest area — are dominated by species adapted to drought and constant wind. Each of these zones supported different types of fauna and required different hunting strategies.

The boreal forest — which begins where the open Plains end and extends northward to the subarctic — was equally important for Nêhiyaw economic life. The Woodland Cree — who lived primarily in the boreal forest — depended on caribou, moose, and beaver as the Plains Cree depended on the Buffalo. But the two economies were complementary: inter-band exchange networks allowed the Plains Cree to access forest products and the Woodland Cree to access Buffalo pemmican. The forested valley floors of the Plains rivers — trembling aspen, willow, birch — were the frontier between the two ecosystems and the preferred sites for winter camps.

Knowledge of medicinal plants was an essential component of the formation of every Nêhiyaw Warrior and healer. The Canadian Plains host hundreds of plant species with recognised medicinal properties: sage for ceremonial purification, white cedar for smudging, echinacea root for infections, willow for pain (the bark contains salicin, the natural ancestor of aspirin), and dozens of other species with specific applications. This botanical pharmacopoeia — developed over millennia of observation and experimentation — was part of the knowledge transmitted by Elders across generations.

The four sacred medicines of Nêhiyaw smudging — sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco — were not chosen arbitrarily: each grew on the Canadian Plains and had specific characteristics that made it appropriate for ceremonial functions. Sweetgrass — Hierochloe odorata, which grows in the wetlands of the Plains and has a sweet, persistent fragrance — was used to attract positive spirits.

Wild tobacco — Nicotiana rustica, different from European commercial tobacco — was the ceremonial offering par excellence, used in ceremonial pipes and diplomatic agreements. The presence of these sacred plants in the Nêhiyaw Land is one of the reasons why the Land itself was considered sacred.

The practice of controlled burning — deliberately burning the prairies to stimulate the growth of fresh grass and attract Buffalo — was a form of active landscape management that the Nêhiyawak practised systematically. This land management by fire shaped the distribution of plant species on an enormous scale: the open prairies of the Plains are in part the product of millennia of controlled fires that prevented trees from advancing. Without controlled fire, the southern Plains would be more forested. With fire, the Nêhiyawak maintained the open grass prairie that fed the Buffalo that fed the bands. This management system — which functioned at continental scale — was entirely invisible to Europeans who arrived believing they were finding "untouched, wild nature."

> [C1] The vegetation of the Great Plains: Bailey, R.G. (1995). Description of the Ecoregions of the United States. USDA Forest Service. [C1] Nêhiyaw medicinal plants: Marles, R.J. et al. (2000). Aboriginal Plant Use in Canada's Northwest Boreal Forest. UBC Press, chs. 2-4. [C1] Land management by fire: Kay, C.E. and Simmons, R.T. (eds.) (2002). Wilderness and Political Ecology. University of Utah Press, ch. 6. [C4] The connection between the four sacred medicines and their presence in the Nêhiyaw Land as a reason for the Land's sacredness is the author's.

4.5 — The Fauna: The Buffalo and Other Species

The fauna of the Great Canadian Plains was of a richness and density difficult to imagine for a contemporary observer. Before European commercial hunting, the Plains hosted between 30 and 60 million Buffalo — the largest concentration of large mammals in a single

ecosystem in recent human history — alongside millions of pronghorn, tens of thousands of moose and white-tailed deer, and enormous populations of wolves, grizzly bears, coyotes, and bald eagles. This hyper-productive ecosystem was the foundation of the economic prosperity of the Plains Nations.

The North American Buffalo — Bison bison bison on the Plains, Bison bison athabascae in the boreal forest — was the pivotal animal of the Plains ecosystem. An adult bull could weigh nearly a tonne; an adult cow approximately 450 kilograms. Buffalo herds moved seasonally between the southern Plains in summer and the more northern, wooded territories in winter. These migrations produced movements of tens or hundreds of thousands of animals that physically modified the landscape: the trails worn by the herds became natural roads; the depressions where Buffalo rolled in dry earth — the wallows — became ponds when they filled with water.

The relationship of the Nêhiyawak with the Buffalo is described in Chapter 5 in its economic and spiritual dimension. Here it is important to emphasise the ecological dimension of this relationship. The Nêhiyawak were not predators devastating their prey: they were an integral part of the ecosystem. Their hunting practices — regulated by precise social norms that prevented overhunting — maintained Buffalo populations in balance with available resources. This balance was the product of millennia of co-evolution between the Nêhiyaw People and the Buffalo: both had adapted to the conditions of the Plains in a complementary fashion.

The pronghorn — Antilocapra americana — was the second most important ungulate in the Plains Nêhiyaw economy. Faster than the Buffalo but much smaller, the pronghorn was difficult to hunt on foot but became more accessible with the Horse. Its branched horns

— unique in the deer family because they shed and regrow annually — were used as implements and ornaments. Pronghorn meat was considered by the Nêhiyawak more flavourful than Buffalo and was preferred for ceremonial feasts. Its great speed — it can run at 80 to 90 km/h — was part of the Nêhiyaw narrative repertoire on the qualities of the animals of the Land.

The Grey Wolf — Canis lupus — had a complex relationship with the Nêhiyaw Nations. It was not simply a species competing with hunters: it was a teacher and an ally. The Nêhiyaw bands observed wolves hunting to learn hunting strategies; they followed wolves to find Buffalo herds in conditions of poor visibility. The Wolf appeared regularly in the spiritual visions of Warriors as guide and protector. Some bands had the Wolf as a clan totem, which prohibited hunting the Wolf for members of that clan. The presence of the Wolf on the Plains — almost completely eliminated by European commercial hunting by the end of the nineteenth century — was an integral part of the cultural as well as biological Nêhiyaw ecosystem.

The grizzly bear — Ursus arctos horribilis — had a special spiritual significance in Nêhiyaw cosmology. As analysed in Chapter 12, the Bear is associated with the West direction in the Medicine Wheel and carries the knowledge of healing. The grizzly inhabited the open Plains before European colonisation — today it is confined to inaccessible mountain zones — and its presence was a daily reality for the Plains Nêhiyaw bands. To hunt a grizzly bear was an undertaking of great danger and great prestige: a Warrior who returned with grizzly claws had demonstrated the utmost courage. The grizzly bear robe was the ceremonial ornament of the most respected war leaders.

> [C1] The fauna of the Great Plains: Roe, F.G. (1951). The North American Buffalo. University of Toronto Press, ch. 1. [C1] The pronghorn: O'Gara, B.W. and Yoakum, J.D. (2004). Pronghorn: Ecology and Management. Wildlife

> Management Institute. [C1] The Grey Wolf and its relationship with Plains cultures: McIntyre, R. (ed.) (1995). War Against the Wolf. Voyageur Press, chs. 1-3. [C4] The ecological relationship between Nêhiyawak and Buffalo as co-evolution, and the spiritual significance of the grizzly bear in relation to the Medicine Wheel, are the author's.

4.6 — The Sacred and Ceremonial Sites

The Nêhiyaw Land was punctuated by sites carrying a specific and profound spiritual significance: places where Ancestors had received visions, where significant events had occurred, where the membrane between the human world and the spiritual world was particularly thin. These sacred sites — which do not necessarily correspond to places of exceptional scenic beauty in the European sense — were the spiritual structure of the Land: the network of meanings that transformed a physical landscape into a territory inhabited by a People with a history.

Wanuskewin — a site along the Opimihaw River, a tributary of the South Saskatchewan River near Saskatoon — is one of the most important ceremonial sites in Nêhiyaw Land. Archaeological evidence indicates continuous occupation of the site for at least 6,000 years. Here are found the ruins of seasonal camps, stone circle structures used as tipi foundations, Buffalo hunting sites with abundant bone material, and a medicine wheel. The name Wanuskewin means in the Nêhiyawêwin "living in harmony": a name that captures the experiential quality of the place rather than a physical characteristic. Today the site is a heritage park managed with the participation of local Indigenous communities.

Waskesiu and the territory of Prince Albert National Park — in central Saskatchewan — was an important ceremonial area in the Nêhiyaw tradition, located in the transition zone between the Plains

and the boreal forest. This transition zone — the ecotone between prairie and forest — was the richest in biodiversity: it hosted both Plains species and forest species. The Gathering Places — inter-tribal gathering sites — were often located in these transition zones because they allowed the meeting of peoples from different ecosystems with different products to exchange.

The Cypress Hills — that rare topographic exception that had escaped glaciation — were a ceremonial site shared by several Plains Nations. Their position at the boundary of Nêhiyaw, Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), and Nakoda territories made them a place of potential diplomatic neutrality: a place where peoples in conflict could meet under the protection of the shared sacredness of the site. The ceremonies held there — connected to the fertility of the Land and the prosperity of the hunt — had participants from multiple Nations, transforming them into occasions of diplomacy as well as spirituality.

The rock art sites — engravings and paintings on rock found at several points in the Nêhiyaw Land — document the spiritual presence of the Plains Nations in the territory for millennia. The most famous site in Saskatchewan is Petroglyphs Provincial Park near Ravenscrag: hundreds of engravings in sandstone depicting Buffalo, human figures in ceremonial poses, cosmological symbols, and handprints. These sites were places of prayer and vision: the engravings were not decorative art but acts of communication with the spiritual world, records of visions and messages to the Ancestors. Their existence demonstrates that the Nêhiyaw presence in the Land had a spiritual dimension that preceded European contact by millennia.

The desecration of sacred sites during the colonial period was one of the most profound violations of the Nêhiyaw relationship with

their Land. The construction of the railway, roads, and cities often occurred on or through sites that the Indigenous Nations considered sacred. Rock art sites were vandalised by settlers who did not understand their meaning or who understood it but deliberately ignored it. The Cypress Hills, after having been the site of the terrible Cypress Hills Massacre of 1873 — in which American hunters killed approximately 40 Assiniboine people over a dispute about horses — lost part of their quality as a place of neutral encounter. The desecration of sacred sites was the desecration of the spiritual geography of the People.

> [C1] Wanuskewin Heritage Park: Wanuskewin Heritage Park Authority (1992). Wanuskewin: Land of the Northern Cree. Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. [C1] Saskatchewan petroglyphs: Brumley (1988), ch. 4. [C1] The Cypress Hills Massacre of 1873: Turner, J.P. (1950). The North-West Mounted Police 1873-1893. King's Printer, vol. 1, ch. 2. [C4] The relationship between the desecration of sacred sites and the desecration of the spiritual geography of the People is the author's.

4.7 — Nêhiyaw Geographic Nomenclature

Geographic nomenclature is one of the most direct ways in which a culture expresses its relationship with the Land. European names tend to be commemorative — lakes, rivers, and cities take the names of explorers, monarchs, or colonial officials — or descriptive in a purely physical sense. Nêhiyaw names tend instead to capture the quality of the relationship between people and place: what is done there, what is seen, what is heard, what happened there in history or cosmology.

The Nêhiyaw name for the Saskatchewan River is *Kisiskatchewanisipi*: "the river that flows fast." Not an abstract name but the result of a physical experience: anyone who has traversed the river by canoe knows that in certain stretches the current is fierce and

demands skill and attention. The name transforms this experience into permanent identification. Saskatchewan, the English pronunciation of the name, became the name of the Canadian province founded in 1905: a province that still carries the Nêhiyaw name of its principal river, while having erased much of the Nêhiyaw cultural presence in the course of colonisation.

The word Manitoba, which gives the province its name, derives from the Nêhiyaw *Manitou-wapow*: “the narrows where the Great Spirit dwells.” It refers to a specific point on the shore of Lake Manitoba where particular conditions of wind and water produced a sound resembling a human voice that the Nêhiyaw bands interpreted as the presence of the Manitou. The name transforms a physical phenomenon — the sound produced by water among the rocks — into a spiritual experience: the Land is not only matter but a place inhabited by spirits who communicate with the living. To carry this name today, in a Canadian context that has forgotten its original meaning, is to carry a trace of Nêhiyaw cosmology in the contemporary political landscape.

The process of colonial renaming — the substitution of Indigenous names with European names — was an act of cultural erasure as systematic as the prohibition of ceremonies. In the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, European explorers and cartographers replaced Nêhiyaw names with English, French, and Scottish names: Fort Carlton, Fort Qu’Appelle, Prince Albert, Lloydminster. Every renaming erased the Nêhiyaw history of the place and replaced it with European history. Some renamings were so radical that the original names were lost: only the work of contemporary Indigenous linguists and historians is recovering the original names of places that had been named in the Nêhiyawêwin for thousands of years.

The movement to recover Indigenous geographic nomenclature is one of the dimensions of the cultural resurgence described in Chapter 10. In Canada, several provinces have reintroduced Indigenous names for geographic sites or added Indigenous names to the official denominations. This recovery is not merely symbolic: it is the recognition that the Land has a history that precedes colonial naming by millennia and that that history belongs to the Indigenous Peoples.

> [C1] Nêhiyaw geographic nomenclature: Christensen (2000), ch. 1. [C1] The names of Saskatchewan and Manitoba: Ahenakew, F. and Wolfart, H.C. (1993). Oh, They Gave Away All Their Feathers. University of Manitoba Press. [C4] The process of colonial renaming as cultural erasure and the recovery movement as a dimension of cultural resurgence are the author's.

4.8 — The Land in Cosmology and in Okichitaw

The relationship between the physical Land of the Plains and Nêhiyaw cosmology is so deep that the two dimensions cannot be separated. The Medicine Wheel — the cosmological system that structures Okichitaw and that Chapter 12 analyses in detail — is not an abstract construction: it is a map. The four directions of the Wheel correspond to four real geographic zones, four real animal species, four real climatic conditions. The cosmology emerged from the millennial experience of the Land: it was not applied to the Land from the outside but grew from the Land from within.

The East direction in the Medicine Wheel corresponds to spring, rebirth, and growing light. In the Plains ecosystem, the East is the direction from which the sun rises in the morning and from which the spring wind blows to bring the thaw. The Eagle, associated with the East in the Medicine Wheel, soars high in the thermal currents that form when the warm spring morning air rises from the heated

earth. Associating the East with the Eagle and with spring is not an arbitrary choice: it is an accurate observation of the ecology of the Land.

The South direction corresponds to summer and abundance. The South is the direction of the high sun, of maximum heat, and of the great Buffalo herds that on the southern Plains reached their highest concentrations. Mouse, the animal of the South in the Wheel, is the guardian of detail: the Mouse has short-range vision but sees the details of the terrain with a precision the Eagle lacks. This association — summer abundance with detail and the present — reflects the practical wisdom of those who know that summer abundance requires attention to detail to be gathered and preserved effectively. The Warrior of the South is the Warrior who acts in the present with full attention.

The West direction corresponds to autumn and reflection. The West is the direction of sunset, of light withdrawing, and of time returning toward winter darkness. The Bear, which goes into hibernation in autumn after accumulating summer reserves, is the symbol of the West: it carries the knowledge of healing (because it emerges from hibernation in spring healthier than when it entered) and the wisdom to withdraw when it is time to withdraw. The Warrior of the West is the Warrior who knows their own limit and knows when to fight and when to withdraw: not the cowardice of fleeing danger but the wisdom of not wasting one's forces uselessly.

The North direction corresponds to winter and wisdom. The North is the direction of the great cold, of the Arctic wind, of the long night that tests the resistance of the body and the spirit. The White Buffalo — the legendary animal of the North, extremely rare and therefore charged with special spiritual significance — symbolises the

purity and wisdom acquired through difficult experience. The Warrior of the North is the mature Warrior, one who has passed through the trials and learned to move in the cold without losing their direction. This spiritual maturity — the Fourth Gate of the Okichitaw curriculum — is the final product of a path that begins with spring and passes through all the seasons of the Land.

The Okichitaw Lodge at the NCCT in Toronto is oriented according to the four directions: not in a purely symbolic way but as a concrete pedagogical instrument. At the beginning of every session, when practitioners orient themselves to the four directions, they are recapitulating the territorial cosmology of the Great Plains. Even in Toronto, two thousand kilometres from the Nêhiyaw Land, the body of the practitioner orients itself according to a geography that carries the Plains within it. The Land is not lost: it is carried in the body, in the cosmology, in the gesture of orienting oneself at the beginning of every session. This is perhaps the deepest response to territorial dispossession: carrying the Land with oneself even when one is far from it.

> [C1] The Medicine Wheel and the four directions: Capossela, C.J. (1980). Medicine Wheels: Ancient Teachings of the Plains. [C2] The orientation of the Lodge session in the four directions: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The relationship between Nêhiyaw territorial cosmology and the structure of Okichitaw, and the practice of orienting as carrying the Land in the body, are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The Land of the Great Canadian Plains is the world that formed Nêhiyaw culture. The glacial geomorphology, the water system of the great rivers and lakes, the extreme climate with its seasonal cycle, the richness of the fauna and flora, the sacred sites that punctuate the landscape, and the geographic nomenclature that names it in terms

of relationship rather than possession: all of this is the material from which Nêhiyaw cosmology — and Okichitaw as its expression in the field of martial arts — emerged.

Chapter 5 analyses the precolonial period: how this Land was inhabited, administered, and defended by the Nêhiyaw Nations in the centuries and millennia before the European arrival.

* * *

PART THREE

HISTORY

Chapter 5 — The Precolonial Period

Before contact with European peoples irreversibly changed the living conditions of the Great Canadian Plains, the Nêhiyawak lived in a world of extraordinary political, economic, and cultural complexity.

A world that the colonial narrative systematically simplified and impoverished: presenting it as "wild nature" before the European arrival, as a political void awaiting the organisation that the colonisers would bring.

This chapter reconstructs the reality of that world: not as a romantic ideal of a precolonial golden age but as a complex human system with its own social structures, its own economies, its own justice systems, and its own martial traditions that are the direct root of Okichitaw.

5.1 — The Nêhiyaw Presence on the Plains: Settlement and Diffusion

The Nêhiyawak are one of the most numerous and geographically widespread Indigenous peoples in Canada. Before European contact, they occupied a vast territory extending from Hudson Bay in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west, and from the Canadian subarctic in the north to the Great Plains of Montana and North Dakota in the south. This geographic distribution had produced significant cultural variants: the Plains Cree (Nêhiyawak of the Plains) were nomadic Buffalo hunters; the Woodland Cree (Nêhiyawak of the forest) lived differently, depending on caribou hunting, fishing, and gathering. Despite these differences, they shared the same language and recognised a common identity expressed in the term nêhiyaw ("one who speaks the same language").

Archaeological evidence places the presence of ancestral Nêhiyaw populations on the Great Canadian Plains at least 8,000 to 10,000 years ago. The Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump site in Alberta, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, documents the use of the Buffalo jump technique for at least 6,000 years: a technique that required sophisticated collective organisation, knowledge of Buffalo behaviour, terrain, and weather conditions. It was not a spontaneous action but the product of weeks of preparation and co-ordination among dozens or hundreds of people.

The question of when the Nêhiyawak settled on the Plains in their recognisable cultural form is debated among historians and archaeologists. Some Nêhiyaw oral traditions suggest a presence “from the beginning of the world” on the Plains; the linguistic and genetic evidence suggests a relatively recent expansion (last 1,000 to 2,000 years) toward the Plains from an original nucleus further to the northeast. These two perspectives are not necessarily incompatible: human populations move and expand while maintaining continuity of identity that oral traditions express as original permanence.

The expansion toward the Plains — probably accelerated by the introduction of the Horse from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — radically transformed Nêhiyaw culture and economy. Before the Horse, Buffalo hunting on foot required elaborate techniques such as the cliff jump or fire-driving that produced large quantities of meat at specific times of year. With the Horse, hunting became more flexible and individual: a skilled mounted hunter could pursue and bring down a single Buffalo in any season. This transformation changed the social organisation, the distribution of food, and even the nature of warfare and combat.

The geographic distribution of the Nêhiyawak placed them in contact with numerous other Plains peoples with whom they maintained relations of exchange, alliance, and conflict. To the west, the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) were the most important and most feared neighbours: a powerful confederation that occupied the Alberta Plains and had with the Nêhiyawak a centuries-long history of rivalry for hunting territories. To the southeast, the Nakoda were more often allies. To the north, the Dene occupied the subarctic territory and had commercial relations with the Woodland Nêhiyawak. This network of relations — complex, constantly evolving, regulated by treaties and ceremonies — was the geopolitical structure within which Nêhiyaw warrior culture developed and expressed itself.

The Nêhiyaw presence on the Plains was not evenly distributed: it concentrated along the principal rivers and lakes (the South and North Saskatchewan Rivers, Lake Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg) that provided water, fish, and communication routes. Summer camps were located on the open Plains where the Buffalo gathered; winter camps were located in forested valley floors that offered protection from the wind and firewood. This seasonal mobility was not instability: it was the way in which the Nêhiyawak optimally used a very large territory with seasonally distributed resources.

> [C1] The geographic distribution of the Nêhiyawak: Mandelbaum, D.G. (1940). The Plains Cree. American Museum of Natural History, chs. 1-2. [C1] Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump: Brink, J. (2008). Imagining Head-Smashed-In. Athabasca University Press. [C1] The introduction of the Horse and its consequences: Ewers, J.C. (1955). The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture. Bureau of American Ethnology.

5.2 — The Buffalo Economy: Organisation and Technology

The North American Buffalo (Bison bison) was the absolute centre of the Nêhiyaw economy. It is estimated that before European colonisation between 30 and 60 million Buffalo roamed the North American Great Plains: an animal biomass without equivalent in any other terrestrial ecosystem in the world. For the Nêhiyawak, the Buffalo was not a resource among others: it was the foundation of the entire economy. The meat was the principal food; the bones were the tools; the hide was the building material for tipis and clothing; the hair was insulation; the sinews were thread and rope; the fat was fuel and a food ingredient. Nothing of the Buffalo went to waste: not because of an artificial rule but because of a centuries-old practice of optimal use of available resources.

The principal Buffalo hunting techniques before the introduction of the Horse required a collective organisation with direct military implications. The "Buffalo jump" technique (piskun in some Plains languages) involved a group of hunters guiding a herd toward a cliff where they fell to their deaths. This operation required: part of the group forming two converging wings (the "Buffalo runners") to channel the herd; others positioned at the cliff edge to push the animals over; and still others at the bottom to finish the wounded animals and immediately begin processing the carcasses. Co-ordinating dozens or hundreds of people silently and precisely is a military as well as an economic competency.

The "stone pound" technique was another collective variant: a permanent or semi-permanent structure built with stones arranged in a funnel into which the herd was guided. The sites of these pounds are still visible in Saskatchewan and Alberta: structures documenting

a considerable collective investment of labour. Building a pound of this type required the collaboration of multiple bands over extended periods: it was a public work in the most literal sense, which strengthened inter-band bonds and required authority structures capable of co-ordinating collective action.

With the introduction of the Horse, Buffalo hunting became more flexible but also more socially stratified. A good war horse was the most precious possession a Nêhiyaw man could own: it allowed more efficient hunting, more effective combat, and the accumulation of social status based on horse wealth. Raids to steal horses from rival bands became one of the principal forms of inter-tribal conflict: not to destroy the enemy but to increase one's own wealth. This form of conflict — ritualised, with rules and a specific code of valorous behaviour — was an integral part of Nêhiyaw martial culture.

The processing of the Buffalo was predominantly women's work requiring specific competencies transmitted from generation to generation. The tanning of hides to produce the leather necessary for the tipi required weeks of intensive work. The preparation of pemmican — a compact mixture of dried meat, fat, and berries that kept for years — was the food technology that allowed the Nêhiyawak to survive the winter months and undertake long movements without depending on the immediate availability of game. Pemmican became one of the most sought-after exchange products in the Fur Trade because the European companies used it as food for their men.

The management of the Buffalo herds was not purely passive: the Nêhiyawak actively influenced the movements and distribution of the Buffalo. The prairies were burned in a controlled manner to stimulate the growth of fresh grass that attracted Buffalo to specific areas. The migration routes of the herds were known with precision

and hunts were planned according to these routes. This active land management — which contemporary science recognises as a sophisticated form of environmental stewardship — was invisible to European observers who saw "wild nature" where there was in reality intelligently administered Land.

> [C1] The Buffalo economy: Roe, F.G. (1951). The North American Buffalo. University of Toronto Press. [C1] Collective hunting techniques: Brink (2008), chs. 3-5. [C1] Pemmican and trade: Newman, P.C. (1985). Company of Adventurers. Viking, ch. 8. [C4] Active land management as a form of environmental administration is the author's.

5.3 — Political Organisation and Social Structure

Precolonial Nêhiyaw society was organised around the band as the fundamental socio-economic unit. A typical band included between twenty and one hundred people: small enough to move together and feed itself from the game available in a circumscribed territory, large enough to guarantee security and social reproduction. The bands were connected to each other by networks of kinship and marriage alliances that created a broader social fabric: in summer, when the Buffalo gathered in great herds, multiple bands would unite to form groups of hundreds or thousands of people for collective hunts and great ceremonial gatherings.

Leadership in the Nêhiyaw bands was of two principal types corresponding to distinct functions: the civil leader (okimaw) and the war leader. The okimaw was a leader by consensus: their authority depended on reputation, generosity, and wisdom rather than on an inherited position. They could propose decisions but not impose them: if the band disagreed, it could simply ignore them or seek another leader. The war leader held authority specifically in contexts of conflict: during raids and in the defence of territory, their word

carried greater weight. This division of functions prevented the concentration of power in a single figure and ensured that decisions reflected community consensus.

The Nêhiyaw governance system was fundamentally assembly-based: important decisions — movements, collective hunts, relations with other bands — were discussed in assemblies attended by all the adults of the band, men and women. The process was slow relative to the authoritarian governance systems that colonial officials preferred: it required that everyone have the opportunity to express their position and that work toward consensus rather than majority vote be done. But it produced decisions with a level of collective adherence far higher than any authority imposed from the outside could guarantee.

The Warrior Societies — male associations with specific functions in collective hunting and combat — were a central element of Nêhiyaw social organisation. Every adult man belonged to a Society that had its own initiation rituals, its own distinctive symbols, and its own specific obligations. In the great summer hunts, the Warrior Societies performed policing functions: they ensured that no one hunted individually before the start of the collective hunt (an action that would scatter the herd and deprive the community of its food). In combat, the Warrior Societies provided the organised units through which the group fought in a co-ordinated fashion.

The role of women in precolonial Nêhiyaw society is often undervalued in historical narratives that privilege European written sources (produced predominantly by men who interacted mainly with men). Nêhiyaw women had a voice in band assemblies, controlled the domestic space of the tipi (which was technically their property), managed food resources, and made autonomous decisions on family

relations. In some bands, women could become Warriors: the Nêhiyaw oral tradition preserves stories of women who fought and were recognised as Warriors by their community. Okichitaw continues this tradition by accepting students of all genders since the founding of the Lodge.

The Nêhiyaw family structure was based on the extended family rather than the European bourgeois nuclear family. A group of kinship-related families — brothers and sisters with their respective families, their elderly parents, and their children — lived and moved together, sharing resources and care responsibilities. In this structure, children were "everyone's child": they were educated by the entire extended family and not only by the biological parents. Aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers had specific roles in education. This distributed care structure made the community more resilient to traumatic events such as the loss of a parent.

> [C1] Band organisation and Nêhiyaw leadership: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 4. [C1] The Warrior Societies: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 5. [C1] The role of women: Brown, J.S.H. and Vibert, E. (eds.) (1996). Reading Beyond Words. Broadview Press, ch. 8. [C4] The connection between the assembly structure and the Lodge pedagogy is the author's.

5.4 — The Inter-Tribal Exchange System

The precolonial Great Plains were anything but a collection of isolated and self-sufficient peoples: they were an integrated economic system in which goods, people, and knowledge circulated along exchange networks covering thousands of kilometres. The Nêhiyawak were in a geographically central position in this system: they could exchange Buffalo products (hide, pemmican, dried meat) with northern populations that produced forest furs and game, and with southern

and western populations that produced agricultural goods (corn, tobacco) and manufactured articles (pottery, shell beads).

The summer commercial gatherings were the most important events in the Plains economic calendar. They took place at fixed sites that were neutral relative to tribal rivalries — “commercial truce” areas where even normally hostile peoples could exchange goods in safety. These gatherings were not only economic: they were also social, diplomatic, and ceremonial. Marriage alliances were forged, disputes were resolved, and information about herd movements and Plains conditions was exchanged. For an assembly governance system like the Nêhiyaw one, these summer gatherings were the most important moment of “foreign policy” in the year.

Among the most exchanged goods on the Plains, tobacco held a special position: it was not only an economic commodity but a ceremonial element whose exchange sealed agreements, alliances, and treaties. The ceremonial pipe — the chanunpa in the Lakota tradition, with equivalents in all the Plains Nations — was the instrument through which diplomatic relations were formalised. By smoking together, two parties invoked the spiritual powers as witnesses to their agreement: to violate it would have had not only political but spiritual consequences. This diplomatic practice was so deeply rooted that European officials adopted it in their own negotiations with Indigenous Nations, often without fully understanding its meaning.

The information networks built through these exchanges also had direct military importance. Knowing where rival bands were located, their numerical strength, whether they had suffered recent losses or were particularly well-armed: this information, circulating through commercial networks, reached Nêhiyaw war leaders and

influenced their decisions about when and where to conduct raids and when instead to maintain peace. The Plains commercial system was also an intelligence system: merchants were also scouts, and the summer gatherings were also collective debriefing sessions.

With the arrival of European traders from the mid-seventeenth century, this pre-existing exchange system was not replaced but incorporated into the new commercial networks. The Nêhiyawak were not passive victims of the fur economy: they were actors with their own logic who negotiated the terms of exchange in accordance with their own interests. When the Hudson's Bay Company set fur prices, the Nêhiyawak compared them with the prices they could obtain from French competitors: they were informed consumers in a competitive market, not primitives dazzled by European objects. This capacity for economic analysis is part of the political competency that the following chapter will analyse in the context of the Fur Trade.

> [C1] The inter-tribal exchange system on the Plains: Wood, W.R. and Liberty, M. (eds.) (1980). Anthropology on the Great Plains. University of Nebraska Press, ch. 6. [C1] The ceremonial pipe as a diplomatic instrument: Mails, T.E. (1972). The Mystic Warriors of the Plains. Doubleday, ch. 9. [C4] Information networks as an intelligence system and the incorporation of pre-existing networks into the Fur Trade economy are the author's.

5.5 — Precolonial Warfare: Forms, Functions, and Ethical Code

Warfare on the precolonial Great Plains was profoundly different from what European officials and soldiers imagined when they used the term. Wars of annihilation aiming at the total destruction of the enemy were not waged; conquered territories were not occupied and tribute was not imposed on the defeated. Inter-tribal conflict on the Plains had ritual forms regulated by precise ethical codes that defined

what was valorous and what was ignominious, what was permitted and what was prohibited, and how prisoners and the defeated were treated.

The most common form of conflict was the horse raid: a small group of Warriors (typically three to twenty people) entered the rival group's camp at night and sought to steal horses without being discovered. The ideal objective — carrying the maximum prestige — was to steal horses tied near the owner's tipi without waking them. This operation required extraordinary bodily control: the capacity to move in complete silence in the darkness, to read the movements of the animals, and to maintain calm under conditions of extreme tension. These were precisely the competencies that the First Gate of Okichitaw (Awareness) develops.

The counting coup is perhaps the most misunderstood element of Plains warfare in popular culture. The coup consisted of touching an opponent — alive, armed, and dangerous — with a stick or the hand, without necessarily seeking to kill them. It was the most prestigious form of warlike act because it required the maximum of courage and skill: approaching a armed Warrior closely enough to touch them without being struck required a perfection of timing and bodily control that killing them from a distance with an arrow did not. The coup-counting system — in which the first person to touch the enemy received the highest recognition — transformed combat into a competition of courage and skill as well as strength.

The precolonial Warrior's ethical code had specific rules defining honourable behaviour. To kill a Warrior already engaged in combat with another was dishonourable (it "robbed him" of his battle). Killing women and children was generally considered disgraceful even if not always avoided. The treatment of prisoners

varied: in some traditions they could be adopted into the band, in others they were used as trade goods, in others still they could suffer ritual violence that European sources described with horror without understanding the context. These were not “savage” behaviours: they were rules — sometimes cruel, sometimes surprisingly merciful — of a conflict system with its own internal logic.

The narration of war exploits was a ceremonial practice of great social importance. On public occasions, Warriors recounted their deeds before the community, which verified the truthfulness of the account through the presence of witnesses. Lying about one’s coup was among the gravest offences a Warrior could commit: they not only lost the respect of the community but betrayed the trust system on which social recognition was based. This practice — the publicly verifiable account — is a form of the Teaching of Honesty that Chapter 13 analyses: the Warrior is what they do, not what they say they have done.

Precolonial warfare also had a dimension of ritualised de-escalation: mechanisms that allowed a conflict to end without degenerating into annihilation. Inter-tribal treaties, sealed with the exchange of the pipe, were instruments of peace that had binding force because they invoked the spiritual authorities as witnesses. The practice of ransoming prisoners allowed captured members of the band to be recovered without the need for further conflict. And the ceremonies of reconciliation — in which the families of those killed in conflict received compensation in the form of gifts from the families of those responsible — allowed grief to be processed without triggering spirals of revenge.

> [C1] Precolonial warfare on the Plains: Hoebel, E.A. (1960). The Cheyenne. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, ch. 5. [C1] The coup counting system: Mails (1972), ch. 7. [C1] The Warrior ethical codes: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 5. [C4] The

> connection between the coup and the First Gate of Okichitaw, and ritualised de-escalation as precursor to the modern Warrior code, are the author's.

5.6 — Nêhiyaw Martial Practices: Techniques, Weapons, and Transmission

The martial practices of the precolonial Nêhiyawak were not a codified system with a name and formal structure: they were a set of competencies transmitted through apprenticeship, warrior ceremonies, and direct practice. Identifying these practices in the available sources is one of the principal tasks that Lépine's research set itself. The sources — the journals of European explorers, the reports of missionaries, the notes of HBC agents, and the oral testimonies of Elders — agree on certain fundamental elements that the Okichitaw system then systematised.

The principal weapons of the precolonial Nêhiyaw Warriors were: the long war club (*pakamahakan*), sometimes described as a "club" in European sources but in reality a sophisticated combat instrument with several variants of form and use; the lance, used both on foot and on horseback; the bow and arrows, with stone (flint or obsidian) or bone tips that reached remarkable velocities and precision; the knife, in stone before European contact and then in metal; and the Buffalo hide shield that was also a spiritual object as well as a defensive one. Every weapon required specific techniques of use learned over years of practice.

Close-quarters combat — without weapons or with short weapons — was a fundamental competency of the Nêhiyaw Warrior. The sources describe wrestling, projection, and control techniques that recall the principles of Hapkido and other close-quarters combat systems. The principle of using the opponent's force and movement rather than opposing them frontally appears in multiple descriptions:

a Warrior who yielded to the opponent's push and then redirected it had an advantage over one who opposed force with force. This principle, common to many martial traditions in the world, was present in the Nêhiyaw tradition before any contact with Asian traditions.

The training of Warriors began in childhood and progressed through the Warrior Societies. Children learned the basics of movement, attention, and endurance through games and daily activities: hunting small animals, running and strength competitions, and simulated war games that developed the competencies necessary for real combat. In the adolescent years, young people participated as assistants in the raids of the older men, observing and learning before being directly involved in combat. The progression — from observer to assistant, from assistant to participant, from participant to leader — mirrors exactly the structure of the Four Gates of Okichitaw.

Preparation ceremonies for combat were an integral part of Warrior training and not an optional addition. Before an expedition, Warriors prepared through fasting, prayers, purification in the sweat lodge, and the rituals of singing and dancing that placed the body and mind in the appropriate state for combat. These rituals were not superstition: they were psychophysical preparation techniques that produced states of concentration and group cohesion demonstrable beyond their spiritual content. The Okichitaw system maintains this integration between ceremonial preparation and technical practice in every Lodge session.

Warrior medicine — the knowledge of medicinal plants, first aid techniques, and healing practices — was part of the curriculum of the Nêhiyaw Warrior. A Warrior who did not know how to treat their own wounds and those of their companions was an incomplete

Warrior. The tradition of the Bear as carrier of medicinal knowledge — which Chapter 12 discusses in the context of the West direction of the Medicine Wheel — reflects this integration between warfare and healing that was fundamental in precolonial formation and that Okichitaw seeks to recover in the Third Gate of the curriculum.

> [C1] Precolonial Nêhiyaw weapons: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 5; Mails (1972), chs. 8-10. [C1] The progressive training of Warriors: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 5. [C4] The connection between precolonial training progression and the Four Gates of Okichitaw, between preparation ceremonies and ceremonial integration in the Lodge, and between Warrior medicine and the Third Gate, are the author's.

5.7 — Precolonial Spirituality as the Foundation of Martial Practice

The European distinction between "religion" and "daily life" does not apply to precolonial Nêhiyaw culture. For the Nêhiyawak, every aspect of life — hunting, combat, healing, storytelling, marriage, and death — had a spiritual dimension that was not "in addition to" the practical aspect but was an integral part of it. Nêhiyaw spirituality was not a belief to be accepted intellectually but a practice to be embodied: it was expressed through movements, ceremonies, relationships, and daily behaviour.

The Manitou — an Anishinaabe term often used in the Plains traditions to indicate the spiritual force that permeates all things — was not a distant god observing from above: it was a presence diffused in every element of the natural world. Animals, stones, rivers, winds, and seasons each had a spiritual dimension requiring respect and ceremony. The Warrior who killed a Buffalo was participating in a relationship with a powerful spirit: they had to do so with appropriate prayers, with respect for the parts of the body that were sacred, and

with the awareness that the Buffalo “chose” to offer itself to the community that had treated it with respect.

The Vision Quest is perhaps the most well-known Nêhiyaw spiritual practice in popular culture, though often misunderstood. A young man (and in some cases a young woman) withdrew alone into the territory, fasted and prayed for several days, seeking the encounter with a spirit-animal guide that would define their specific relationship with the spiritual world for the rest of their life. This spiritual guide — not identical to the “totem animal” of popular culture — was not a symbol but a real presence: the Warrior could invoke it in moments of difficulty, carry elements representing it in their medicine bundle, and act in accordance with its indications.

The sweat lodge ceremony (*mâsinahikasiwin* in the Nêhiyawêwin) is one of the most important and widespread practices in Nêhiyaw spirituality. The ceremony takes place in a curvilinear structure built with branches and covered with hides or blankets, in which heated stones produce intense steam. Participants sit around them and sing, pray, and sometimes receive visions through the extreme heat. It is not only ritual purification: it is also a body-strengthening practice that prepares the Warrior to endure extreme physical conditions. Warriors preparing for an important expedition used the sweat lodge as a psychophysical preparation tool.

The Warrior’s personal medicine bundle — a pouch containing objects of specific spiritual significance for that person — was the instrument through which the Warrior maintained the connection with their spiritual guide in everyday conditions. The objects in the bundle varied from person to person: they could include feathers, particular stones, specific herbs, parts of animals, or any other element that had acquired spiritual significance through the Vision

Quest or through subsequent experiences. The confiscation of medicine bundles during the period of suppression — when federal agents collected Indigenous religious objects to send to museums — was therefore a violence not only cultural but spiritual and personal: it was the confiscation of the Warrior's individual identity.

The Nêhiyaw cosmology — with the Medicine Wheel as spatial and temporal structure, the Seven Teachings as ethical code, and the connection between the human world and the spiritual world as the foundation of every action — was not a system of beliefs separate from martial practice: it is the framework within which martial practice acquires meaning. A Warrior who fought without this framework was merely violent; a Warrior who embodied it was a carrier of the wisdom of their community in the most critical moment of their life. This is the founding principle that Okichitaw wishes to recover: not the combat techniques in isolation but martial practice in its full cosmological context.

> [C1] Precolonial Nêhiyaw spirituality: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 7. [C1] The Vision Quest and the medicine bundle: Brown, J.E. (1953). The Sacred Pipe. University of Oklahoma Press. [C1] The sweat lodge ceremony: Pettipas (1994), ch. 2. [C4] The cosmological framework as the structure within which martial practice acquires meaning is the author's.

Chapter Summary

The precolonial period was not a blank page waiting for European writing: it was a fully formed world with its own economy, its own politics, its own spirituality, and its own martial traditions.

The Plains Nêhiyawak had developed a system of warrior competencies rooted in a cosmology and an ethical code that the colonial system would then seek to destroy through the measures described in the following chapters. Okichitaw is the attempt to

recover this system: not as a living museum of the past but as a living tradition capable of responding to the needs of the present.

Chapter 6 analyses the period of the Fur Trade (1670–1879): the moment in which contact with European traders transformed the Nêhiyaw economy while leaving much of the social and cultural structure initially intact.

* * *

PART THREE

HISTORY

Chapter 6 — The Fur Trade (1670–1879)

The Fur Trade was not only an economic system: it was the first great system of prolonged contact between the Nêhiyaw Nations and European peoples, and as such was the container in which the dynamics were formed that would later define the colonial relationship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To understand the Resistance of 1885, the violations of Treaty No. 6, the century of suppression, and the necessity of the cultural resurgence from which Okichitaw would be born, one must first understand this long period of progressive transformation stretching from 1670 to 1879.

The historiography of the Fur Trade has undergone a significant transformation over the last fifty years. The traditional narratives — presenting trade as a European civilising enterprise that had brought technology to primitive peoples — have been progressively replaced by more accurate analyses that recognise Indigenous peoples as sophisticated economic actors with their own objectives and strategies. The work of Arthur Ray, Harold Innis, and Jennifer Brown has demonstrated definitively that the Fur Trade was a system in which both parties sought to maximise their advantage and in which the Nêhiyawak, for a long time, held a position of relative strength.

This chapter reconstructs the period through seven sections covering the entire temporal arc from the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670 to the crisis of the Buffalo's disappearance at the end of the 1870s. The emphasis is on the transformations this system produced in Nêhiyaw society: not only economic but cultural, demographic, and military. Some of these transformations weakened the Nêhiyaw position; others temporarily strengthened it. Understanding both dimensions is understanding why the

Nêhiyawak were neither passive victims nor naive beneficiaries of a system that would ultimately leave them in a condition of structural vulnerability.

6.1 — The Hudson's Bay Company: Origins, Structure, and Strategy

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) was founded by a Royal Charter of King Charles II in 1670, granting the company an exclusive commercial monopoly over all the territory drained by rivers emptying into Hudson Bay: an area comprising approximately one-third of present-day Canada, called Rupert's Land in honour of Prince Rupert, the company's first governor. The Royal Charter completely ignored the presence of dozens of Indigenous Nations that had inhabited that territory for millennia: it was an act of legal appropriation on paper that had no immediate practical effect but would have enormous consequences two centuries later.

The HBC's strategy in the early decades was that of "trading from the bay": establishing trading posts on the shores of Hudson Bay and waiting for Indigenous Nations to bring furs to these posts. This strategy was economically efficient — it required no large investment in the exploration of the interior — but left control of the commercial routes in the hands of the Indigenous intermediary Nations, in particular the Woodland Cree and the Assiniboine. For nearly a century, the HBC depended entirely on the goodwill and co-operation of these Indigenous intermediaries to access the furs of Nations further from the coast.

The internal structure of the HBC was that of a large corporation headquartered in London that operated through a hierarchy of governors, factors, and employees. The Chief Factors —

the managers of individual posts — had broad operational discretion but had to respect the policies established by the London Committee on prices, quality of goods, and relations with the Indigenous Nations. The London Committee explicitly recommended maintaining respectful relations with Indigenous leaders: not for moral but for practical reasons. Without Indigenous co-operation, there would be no furs. Respect was functional, not genuine.

The HBC posts became over time centres of encounter and cultural transformation that went well beyond the simple commercial transaction. At the posts, the Nêhiyawak encountered for the first time European writing, printing, firearms, and metallurgy. They learned some words of English; they observed European practices with the same analytical eye with which the Europeans observed theirs; and they contracted, involuntarily, the European infectious diseases against which they had no defences. The trading post was therefore a place of possibility and risk, a point of contact that simultaneously enriched and impoverished those who participated in it.

The HBC's accounting system — based on the "standard beaver skin" (Made Beaver) as unit of measurement — was a system that imposed European economic categories on the Indigenous exchange system. Before contact, the Nêhiyawak exchanged goods on the basis of reciprocity and social value relationships that were not reducible to a universal common measure. The Made Beaver standardised these relationships in a numerical system that favoured those who understood it best: initially the Europeans, but progressively also the Nêhiyaw leaders who learned to use the system to their own advantage.

The goods offered by the HBC in exchange for furs included an ever-wider range of European products. In order of importance for the Nêhiyawak: metal implements (knives, axes, fishhooks, needles), cloth (red, blue, white), copper and cast-iron caldrons and pots, glass and metal beads (used in ceremonial decorations), and subsequently firearms, gunpowder, and lead. The quality of these products was variable and the subject of ongoing negotiation: Nêhiyaw leaders were demanding about the quality of knives and refused those that broke on first use.

HBC policy toward alcohol oscillated over time between formal prohibition and practical tolerance. The London Committee was aware of the damage alcohol produced in Indigenous communities and formally prohibited its distribution on several occasions. But local Chief Factors knew that brandy and rum were among the most sought-after goods and that refusing to distribute them meant losing business to French competition. The result was a policy of official prohibition and practical tolerance that produced enormous damage to Indigenous communities throughout the HBC territory.

> [C1] The Hudson's Bay Company: Newman, P.C. (1985). Company of Adventurers. Viking, chs. 1-4. [C1] The Made Beaver system: Ray, A.J. and Freeman, D. (1978). Give Us Good Measure. University of Toronto Press, ch. 2. [C1] HBC policy on alcohol: Noel, J. (1995). Canada Dry. University of Toronto Press, ch. 3. [C4] The analysis of the trading post as a place of possibility and risk and the accounting system as an imposition of European economic categories are the author's.

6.2 — The North-West Company and the Competition

The HBC's monopoly was challenged from the end of the seventeenth century by Franco-Canadian traders who operated from the interior rather than the coast: the coureurs des bois — literally "runners of the

woods" — who travelled in canoes for thousands of kilometres, bringing European goods directly to Indigenous villages and returning with furs. This commercial model was more costly and more risky than the HBC's but had one fundamental advantage: it built personal relationships with communities that produced commercial loyalty far more solid than that obtainable by waiting in coastal posts.

The North-West Company (NWC), founded in Montreal in 1779 by a coalition of primarily Scottish and Franco-Canadian traders, institutionalised this model. The NWC had a radically different structure from the HBC: instead of depending on shareholder partners in London, it was organised as a partnership between the traders themselves, many of whom lived on the Plains and knew the Indigenous Nations with a depth that no HBC manager arriving from England could have. This direct knowledge translated into more flexible and more effective commercial relationships.

The voyageurs — the paddlers and transporters who moved goods through the system of Great Lakes and Plains rivers — were predominantly of Franco-Canadian or Métis origins. Their presence in Nêhiyaw communities for weeks or months at a time produced the kind of cultural integration that the more formal HBC policy did not encourage. The voyageurs learned local languages, adopted Indigenous food practices (pemmican was their principal diet), and many married Nêhiyaw women "in the custom of the country" — according to Indigenous rather than European marriage practices. These marriages were the biological and cultural foundation of the Métis Nation that would play such an important role in subsequent history.

The competition between the HBC and the NWC lasted nearly half a century and produced ambivalent consequences for the Nêhiyaw Nations. On the positive side, competition between two buyers increased Indigenous bargaining power: Nêhiyaw leaders could play one company against the other to obtain better prices and higher-quality goods. The internal documents of both companies are full of complaints about Nêhiyawak who were "too demanding" or who "refuse our prices": involuntary testimony to their negotiating capacity. On the negative side, competition intensified pressure on fur-bearing animal populations and accelerated the exhaustion of animal populations in already-exploited areas.

The merger of the HBC and the NWC in 1821 was imposed by the British government to put an end to the violence that commercial competition was producing. The two companies — which had physically clashed in several episodes culminating in the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816 — were forced to merge into a single entity under the HBC name but with many NWC managers at intermediate levels. This merger eliminated competition and reduced Indigenous bargaining power: with only one buyer available, the Nêhiyawak had far less negotiating power.

The merger also produced a reduction in the number of posts and employees throughout the commercial system. Many voyageurs and traders who had worked for the NWC lost their jobs; their Métis families — who had settled near the posts — found themselves in a precarious condition. The reduction in personnel also meant less European presence in the territory and fewer direct relationships with Nêhiyaw communities: the posts became more distant and bureaucratic, managed by agents who lacked the personal knowledge of the communities that the voyageurs had brought.

A specific effect of the merger on Nêhiyaw martial culture was the reduction of arms traffic. The NWC, in its competition with the HBC, had used firearms as a commercial recruitment tool: bands that traded with the NWC received better and more abundant weapons. With the merger, the new HBC controlled the distribution of arms more carefully for both economic (rifles were expensive) and political (arming the bands too heavily could become dangerous) reasons. This reduced the Nêhiyaw Nations' access to firearms at the very moment when colonial pressure was increasing.

> [C1] The coureurs des bois and the NWC: Innis, H.A. (1956). The Fur Trade in Canada. University of Toronto Press, chs. 4-6. [C1] The voyageurs and the birth of the Metis Nation: Brown, J.S.H. (1980). Strangers in Blood. University of British Columbia Press. [C1] The merger of 1821 and the Battle of Seven Oaks: Ray (1974). Indians in the Fur Trade, ch. 7. [C4] The effect of the merger on arms distribution as a dimension of martial culture and the reduction of Indigenous bargaining power are the author's.

6.3 — The Nêhiyawak as Economic Actors: Strategies and Negotiation

One of the most persistent errors in the Fur Trade narrative is treating Indigenous peoples as passive objects of exchange rather than recognising them as sophisticated economic actors. Historical research over the last decades, in particular the work of Arthur Ray, has demonstrated definitively that the Nêhiyawak understood how the market worked and used it to their advantage in a systematic and deliberate fashion. Their economic behaviour was rational in the proper sense of the term: based on an accurate assessment of their own interests and the available alternatives.

The exchange protocols that European traders were obliged to respect illustrate the nature of the negotiation. Before any commercial exchange, there had to occur: the exchange of gifts (which established

relationships), the smoking of the pipe (which formalised them), the speeches of the leaders (which articulated expectations and conditions), and the community celebrations (which created the atmosphere of trust necessary for exchange). European traders who tried to bypass these protocols were simply ignored: the bands turned to the post where respect was greater. The HBC itself, in its instructions to its agents, recommended respecting "the customs of the Indians" as an indispensable commercial instrument.

The practice of comparing prices between different buyers was systematic and documented. Nêhiyaw leaders visited both rival posts before selling, negotiating the best possible price. When both the HBC and the NWC were present, leaders organised genuine informal auctions: they brought furs to one post, declared the price offered by the other, and waited for the first to offer better. The HBC's internal letters — preserved in the London archives — contain dozens of references to Nêhiyawak who were "too demanding" or who "refuse our prices": involuntary testimony to their negotiating capacity.

The credit system developed by the HBC — which provided goods in advance in exchange for future furs — was used by the Nêhiyawak in a far more strategic fashion than the HBC anticipated. Bands that received credit were not necessarily bound to the HBC for repayment: if prices were better elsewhere, they could repay the debt with fewer furs or negotiate a reduction. The HBC sought to bind bands with high debts to reduce their negotiating power; Nêhiyaw leaders sought to keep debt low to preserve their flexibility. This strategic tension ran through all commercial relationships.

The position as commercial intermediaries — the role developed in the precolonial exchange system — transferred naturally into the fur system. The Plains Nêhiyawak served as a link between

the HBC and the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), the Nakoda, and other Nations further from the commercial posts. This intermediary position allowed control of the flow of information and goods in both directions and the retention of a portion of the exchange value as margin. When the HBC began building posts directly in interior territories, bypassing Nêhiyaw intermediaries, the latter lost this source of economic power and became increasingly direct sellers rather than intermediaries: a loss of position that was not compensated by prices.

Gifts to leaders were a structural element of the system that the HBC practised systematically. The leader of every band received special gifts at the beginning of each commercial season: hats, jackets, medals, special tobacco. These gifts served to reinforce the personal bond between the leader and the HBC agent, to guarantee the commercial loyalty of the band, and to give the leader the opportunity to redistribute to their members — reinforcing their status through generosity. Nêhiyaw leaders also used this system to negotiate better conditions: implicitly threatening to take the band to the rival post if the gifts did not meet expectations.

Control of information was another instrument of power that the Nêhiyawak used strategically. They knew where the richest beaver and otter populations were; they knew which routes were practicable in each season; and they knew the strength and position of rival bands. Sharing this information with European traders had a cost: it could bring competitors directly to their hunting territories. So information was shared strategically — only what was necessary to maintain commercial relations, and never what could weaken their own position. This control of information was essentially the same competency that the Warrior used in military intelligence.

> [C1] The Nehiyawak as economic actors: Ray, A.J. (1974). Indians in the Fur Trade. University of Toronto Press, chs. 3-5. [C1] The credit system and gifts to leaders: Ray and Freeman (1978), chs. 4-6. [C4] Control of information as an instrument of power parallel to military intelligence, and the intermediary system as progressive loss of position, are the author's.

6.4 — Epidemic Diseases and Demographic Collapse

No aspect of European contact had more devastating consequences for the Nêhiyawak than the epidemics of infectious diseases. The populations of the American continent, completely isolated from Eurasia for ten thousand years, lacked the partial immunisation that Eurasian populations had developed through generations of exposure to the same diseases. When smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, influenza, and many other infectious diseases reached the Nêhiyawak, they produced mortality rates of between 30% and 90% in populations exposed for the first time: demographic catastrophes without precedent in human history.

The first great documented epidemic to strike the Plains Nêhiyawak was the smallpox of 1781 to 1782. The epidemic spread along commercial routes with terrifying speed: arriving on the Pacific coast with European traders, through inter-tribal exchange networks it reached the Saskatchewan Plains in the same year. HBC traders' testimonies describe depopulated villages, bodies abandoned without funeral rites because no one was well enough to bury them. Contemporary historians' estimates suggest that between one-third and one-half of the Plains population died within a single winter: a demographic disaster of barely imaginable proportions.

The demographic damage of the 1781-82 epidemic was grave in itself; but the damage to cultural transmission was even deeper. Epidemics struck with particular severity the children and the Elders:

children because of the immaturity of the immune system, Elders because of the natural weakening of age. The Elders were the repositories of ceremonial knowledge, traditional stories, technical competencies, and martial practices. When they died in mass within a few weeks, they took with them knowledge that no one had had time to receive. The gaps in transmission produced by these epidemics were irreversible: what had not been transmitted was lost forever.

Subsequent epidemics followed a similar pattern. The smallpox of 1837-38 was particularly devastating: it arrived along the Missouri River on an American Fur Company steamboat and spread northward along commercial routes. The Mandan of the Missouri — an agricultural people with a sophisticated culture and an estimated population of 2,000 — were almost completely wiped out: in a few months fewer than 150 survived. The Nêhiyawak of Saskatchewan were affected more moderately because some bands had had previous partial exposure, but the losses were still enormous. The epidemic of 1869-70 struck at the very moment when the Canadian government was purchasing Rupert's Land: the Nêhiyaw Nations faced the political crisis of the transfer in conditions of serious demographic weakness.

The Nêhiyaw responses to epidemics were limited by the lack of understanding of infectious disease transmission. The traditional healing practices — which included the sweat lodge, herbal remedies, and healing ceremonies — were effective for many Indigenous diseases but counterproductive for smallpox: the heat of the sweat lodge and collective gathering accelerated transmission. When families gathered their sick together to care for them collectively — an appropriate care practice for most diseases — smallpox spread rapidly to all present. This tragic effectiveness of traditional care practices in

spreading smallpox contributed to increasing mortality well beyond what would have occurred without any intervention.

Some Nations responded to epidemics with what historians call “flight”: bands struck by epidemic dispersed into the territory trying to escape the disease. This behaviour, understandable from an individual perspective, was counterproductive from an epidemiological standpoint — dispersed into the territory, the carriers of the disease brought it also to communities not yet struck. The result was a faster and more widespread diffusion of the epidemic over a larger territory. Bands that instead completely isolated themselves — ceasing all contact with other groups for the entire duration of the epidemic — had much higher survival rates, but this required food reserves that not all bands had.

The cumulative impact of the epidemics on the Nêhiyawak’s strategic position has been calculated by historians as a reduction of population of at least 50 to 70% between 1780 and 1870. A population that could count tens of thousands before European contact found itself reduced to a few thousand at the critical moment of the negotiation of Treaty No. 6. This demographic reduction was the context in which Nêhiyaw leaders were negotiating: they were not representatives of a People at the height of their strength but of a People that had already lost half or more of its population and was seeking to guarantee the survival of the rest.

> [C1] Epidemics on the Canadian Plains: Daschuk, J. (2013). Clearing the Plains. University of Regina Press, chs. 2-7. [C1] The smallpox of 1781-82: Hackett, P. (2005). A Very Remarkable Sickness. University of Manitoba Press. [C1] Estimates of demographic decline: Boyd, R. (1999). The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence. University of Washington Press. [C4] The analysis of the counterproductive effectiveness of traditional care practices in the case of smallpox, and the cumulative impact on the strategic position, are the author's.

6.5 — The Horse: Military and Cultural Revolution

The introduction of the Horse into the cultures of the North American Plains is one of the most rapid and profound changes in human history. The Horse had disappeared from the American continent approximately 10,000 years ago; the descendants of the horses brought by the Spanish conquistadores to Mexico spread northward through inter-tribal exchange networks, reaching the Saskatchewan Plains around 1740 to 1760. In less than a generation, the Plains Nations had adopted the Horse as a central element of their economy and their martial culture.

The impact of the Horse on the hunting economy was immediate and radical. Before the Horse, Buffalo hunting required large collective operations (the cliff jump, the stone pound) that could be carried out only a few times a year. With the Horse, a skilled hunter could pursue and bring down a single Buffalo in any season and in any weather conditions. This enormously increased the productivity of hunting and changed the distribution of food: instead of a large but irregular surplus from collective hunts, the Nêhiyawak could now have a more regular and more predictable flow of fresh meat.

The consequences for martial culture were equally profound. The mounted Warrior is the iconic figure of Plains culture but was not simply a foot Warrior with a horse underneath. Mounted combat required radically different physical competencies: the capacity to control the horse with the thighs and body weight while drawing the bow or using the lance, the co-ordination between the horse's movement and the timing of the strike, and the physical endurance to sustain prolonged combat at high intensity. These competencies were developed from childhood: Nêhiyaw children learned to ride before they even learned to use the bow.

The Horse also transformed the structure of raids. Before the Horse, raids were slow operations requiring days or weeks to reach enemy territory. With the Horse, a group of Warriors could cover enormous distances quickly, strike the enemy camp, and withdraw before an organised response was possible. This changed the nature of warfare on the Plains: from relatively rare confrontations to frequent and fast raids that required constant defensive readiness. Camps had to be organised with night sentries and war horses kept near their owner's tipi to be immediately available.

The Horse became the principal unit of wealth in Nêhiyaw society. A good war horse — fast, hardy, and trained not to be frightened in combat — was the most precious possession a man could own. War horses were distinguished from pack horses: the former were treated with special care, fed with the best pasture, not used for heavy work, and specifically protected during combat. The number of horses owned by a leader was an indicator of their social status: those with more horses could redistribute them to their allies and relatives, gaining loyalty and respect. The redistribution of horses — like that of any other wealth in the Nêhiyaw tradition — was a social construction practice as well as an economic one.

The impact of the Horse on the Fur Trade was significant in an indirect way. With horses, Nêhiyaw bands could cover much greater distances in searching for furs and transporting them to the trading post. This increased the volume of trade and allowed bands to reach posts that before were too distant. But it also increased pressure on beaver and otter populations, already in decline near the posts and now threatened even in more remote areas. The combination of Horse and firearm — both acquired through European trade — made fur hunting extraordinarily efficient in the short term but unsustainable in the long.

> [C1] The introduction of the Horse on the Plains: Ewers, J.C. (1955). The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture. Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution. [C1] The Horse and warfare on the Plains: Mishkin, B. (1940). Rank and Warfare Among the Plains Indians. American Ethnological Society. [C4] The analysis of the Horse's impact on the structure of raids and the connection with the competencies of the First Gate of Okichitaw are the author's.

6.6 — Cultural Transformations and New Dependencies

The Fur Trade did not only transform the Nêhiyaw economy: it produced profound transformations in social structure, in values, and in relations between people and between bands. Some of these transformations were relatively rapid and visible; others manifested only in subsequent generations. Together, they prepared the conditions in which the colonial policy of the nineteenth century could operate more effectively than it could have against a fully self-sufficient Nêhiyaw society.

Technological dependency developed gradually but irreversibly. Once adopted, the European metal knife was superior to flint in almost all uses: sharper, more durable, and requiring less maintenance. It was therefore rational to stop working stone and devote the time to more productive activities. But this meant progressively losing the competency to produce stone implements: a loss of self-sufficiency that was invisible as long as trade functioned but became critical at moments of interruption. Similarly with the firearm: once dependent on European ammunition, bands that were cut off from trading posts found themselves without the capacity to hunt or defend themselves.

Social stratification within Nêhiyaw bands increased significantly during the Fur Trade period. Before contact, status differences within the band were relatively moderate: a leader was more respected than others but not necessarily wealthier in a

structurally different way. With the Fur Trade and the accumulation of horses, a distinction emerged between families with many horses and families with few. The former could hunt more, have better equipment, and distribute more gifts to maintain their status. The latter depended on the redistribution of the former. This stratification had not yet reached the levels of inequality of European societies but had altered the relative egalitarianism of precolonial society.

Christian evangelisation — conducted primarily by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate from the mid-nineteenth century — produced cultural transformations difficult to separate from the economic ones of trade. The missionaries explicitly opposed many traditional practices: the Sun Dance for the bodily piercings they considered “self-torture”; the healing ceremonies they considered “witchcraft”; and the narrative traditions that recounted creation in a manner incompatible with Genesis. Some Nêhiyawak adopted Christianity in a syncretic fashion, integrating elements of it with their own spirituality. But the erosion of traditional practices was real: missionaries were present and influential in Nêhiyaw communities decades before the Indian Act made them illegal in 1885.

Inter-ethnic marriages — which had produced the Métis Nation — continued to have complex effects on Nêhiyaw identity. On one hand, the Métis relatives of a Nêhiyaw band could serve as mediators in relations with European traders and the colonial administration: they understood both cultures and could navigate between the two. On the other, the growing presence of children of mixed marriages in the bands introduced Euro-Canadian values and practices that sometimes conflicted with Nêhiyaw traditions. Some bands absorbed this diversity; others developed internal tensions between the more traditional members and those more integrated into Euro-Canadian culture.

The crisis of Warrior identity is perhaps the most subtle but most significant transformation for the history of Okichitaw. The Nêhiyaw Warrior tradition — the horse raids, the coup counting system, the combat preparation ceremonies — made sense in a context of mobility, Buffalo hunting, and competitive relations with neighbouring Nations. As colonial pressure limited mobility, the disappearance of the Buffalo eliminated hunting, and treaties sought to regularise relations between Nations, the traditional role of the Warrior lost its context. Young men who had the training and the desire to be Warriors found themselves in a context where Warrior competencies had no legitimate application. This identity crisis is one of the reasons why the recovery of the warrior tradition in Okichitaw has such deep resonance in contemporary Indigenous communities.

> [C1] Technological dependency in the Fur Trade: Ray (1974), ch. 6. [C1] Oblate evangelisation: Lux, M.K. (2001). Medicine That Walks. University of Toronto Press, chs. 1-2. [C4] Social stratification, the complexity of inter-ethnic marriages, and the Warrior identity crisis as precursor to Okichitaw's resonance are the author's.

6.7 — The End of the System and the Disappearance of the Buffalo (1870–1882)

The Fur Trade as the dominant economic system of the Plains entered structural crisis from the mid-nineteenth century. Several causes were converging in the same direction: the exhaustion of beaver and otter populations in areas already exploited for two centuries, the change in European fashion reducing the demand for furs, and the growing availability of other economic systems that made the Fur Trade less essential for the British government. The definitive conclusion came with a political act: in 1870, Canada acquired Rupert’s Land from the HBC for 300,000 pounds, without any consultation with the Indigenous Nations that inhabited it.

The purchase of Rupert's Land marked the passage from one economic system — the Fur Trade — in which the Indigenous Nations were necessary partners, to a political system — colonisation — in which the Indigenous Nations were primarily an obstacle to be managed or removed. The HBC needed Indigenous furs and therefore needed Indigenous co-operation. The Canadian government needed the Land for European settlers and the railway, and the Indigenous Nations were in the path of both projects. The logic of the relationship had completely changed.

The commercial Buffalo hunt — conducted primarily by American hunters who killed the Buffalo only for their hides, leaving the carcasses to rot — eliminated in less than a decade the principal resource of the Plains Nations. Between 1870 and 1880, the great southern herds were almost completely destroyed by American hunters. Between 1879 and 1882, the northern herds — the last great Buffalo concentrations in Canada — disappeared as well. An ecosystem that had supported the Buffalo for millennia was now empty.

The disappearance of the Buffalo had catastrophic consequences at every level of Nêhiyaw life. At the economic level, it eliminated the primary source of food and the base of the entire Plains economy. At the cultural level, it eliminated the context of the most important ceremonies (the Sun Dance was connected to the Buffalo hunt), of combat preparation practices, and of the entire value system that the Warrior and the hunter embodied. At the spiritual level, the Buffalo was not only food: it was a relationship with Creation expressed through hunting, ceremony, and gratitude. Without the Buffalo, these elements of spiritual life lost their natural context.

The Nêhiyawak sought to compensate for the disappearance of the Buffalo by hunting other animals: deer, moose, pigeons, rabbits. But these resources — abundant for the small precolonial bands — were insufficient to feed the larger and more sedentary bands that the treaty policy was creating. The delimited reserves had fixed boundaries that prevented the seasonal mobility necessary to follow animal migrations. And HBC-turned-government policies further restricted movements outside the reserves. The combination of these factors created the conditions for the structural famine that the Macdonald government would then deliberately aggravate.

American General William Sherman, commenting on the disappearance of the Buffalo in the 1870s, had declared that the Buffalo hunters were doing more to resolve “the Indian problem” than the entire American army could have done in thirty years. Canada did not adopt this policy explicitly and did not directly encourage the destruction of the Buffalo. But it benefited from the result without taking any measure to protect it: despite the requests of Nêhiyaw leaders and missionary organisations, the Canadian government established no Buffalo reserve and no hunting restriction that could have delayed the collapse of the herds.

The end of the Fur Trade and the disappearance of the Buffalo left the Nêhiyawak in a condition of structural vulnerability without precedent in their history. Two centuries of the Fur Trade had eroded their technological self-sufficiency; epidemics had reduced their population by half or more; the treaty system had confined them to reserves dependent on governmental discretion; and now the economic base on which the entire Plains economy rested had disappeared. It is in this context of extreme vulnerability that the negotiations of Treaty No. 6 of 1876 and the crisis that would lead to the Resistance of 1885 are situated.

> [C1] The purchase of Rupert's Land: Owram, D. (1980). Promise of Eden. University of Toronto Press. [C1] The disappearance of the Buffalo: Isenberg, A.C. (2000). The Destruction of the Bison. Cambridge University Press, chs. 3-5. [C1] The Sherman quotation: Isenberg (2000), ch. 4. [C4] The analysis of the Warrior identity crisis and the condition of structural vulnerability as context for Treaty No. 6 are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The Fur Trade was for the Nêhiyawak a period of active participation and progressive transformation. Capable economic actors who negotiated their advantage, victims of the epidemics that decimated their populations, protagonists of the Horse revolution and agents of change who selectively adopted useful European technologies: these three dimensions coexisted in the same communities and in the same generations.

The end of the Fur Trade and the disappearance of the Buffalo left the Nêhiyawak in a condition of structural vulnerability that Treaty No. 6 of 1876 was supposed to mitigate but that subsequent Canadian policy would instead deliberately aggravate. Chapter 7 analyses Treaty No. 6 of 1876: its promises, its ambiguities, and the systematic violations that produced the crisis of 1885 analysed in Chapter 8.

* * *

PART THREE

HISTORY

Chapter 7 — Treaty No. 6 (1876)

Treaty No. 6 of 1876 holds a unique place in the history of the Plains Nêhiyawak of Canada. It is the legal document that defines the formal terms of the relationship between the Nêhiyaw Nations and the Canadian government: the rights the Nêhiyawak believed they had secured, the responsibilities the government had formally accepted, and the conditions that then produced the crisis of 1885.

The promises of Treaty No. 6 were generous enough to convince most Nêhiyaw leaders to sign. The violations of those promises were systematic enough to make the crisis of 1885 inevitable. This combination of real possibility and deliberate failure is what makes Treaty No. 6 not only a historical document but a case study in the nature of colonial power.

Understanding Treaty No. 6 requires reading three levels simultaneously: the written English text that was signed, the Nêhiyaw understanding of what was agreed as filtered through oral translation, and the actual application the government made of it in the following decades. These three levels do not coincide: their divergence is the structure of the betrayal.

7.1 — The Context: Why Canada Wanted a Treaty

In 1876, the Canadian government had two urgent objectives requiring guaranteed access to the western Great Plains: the settlement of European immigrants and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Both were impossible without a formal agreement with the Indigenous Nations that inhabited that territory. The Macdonald government therefore had a strong pragmatic incentive to conclude the treaties: not out of respect for Indigenous rights but to clear the path for national development objectives.

The Numbered Treaties model — from Treaty No. 1 of 1871 to Treaty No. 7 of 1877 — was a systematic policy of territorial acquisition through formal negotiations rather than through direct military conquest. This choice was not dictated by moral scruples: it was dictated by political calculation. War against the Plains Nations would have required enormous military resources that young Canada did not have and would have attracted international criticism at a time when British diplomacy was seeking to maintain the image of a civilised Empire.

The negotiating position of the Nêhiyawak in 1876 was structurally weak for reasons analysed in the preceding chapters. Epidemics had reduced the population by at least 50 to 70% relative to precolonial levels. The disappearance of the Buffalo was advancing rapidly northward: the great southern herds had almost disappeared. The leaders who were negotiating Treaty No. 6 were representatives of communities desperately seeking guarantees for the future in conditions of structural weakness.

The Canadian political context of 1876 was that of the second Macdonald government and the construction of the federal state. The treaties had to resolve “the Indian question” definitively: to confine the Indigenous Nations to reserves, guarantee the formal cession of the lands, and create the conditions for their progressive assimilation into Canadian society. The underlying philosophy was what Pratt would later formulate explicitly: kill the Indian to save the man.

The precedent of Treaties Nos. 1 to 5 provided the Canadian side with an already-tested model and the Nêhiyaw side with troubling information. Some leaders had been in contact with Manitoba bands that had signed earlier treaties and had information about actual conditions on the reserves: small reserves, equipment

delivered late and of poor quality, rations barely sufficient for survival. This context of information pushed Nêhiyaw leaders to negotiate more insistently on certain specific clauses, in particular the one relating to assistance in case of famine.

The timing of the negotiations was not accidental. The choice of 1876 coincided with several factors favourable to the Canadian government. The disappearance of the Buffalo was already visible but not yet complete, making the Nêhiyaw bands desperate enough to negotiate but not yet in the acute crisis that would have made negotiations impossible. The railway was advancing but not yet close enough to create immediate conflicts on the ground. The timing was calibrated precisely to maximise the government's bargaining power.

The choice of Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt as sites was also calculated. Both were former Fur Trade posts converted into Canadian administration outposts: places familiar to the Nêhiyaw bands but controlled by Canadian authority. The commissioners had funds for the preliminary banquets and celebrations: a deliberate practice to create a climate of agreement even before the formal discussions began. Respecting Indigenous ceremonial protocols — the exchange of gifts, the smoking of the pipe — was both cultural respect and negotiating strategy.

An element often overlooked in the negotiation context is time pressure. The commissioners had instructions to conclude negotiations quickly: the season allowed only a few days of negotiation before the bands dispersed for the autumn hunts. This time pressure favoured the government: the bands had neither the time nor the resources to consult at length or to wait for better conditions. The leaders had to decide in a few days on a document that would define the condition of their people for generations.

The linguistic and conceptual barrier was a structural obstacle that no interpreter could fully overcome. The fundamental legal concepts of the European treaty — to cede, to own, reserve, private property — had no direct equivalents in the Nêhiyawêwin. For the Nêhiyawak, the Land could not be ceded because it did not belong to anyone in the European sense. What the leaders believed they were doing — sharing the use of the Land with the newcomers while maintaining their permanent rights — was profoundly different from what the English text stated: the cession of sovereignty over the Land in exchange for specific compensations.

> [C1] The Canadian political context of 1876: Owram, D. (1980). Promise of Eden. University of Toronto Press, ch. 6. [C1] The Numbered Treaties as acquisition policy: Tobias, J.L. (1983). Protection, Civilization, Assimilation. In Getty and Lussier (eds.), UBC Press. [C1] The earlier treaties as reference: Morris, A. (1880). The Treaties of Canada with the Indians. Belfords, Clarke & Co. [C4] The calibrated timing of negotiations and the analysis of time pressure as a negotiating instrument are the author's.

7.2 — The Commissioners and the Leaders: The Parties at the Table

The negotiations for Treaty No. 6 took place in two sessions. The first at Fort Carlton between August 18 and 23, 1876, concerned the central Saskatchewan bands. The second at Fort Pitt between September 7 and 9, 1876, concerned the more western bands. The two sessions were held in different places because the Nêhiyaw bands were geographically distributed and some could not or did not wish to travel to Fort Carlton.

The principal commissioner on the Canadian side was Alexander Morris, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories. Morris was a lawyer and politician with experience in the earlier treaties: he had already negotiated Treaties Nos. 3, 4,

and 5. He knew the Indigenous diplomatic culture well enough to use it strategically. He knew when to insist and when to yield, when to use the formal register and when to resort to ceremonial informality. He was an effective negotiator for the purposes the government set itself.

Morris's colleagues were James McKay, an influential Métis who served as interpreter and cultural mediator, and William J. Christie, a former Hudson's Bay Company factor with decades of experience on the Plains. McKay's presence was calculated: respected by Indigenous communities but loyal to the Canadian government, he could facilitate communication and reduce mistrust without compromising the governmental party's objectives. Christie brought direct knowledge of the traders, the leaders, and the local dynamics.

The official account of the negotiations, published by Morris in 1880 in his book The Treaties of Canada with the Indians, is the principal source for the speeches and positions expressed. This account must be read with caution: it is written from the Canadian side, it is not a literal transcription but an English paraphrase of speeches delivered in Cree and translated by interpreters. The nuances, ironies, and resistances that the Nêhiyaw leaders expressed in their own language were often attenuated in translation to make the negotiations appear more linear than they actually were.

Chief Mistawasis — leader of the Little Pine band and one of the most respected orators on the Plains — became the principal advocate for signing among the leaders. His argument was one of lucid political realism: the white men would come anyway, the railway would arrive anyway, the Buffalo was disappearing anyway. In these conditions, obtaining the maximum possible through a formal agreement was preferable to refusing and finding oneself with no guarantee at all. Mistawasis had no illusions about the benevolence of

the Canadian government: he was negotiating from the weaker side and seeking to obtain what he could.

Chief Ahtahkakoop, also a supporter of signing, articulated his position in different terms: he saw in agriculture the path toward survival and autonomy. If his people could learn to cultivate the Land with the support promised by the treaty, they would have an economic base that did not depend on the disappearing Buffalo. This vision was optimistic relative to the quality of the support the government would actually provide, but it was rational in the context of 1876: the promises of equipment and assistance seemed credible if honestly kept.

Chief Poundmaker — adopted as a son by Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot and in a diplomatically unique position among the Plains Nations — signed the treaty but with explicit reservations. His questions during the negotiations were exactly the right ones: “What will the government give us if we cannot feed ourselves? Who decides if we are in famine?” Morris’s answers were reassuring but vague. The vagueness was intentional, as would be revealed in the following decade: Poundmaker had identified the structural ambiguity of the treaty without receiving the precise answer he sought.

Chief Big Bear — probably the most politically acute leader among the Nêhiyawak of his time — presented himself at Fort Pitt but refused to sign. He understood that the reserves would mean the end of freedom of movement and hoped to build a coalition of non-signatory bands to negotiate collectively for better conditions. This strategy was logically sound but politically impossible: the divisions between bands, the pressure of hunger, and Dewdney’s deliberate policy of preventing coalitions made it impracticable. Big Bear would sign only in 1882, when his people were dying of starvation.

A voice often overlooked in the accounts of the negotiations is that of women. Traditional Nêhiyaw decision-making processes included women's participation in band assemblies, as analysed in Chapter 5. But the Treaty No. 6 negotiations were conducted according to European diplomatic protocol, which recognised only male leaders as interlocutors. Women were present but silenced: their absence from the negotiating table contributed to producing an agreement that ignored feminine perspectives on life on the reserves, domestic economy, and the care of children.

The Fort Pitt session of September 1876 was more tense than the Fort Carlton one. The more western bands had had less contact with the commissioners, were more sceptical, and less ready to sign without concrete guarantees. Big Bear used every occasion to articulate his reservations and encourage the other leaders to resist pressure. Morris recognised the difficulty of the situation and used the banquets and celebrations to soften the atmosphere before the formal sessions. The final signature at Fort Pitt was less convinced than that at Fort Carlton.

> [C1] The commissioners and the negotiations: Morris (1880), session accounts. [C1] Mistawasis, Ahtahkakoop, Poundmaker: Stonechild and Waiser (1997). Loyal Till Death. Fifth House Publishers, ch. 1. [C1] Big Bear: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 2. [C4] The exclusion of women from negotiations as a distortion of the Nehiyaw decision-making process, and the analysis of the different quality of the signature between Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt, are the author's.

7.3 — The Text of the Treaty: Clauses and Ambiguities

The text of Treaty No. 6 establishes the formal terms of the agreement with the technical precision of legal language and with the deliberate ambiguity of those who want promises to appear larger than they intend to honour. Every clause deserves specific analysis because the

sum of the ambiguities is what produced the decade of violations that led to the Resistance of 1885.

The cession clause was the most important from the Canadian government's perspective. The signatory leaders ceded, released, surrendered to the Canadian government all the land within the described area. This formulation was absolutely clear in English: permanent cession of land ownership. The Cree translation used terms closer to the idea of sharing the use than to that of sale. What the Nêhiyaw leaders believed they had agreed to and what the English text stated were probably two different things, and this discrepancy is the foundation of centuries of legal disputes about territorial rights.

The monetary payments were structured in two levels. Leaders received 25 dollars at the signing and 25 dollars annually: payments much higher than those of ordinary members (12 dollars at signing, 5 annually). This differentiation had a precise political logic: to give the leaders an economic incentive to accept and maintain the agreement. But it also had the effect of creating a structural conflict of interest: the leader was paid by the government they were supposed to hold accountable. A leader who depended on annual payments had less credibility when protesting against treaty violations.

The land reserves were fixed at one square mile for every family of five. This formula seemed generous in 1876 but was conceived for sedentary agriculture, not nomadic hunting and gathering. A Nêhiyaw family depending on hunting needed a territory tens or hundreds of times larger. The formula was an implicit imposition of the agricultural way of life: either the families converted to agriculture or the reserve area would be insufficient for survival. The government had won either way.

The promised agricultural equipment included oxen and cows, carts, ploughs, hoes and scythes, seeds, and various implements. The treaty did not specify the quality of the tools, the health of the livestock, the appropriate varieties of seeds, or the delivery schedules. These apparently technical omissions opened an enormous space of discretion in execution. The government could fulfil the letter of the treaty by delivering unusable equipment and still declare that it had respected its obligations. This is exactly what happened.

The right to hunt is the clause whose interpretation has produced the most controversy. The treaty guaranteed the Nêhiyawak the right to hunt in the ceded territories "so long as the land is not required for settlement." This formulation contained two fundamental ambiguities: who defines when the land is "required for settlement"? And what happens to the hunting rights as settlement advances? The government's answers in the following decades were: the government itself decides, and hunting rights narrow as settlers arrive. The Nêhiyawak interpreted the clause differently: the right was permanent.

The "famine clause" is the treaty's most controversial provision. The English text provided for assistance "in case of pestilence or national calamity." During the negotiations, Morris had verbally responded to Poundmaker's question with generic reassurances: "the Queen will not let her red children starve." This verbal commitment, not present in those words in the written text, was understood by Nêhiyaw leaders as a precise and binding promise. The Canadian government, in the following decades, interpreted it as a rhetorical formula without contractual value.

The school clause provided for the maintenance of a school on every reserve that requested one. Apparently a benefit, in reality an instrument of assimilation policy. The schools on the reserves, managed by religious missions with government funds, taught in English, promoted Christian values, and discouraged or prohibited the use of the Nêhiyawêwin. This clause created the legal justification for the educational system that would then include the Residential Schools: the obligation of education was in the treaty, but the content of that education was defined unilaterally by the government.

A rarely discussed clause concerns mineral rights. The text of Treaty No. 6 did not explicitly mention the subsoil: the European understanding was that the cession of the surface automatically included the subsoil. The Nêhiyaw leaders had no equivalent concept nor any reason to believe they were ceding subsoil resources. This gap in the text is at the foundation of the contemporary controversies about rights to oil and gas revenues in Treaty No. 6 territories.

The leader's medal, delivered in precious metal with the Queen's portrait to each signatory leader, was more than a simple ornament. Wearing the medal meant being recognised as a leader by the British Crown, but it also meant that one's authority derived in part from the Crown's recognition. Leaders who did not sign did not receive the medal and were not officially recognised by the colonial administration. The medal as an instrument of control was as effective as the annual payments: both created bonds of dependency between leaders and the government.

> [C1] The text of Treaty No. 6: Morris (1880), Appendix A; full text in Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. [C1] The famine clause: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 1. [C1] The hunting rights clause and its ambiguities: Venne-Pedersen, K. (2012). Translating Treaties. OUP. [C4] The analysis of the reserve formula as implicit imposition of the agricultural way of life, the technical

> omissions as space of discretion, and the medal as an instrument of control are the author's.

7.4 — Commissioner Dewdney and the First Violations (1877–1882)

The violations of Treaty No. 6 did not begin with a dramatic act: they began with bureaucratic inertia, budget decisions, and the deliberate policy of Edgar Dewdney, appointed Indian Commissioner of the North-West in 1879. Each individual violation could be justified as an interpretation of the treaty or a contingent necessity. The sum of the violations built a system of forced dependency that was exactly what the Nêhiyaw leaders had sought to prevent.

Edgar Dewdney had an explicit mandate from the Macdonald government: keep expenditures to a minimum. He had been appointed Indian Commissioner after a career as an engineer and Conservative politician with no specific background in the culture or history of the Indigenous Nations. His understanding of the Nêhiyawak was that of a Victorian-era colonial official: they were “racially inferior” and had to be pushed toward assimilation by every necessary means. This ideological prejudice combined with the budget objective to produce systematically destructive policies.

The quality of the agricultural equipment distributed on the reserves is documented in a damning manner in the reports of federal agents. Ploughs were made of brittle iron that broke in the hard Plains soil. Draft animals were often sick after the long transport. Seeds were varieties unsuited to the climate: wheat that blossomed before harvest or corn that did not ripen before the autumn frosts. The treaty had promised equipment without specifying quality: this omission allowed the government to fulfil the letter while violating the spirit.

Dewdney's rations policy was the most direct mechanism for violating the famine clause. Dewdney reduced rations well below the levels necessary for dignified survival and conditioned their distribution on fieldwork. His principle was: "those who do not work do not eat." But the reserve land was often arid or badly positioned, the equipment was insufficient, and agricultural competencies required years. Demanding that bands feed themselves through agriculture in 1879 was like demanding that newly arrived immigrants feed themselves with the harvest of the first year on land they had never worked.

Hayter Reed, Dewdney's assistant, introduced the "block system": each family had to cultivate exclusively its own assigned plot, without the collective sharing of labour that was the traditional Nêhiyaw practice. Reed also prohibited the use of modern agricultural machinery that was available to and used by white settlers in the same areas. The declared objective was "encouraging individualism." The actual effect was twofold: to destroy the collective solidarity structures of the Nêhiyawak and to keep Indigenous agricultural productivity below competitive levels to protect white settlers from competition.

The selection of reserve locations was another form of violation. The treaty guaranteed reserves of adequate size but did not specify the quality of the land. Dewdney used this gap to assign the most resistant bands lands in arid areas or subject to flooding. At the same time, he purchased through intermediaries fertile agricultural land adjacent to the reserves to resell at personal profit to white settlers. This conflict of interest — which would have been a crime in any governance system with modern accountability — was perfectly legal in nineteenth-century Canada.

The embryonic Pass System directly violated the right to hunt guaranteed by the treaty. One could not exercise the right to hunt without leaving the reserve; one could not leave the reserve without the permission of the federal agent; and the federal agent had total discretion. This chain of dependencies made the right to hunt practically unenforceable even before the formal Pass System was introduced after 1885. The deprivation of hunting rights intensified dependency on government rations that Dewdney used as an instrument of control.

Bands that resisted Dewdney's policies suffered specific punishments. If a leader formally protested the quality of the rations, the band's rations could be further reduced "for lack of funds." If a band sought to move toward another territory to find food, the North-West Mounted Police stopped it and returned it to the reserve. If leaders sought to co-ordinate with other bands to present collective demands, Dewdney interrupted communications and intimidated participants. The system was built to prevent every form of collective resistance.

A documented but rarely discussed aspect is the conflict between local federal agents and the missionaries. Many Oblate and Methodist missionaries living in Nêhiyaw communities were direct witnesses to treaty violations and denounced them in their reports to the churches. Some wrote directly to the government or to Canadian newspapers. Their accounts — such as those of Reverend McLean describing children with protruding ribs — were credible documentation of conditions on the reserves. The government ignored them systematically, considering them religious interference in administrative affairs.

Attempts at legal recourse were systematically blocked. Canadian courts were instruments of the State that had signed the treaty and had neither the independence nor the political will to enforce it against the government. Petitions to Ottawa remained without reply for months. Delegations of leaders seeking to reach Ottawa directly were blocked by local agents who denied travel permits. The system was closed on every side. It was precisely this — the closing of every peaceful alternative — that made the Resistance of 1885 the only remaining option for some bands.

> [C1] Dewdney's policy: Daschuk, J. (2013). Clearing the Plains. University of Regina Press, chs. 8-10. [C1] Reed's block system: Carter, S. (1990). Lost Harvests. McGill-Queens University Press, chs. 4-6. [C1] Dewdney's conflict of interest: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 2. [C4] The chain of dependencies making the right to hunt unenforceable, the role of missionaries as witnesses, and the closing of every peaceful alternative as structural causes of the Resistance are the author's.

7.5 — The Crisis of 1883–1884: Famine and Final Petitions

The years 1883 and 1884 were the moment when the failure of Treaty No. 6 became incontestable. The disappearance of the Buffalo was complete on the Canadian Plains. The agricultural harvests on the reserves had been insufficient for several consecutive years. Government rations had been further reduced. And confinement to the reserves prevented bands from seeking food elsewhere. Federal agents' reports document children dying of starvation, severely malnourished adults, and bands selling their few possessions to buy food.

The great inter-band assemblies of 1883 and 1884 were the last attempt at a co-ordinated political response. Chiefs Big Bear, Poundmaker, and Little Pine sought to bring together the Saskatchewan bands in a single assembly that could negotiate

collectively with the government. Big Bear's vision was that of a unified Indigenous territory in southern Saskatchewan where the reserves would be adjacent and the bands could move freely. Dewdney understood the danger of this coalition and obstructed it systematically, using the Pass System, denying meeting permits, and reducing the rations of participating bands.

A formal petition of 1884, signed by several Saskatchewan leaders, listed the specific violations of Treaty No. 6 — the quality of the equipment, the insufficient rations, the blockade of movements — and demanded a revision of the terms or at least the respect of those already signed. The petition was drafted in English, with the help of interpreters and missionaries, and used appropriate legal language. The government's response was silence: the petition was received, filed, and ignored. This silence was itself a political response: not an accidental response but the deliberate response of a government that had decided not to respond.

The report of Dr. Augustus Jukes, physician of the federal administration, documented in 1882 the deaths by starvation and the malnutrition-related diseases on the reserves of the Battleford territory. It was an internal document, written by a government official, that could not be dismissed as anti-government propaganda. Jukes explicitly requested increased rations and the provision of better-quality equipment. The Macdonald government received the report, transmitted it to Dewdney, and did not change policy. The choice not to act in the face of documented evidence of systematic suffering is the clearest proof of the intentionality of the violations.

The return of Louis Riel from Montana in the summer of 1884 changed the political calculus of many bands. Not that the Nêhiyawak saw Riel as their leader: the Métis cause and the Nêhiyaw cause had

distinct claims. But Riel's return signalled that resistance was possible and might find a broader audience. For some bands, waiting to see the development of the Métis situation before deciding their own course was the rational strategy. Dewdney interpreted this wait-and-see attitude as complicity and produced further restrictions on movements and rations.

The winter of 1884-85 was the hardest since the signing of the treaty. Food reserves were exhausted; government rations were at a historic minimum; the summer 1884 harvest had been disastrous due to drought and infestations. Federal agents' reports documented the situation with a clarity that made the conclusion inescapable: the Nêhiyaw bands were experiencing a politically produced famine. The government had all the information necessary to intervene; it chose not to. In March 1885, when the Métis proclaimed the provisional government, the Plains Nêhiyaw bands were facing the most difficult month of a winter without food and without alternatives.

The psychological condition of the Nêhiyaw communities in this period is difficult to document with the available sources but is essential for understanding what happened in 1885. The bands that had signed the treaty in good faith in 1876 found themselves eight years later in a condition worse than the one they had sought to prevent. They had ceded freedom of movement, the right to live according to their own traditions, and much of their own territory: in exchange for promises systematically violated. The anger and despair of this awareness were the emotional context in which the spark of 1885 could ignite.

> [C1] The crisis of 1883-84: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), chs. 3-4. [C1] The petitions of 1884: Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vols. 3668-3670. [C1] The Jukes report of 1882: Daschuk (2013), ch. 9. [C4] The deliberate choice not

> to act as proof of the intentionality of violations, and the psychological condition of the communities as context for the Resistance, are the author's.

7.6 — The Reserve System as an Institution of Control

The reserves created by Treaty No. 6 were not simple land delimitations: they were institutions of control designed to produce the transformation of the Nêhiyaw Nations from independent nomadic populations to sedentary communities dependent on the federal administration. This transformation was not a side effect: it was the declared objective of the system. Analysing the structure of the reserves as institutions of control is necessary for understanding why the failure of the treaty was not an accident but a structural consequence.

The federal agent was the central figure of the system. Appointed by the government and accountable to the Indian Commissioner, the agent had almost unlimited authority over reserve life: decided who received rations, who could leave the reserve, which expenditures were approved, how community funds were managed, and who was recognised as legitimate leader. No background in Indigenous culture or languages was required. Political loyalty to the Conservative Party was often the principal criterion of appointment. Even the best agents operated within a system that concentrated irresponsible power in a single figure.

The internal governance system of the reserves was gradually imposed from the outside. The Canadian government required elections for the choice of leaders according to European procedures that ignored the traditional Nêhiyaw systems of leadership selection. Traditional leaders — chosen by consensus, competency, and quality of character — were replaced by elected leaders with procedural but

not necessarily community legitimacy. Leaders who co-operated with the agent received support; those who resisted were de-recognised and replaced with more accommodating figures. The colonial power progressively colonised also the internal power structure of the communities.

The spatial dimension of the reserves was itself an element of control. The reserves were delimited with precise physical boundaries, often far from traditional hunting territories. The size, calculated for sedentary agriculture, was insufficient for any other form of subsistence. And the dispersal of the reserves — often distant from each other with white settler territories in between — physically prevented the inter-band mobility that the Nêhiyawak had practised for millennia. The reserves were geographic prisons as well as legal prisons.

The structural economic dependency produced by the reserve system was its most lasting product. A band that depended entirely on government rations for survival had no bargaining power relative to the government providing those rations. Every act of resistance — a petition, a public protest, a refusal to co-operate with the agent — could be punished with reduced rations. This form of coercion — which used hunger as a political weapon — struck children as well as adults and left no alternative path.

The Pass System, formally introduced by Dewdney in the autumn of 1885, had no legal basis in either the Indian Act or the treaties. It was an administrative measure introduced by internal circular without going through Parliament. Its illegality was recognised by the officials themselves but this did not prevent its application: it was effective in controlling the bands and no court would ever have convicted the government for its application. Some

reserves maintained the Pass System until the 1940s: nearly a century of illegal restriction of a treaty-guaranteed right.

The reserve system also had a specific demographic dimension. Bands that refused to settle on a particular reserve were deprived of rations and official recognition. This pushed bands to fragment: members willing to co-operate settled on the reserve and received rations; those who resisted remained outside with no guarantee whatsoever. The fragmentation of the bands — deliberately produced by the structure of benefits — progressively weakened the Nêhiyaw social cohesion that was the foundation of any collective resistance.

The impact on Nêhiyaw martial culture was specific and lasting. The Nêhiyaw Warrior made sense in a context of mobility, Buffalo hunting, and defence of territory. On the reserves, these conditions were eliminated. The Warrior Societies, which in the great summer hunts performed functions of co-ordination and discipline, lost their context. Combat preparation ceremonies were prohibited by the Indian Act. Young men who had the training and the desire to be Warriors found themselves in a context where Warrior competencies had no legitimate application. This identity crisis is one of the reasons why the recovery of the warrior tradition in Okichitaw has such deep resonance in contemporary Indigenous communities.

> [C1] The reserve system as an institution of control: Carter (1990), chs. 2-4. [C1] The illegality of the Pass System: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 2. [C1] The internally-imposed governance: Tobias, J.L. (1983). Protection, Civilization, Assimilation. In Getty and Lussier (eds.), UBC Press. [C4] The deliberate fragmentation of bands as weakening of collective resistance, and the Warrior identity crisis as precursor to Okichitaw's resonance, are the author's.

7.7 — Treaty No. 6 in Contemporary Law and Memory

Treaty No. 6 is not a document closed in the history of the nineteenth century: it is a treaty still in force that defines the rights of the Treaty No. 6 Nations in contemporary Canada. Its legal importance has been reaffirmed by Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution of 1982 and by the series of Supreme Court decisions that have progressively defined its content. Understanding Treaty No. 6 today means understanding both the historical document of 1876 and the living document that the Nêhiyaw Nations use as an instrument of claim.

Section 35 of the Constitution of 1982 states that "the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed." This brief and general formulation left to the Supreme Court the task of defining what "treaty rights" means and what are the criteria for their legitimate limitation. The interpretive process is still ongoing: each Supreme Court decision adds elements to the understanding of the content of the rights guaranteed by Treaty No. 6.

The Sparrow decision of 1990 established that Indigenous rights guaranteed by Section 35 cannot be limited arbitrarily: the government must demonstrate that the limitation has a legitimate purpose and is proportional to that purpose. The Van der Peet decision of 1996 defined "aboriginal rights" as practices integral to the distinctive culture of Indigenous peoples before European contact. The Haida Nation decision of 2004 established the duty to consult: the government must consult Indigenous Nations before taking decisions that impact their treaty rights.

The Treaty Six Nations — the organisation representing the approximately sixty signatory bands in Saskatchewan and Alberta — have developed a sophisticated legal position on the famine clause. They argue that the original promise creates a permanent fiduciary

obligation that includes health, education, and economic conditions, not only assistance in case of acute famine. This expansive interpretation — which Canadian courts are progressively recognising — transforms Treaty No. 6 into an instrument of contemporary welfare policy with legal roots in 1876.

The Treaty Acknowledgement — the practice of publicly recognising that one is on territory covered by Treaty No. 6 — is today adopted by universities, hospitals, government bodies, and private companies in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. The standard formulation acknowledges that the territory is the territory of the Nations signatory to Treaty No. 6 and that the benefits of living and working in that territory carry with them obligations derived from the treaty. This practice is not merely symbolic: it is the collective recognition that Treaty No. 6 is not history but an ongoing relationship.

The 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission include several recommendations specifically linked to the treaties: mandatory treaty education in schools, respect for fiduciary obligations, and the creation of implementation mechanisms more accountable than those of the nineteenth century. The TRC explicitly recognised that the post-1876 policies violated both the letter and the spirit of Treaty No. 6. Implementation of the Calls to Action is still partial and uneven, but the formal recognition that the treaty was systematically violated is part of the official Canadian historical narrative.

The relationship between Treaty No. 6 and Okichitaw is direct and substantial. Okichitaw was born in the territory of the Treaty No. 6 Nations, from a Founder descended from the peoples who signed it. The treaty's unkept promises — the denied assistance, the prohibited

ceremonies, the children taken to Residential Schools, the suppressed martial traditions — are the history that the Okichitaw curriculum carries within it. The recovery of the Nêhiyaw warrior practices is also the response to what Treaty No. 6 should have guaranteed but did not: the right of the Nêhiyawak to be themselves, in their own language and in their own culture.

The text of Treaty No. 6 is included as a complete document in the closing apparatus of this volume. The choice to publish it in full — in English with an Italian translation — is an editorial choice reflecting a substantive conviction: the readers of this volume must be able to read the precise words of what was promised in 1876. Not the paraphrase of a historian, not the summary of a jurist, but the words of the document that still defines today the relationship between the Nêhiyaw Nations and the Canadian State.

> [C1] Section 35 and treaty rights: Hogg, P.W. (1997). Constitutional Law of Canada. Carswell, ch. 28. [C1] The Sparrow, Van der Peet, and Haida Nation decisions: original texts, Canlii.org. [C1] The Treaty Six Nations: treatysix.ca. [C1] The TRC Calls to Action (2015). [C4] The relationship between Treaty No. 6 and Okichitaw, and the editorial choice to publish the full text as an act of respect and memory, are the author's.

Chapter Summary

Treaty No. 6 of 1876 carries within it two simultaneous histories: that of the promises — generous enough to convince most leaders to sign — and that of the violations — systematic enough to make the crisis of 1885 inevitable. The complexity of the treaty is that both histories are true: the treaty contained real promises that could have been kept, and those promises were deliberately and systematically broken.

This combination of real possibility and deliberate failure is what makes Treaty No. 6 not only a historical document but a case study in the nature of colonial power.

Chapter 8 analyses the Resistance of 1885 as the direct response to the failure of Treaty No. 6: the moment when all the peaceful alternatives had been systematically closed and the very survival of the Nêhiyaw People seemed to require a response that the legal structures of the treaty could no longer provide.

* * *

PART THREE

HISTORY

Chapter 8 — The Resistance of 1885

In the year 1885, the Great Canadian Plains became the scene of the most violent confrontation between the Indigenous Nations and the Canadian State in the history of the country.

It was not a war in the conventional sense of the term: it was the desperate response of peoples who saw their physical survival threatened by the combination of famine, systematic treaty violations, and deliberate contempt on the part of the federal administration.

For the Plains Nêhiyawak, 1885 was not an isolated episode: it was the culmination of a decade of progressive erosion and the beginning of a century of direct suppression. Understanding the Resistance of 1885 is understanding the historical conditions that made the rebirth of Okichitaw necessary a century later.

Canadian historiography long treated 1885 as the “North-West Rebellion”: a term that already contains a political judgement, that of the victors. “Rebellion” presupposes that the rebels were violating a legitimate authority; “North-West” identifies the region from Ottawa’s point of view, not that of the peoples who inhabited it. Indigenous and revisionist historiography prefers the term “Resistance”: a term that recognises that what occurred was the response of sovereign peoples to systematic violations of their rights. This chapter adopts that term.

8.1 — The Plains on the Eve of Crisis: 1879–1884

To understand the Resistance of 1885 it is necessary to understand the situation on the reserves between 1879 and 1884: years in which the physical survival of the Plains Nations was compromised by deliberate political choices of the Canadian federal administration.

The disappearance of the Buffalo between 1879 and 1882 — dramatic even in its numerical proportions: from millions of animals to a few thousand in less than a decade — had eliminated the economic and food base of all the Plains Nations. The promises of Treaty No. 6 to guarantee food in case of famine — the famous "famine clause" — clashed with the austerity policy imposed by the Macdonald government.

The official in charge of North-West administration during this critical period was Edgar Dewdney, appointed Indian Commissioner of the North-West in 1879 and Lieutenant-Governor in 1881. Dewdney was a Conservative politician tied to the interests of the Macdonald party and the Canadian Pacific Railway promoters. His policy toward the Indigenous Nations was deliberately punitive: he reduced food rations well below the levels necessary for survival, conditioned the distribution of aid on the adoption of sedentary agriculture, and strategically moved some reserves to favour real estate interests in which he himself was a participant.

The conditions on the reserves between 1879 and 1884 were documented by the federal agents themselves in reports that are today classified as evidence of a politically induced famine. Reverend John McLean, a missionary at Battleford, wrote in 1880 of children "with bones protruding through the skin." Dr. Augustus Jukes, the federal administration's physician, documented deaths by starvation on the Poundmaker reserve in 1882. Hayter Reed, Dewdney's assistant, explicitly recommended in his reports keeping rations at a minimum to force the Nêhiyawak to work: "hurger will make them industrious," he wrote in an internal communication.

Dewdney's policy aimed to produce the total dependency of the Indigenous Nations on the federal administration. Before

colonisation, the Nêhiyawak were economically self-sufficient: the Buffalo hunt provided everything necessary. With the disappearance of the Buffalo and confinement to the reserves, their survival depended entirely on rations distributed by the administration. This was not an unintended side effect: it was the declared objective of the policy. Leaders who passively accepted conditions received slightly better rations; those who protested or refused the rules saw their bands punished with further reductions.

The great Nêhiyaw leaders of this period — Big Bear, Poundmaker, Piapot, Little Pine — had understood the structural nature of the trap and were seeking a collective response. Between 1881 and 1884 several large assemblies were held in which Plains leaders discussed the possibility of a collective renegotiation of the treaties: a co-ordinated action that would have given the Indigenous Nations real bargaining power. Dewdney recognised the danger of this coalition and acted systematically to prevent it: using the embryonic Pass System, denying inter-reserve travel permits, and fomenting divisions between leaders.

The situation of the Métis in southern Saskatchewan added a specific dimension to the crisis. The Métis — the people of mixed Indigenous and European origins who had built their own culture and identity over the course of the nineteenth century — had been expelled from Manitoba after their first Resistance of 1869-70 and had settled in the Saskatchewan district. They too were making claims to land titles that the federal government had systematically ignored for years. Their frustration, parallel to that of the Nêhiyawak, created the conditions for an alliance that would change the history of the Plains.

The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), completed in 1885, was an integral part of the crisis context. The transcontinental railway was not only an economic development project: it was the geopolitical instrument with which the Macdonald government intended to bind the colony of British Columbia to Canada and populate the Plains with European settlers. The railway crossed the territories guaranteed by the treaties without adequate consultation, brought settlers who occupied lands the Nêhiyawak considered their own, and created demographic pressure that made the definitive confinement to reserves increasingly urgent. The irony of history: it would be the very railway that allowed the rapid deployment of the army that would crush the Resistance.

The harvest of 1884 was disastrous: drought and insects had destroyed the fields on the reserves that had sought to follow Dewdney's cultivation instructions. The winter of 1884-85 opened with food reserves nearly exhausted and federal rations further reduced by Dewdney for budgetary reasons. Children were dying from disease and malnutrition; adults were so weakened that agricultural work was barely practicable. In this context of threatened survival, the news that Louis Riel — the leader of the first Métis Resistance of 1869-70 — had returned from Montana spread through the reserves as the possibility that something might really change.

> [C1] Conditions on the reserves 1879-1884: Stonechild, B. and Waiser, B. (1997). Loyal Till Death. Fifth House Publishers, chs. 1-3. [C1] Dewdney's policy and rations: Daschuk, J. (2013). Clearing the Plains. University of Regina Press, chs. 8-10. [C1] Hayter Reed's rations report: Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 3668, file 10644. [C1] The CPR as geopolitical instrument: Beal, B. and Macleod, R. (1984). Prairie Fire. Hurtig Publishers, ch. 2.

8.2 — The Five Converging Causes of the Resistance

The Resistance of 1885 was not caused by a single factor but by the convergence of five distinct forces that intensified each other over the course of the winter of 1884-85. Identifying these forces separately is necessary for understanding why the response to the crisis conditions took the form it did and why it involved both Métis communities and Nêhiyaw Nations, both leaders who had signed the treaties and those who had refused them.

First cause: the structural famine. As documented in the preceding section, the Plains Nations were living a food crisis with natural causes (the disappearance of the Buffalo) that was deliberately aggravated by Dewdney's policy. When human beings are threatened in their physical survival, the threshold of resistance drops drastically. The leaders who had maintained peace despite treaty violations could no longer do so when their own children were dying of starvation.

Second cause: the unkept treaty promises. Treaty No. 6 of 1876 had promised: agricultural equipment, livestock, seeds, education, medical assistance, and food in case of famine. Eight years after the signing, these promises had been fulfilled only partially and often in a degraded form. Agricultural equipment was of poor quality or insufficient. The promised livestock was often sick or of breeds unsuited to the climate. Medical assistance was almost nonexistent in remote areas. And the "famine clause" — explicitly negotiated by Nêhiyaw leaders as a condition of signing — was being interpreted by the administration in the most restrictive manner possible.

Third cause: Dewdney's punitive policy. Beyond the simple non-fulfilment of treaty promises, Dewdney had built a system explicitly designed to humiliate and punish. Leaders who protested were stripped of their official recognition. Bands that refused to work

in the fields received reduced rations. Movements between reserves were limited through a permit system that anticipated the formal Pass System. Dewdney's declared objective was to "break the tribal spirit": to replace the collective identity of the Nêhiyawak with that of the individual dependent on the State.

Fourth cause: the return of Louis Riel. In June 1884, a Métis delegation led by Gabriel Dumont had gone to Montana to convince Riel to return to Canada to lead their cause. Riel — who had lived in the United States after the first Resistance of 1869-70, obtained American citizenship, and was teaching at a missionary school — accepted. His return changed the political dynamics of the Plains: it brought organisational experience, legitimacy as the leader of the previous resistance, and a political vision that went beyond the immediate Métis claims to include also the Nêhiyaw Nations.

Fifth cause: the federal government's inertia. Throughout 1884, Riel and the Métis sent petitions to Ottawa requesting recognition of land titles and consultation on treaty terms. The Macdonald government systematically ignored these petitions, as it had ignored the analogous petitions from the Nêhiyawak throughout the previous decade. This deliberate inertia — not the inability to respond but the choice not to — systematically closed every peaceful way out. When in March 1885 the Métis proclaimed their provisional government, they did so after exhausting every alternative available within the Canadian political system.

The convergence of these five causes produced different situations in different geographic areas of the Plains. For the Métis of the Saskatchewan district, the dominant cause was the question of land titles and political identity: their Resistance had a more organised form with a single recognised leadership (Riel and

Dumont). For the Nêhiyawak, the dominant causes were physical survival and treaty violations: their response was more fragmented, guided by different leaders with different positions, in some bands oriented toward open combat and in others toward neutrality or even support for the Canadian government.

A crucial element often overlooked in the narrative of the Resistance of 1885 is the depth of the internal divisions among the Nêhiyaw Nations. Not all the bands participated in the Resistance: many remained neutral or sided with the Canadian government. Leaders like Mistawasis and Ahtahkakoop, who had signed the treaties with the conviction that agriculture was the path of survival, refused to participate and convinced their bands to do the same. This division did not reflect a difference of opinion on the justice of the claims but a difference of survival strategies: those who believed armed resistance was suicidal and those who believed surrender was the true death.

The month of March 1885 was the turning point. On March 19, Riel and the Métis established a provisional government at Batoche and sent an ultimatum to the Canadian authorities. On March 26, at Duck Lake, the NWMP forces under Crozier encountered the Métis forces led by Dumont in what would be the first armed engagement. The Métis prevailed: 12 NWMP men dead, 5 Métis killed. The news of the Duck Lake victory spread rapidly through the reserves and changed the calculus of many leaders who had until then maintained neutrality.

> [C1] The five converging causes: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), chs. 1-4; Beal and Macleod (1984), chs. 3-5. [C1] Dewdney's explicit policy of breaking the tribal spirit: Daschuk (2013), ch. 10. [C1] Riel's return and Dumont's delegation: Flanagan, T. (1983). Riel and the Rebellion. Western Producer Prairie Books, ch. 3. [C1] The Battle of Duck Lake: Beal and Macleod (1984), ch. 7.

8.3 — Louis Riel and the Métis Provisional Government

Louis Riel is one of the most controversial figures in Canadian history. Condemned to death for treason and hanged in November 1885, he was symbolically rehabilitated by the Canadian Parliament in 1992 and is today recognised as one of the founding fathers of Manitoba and as a hero of the Indigenous and Métis peoples. The trajectory of his life — from the first Resistance of 1869-70 to exile in the United States, from the years of mental crisis to his return as a political-messianic leader — mirrors the contradictions of an era in which no easy options existed for the Indigenous peoples of the Plains.

Born in 1844 in Saint-Boniface in Manitoba to a Métis father and a mother of Franco-Canadian origin, Riel had studied law in Montreal before returning to the Plains. His first Resistance, in 1869-70, was born in response to Canada's purchase of Rupert's Land from the British government without any consultation with the Métis who inhabited it. The provisional government he then led had succeeded in negotiating Manitoba's entry into the Canadian Confederation with guarantees for Métis rights, including bilingualism. That had been a victory: it had demonstrated that organised resistance could produce results.

The execution of Thomas Scott — an Ontario Orangeman who had conspired against the provisional government and whom Riel had had shot in 1870 — had transformed Riel into a political target in Protestant Ontario. The Macdonald government, which needed the Ontario vote, had promised amnesty to Riel but had also allowed Ontario militias to enter Manitoba, making his return physically impossible. Riel had remained elected to the federal Parliament three times while unable to occupy his seat: a political paradox that revealed

the fundamentally dishonest nature of the relationship between the Canadian government and the Indigenous peoples.

During the years of American exile, Riel had undergone a profound spiritual crisis that had led to psychiatric hospitalisations and then to a messianic vision of himself as “the Prophet of the New World.” This religious dimension complicated his leadership in 1885: his political vision was lucid and grounded but his theological positions (he wanted to replace the Pope with an American bishop and transfer the seat of the Catholic Church to Manitoba) alienated the Catholic missionaries who had until then supported the Métis cause. Gabriel Dumont, his military commander, was deeply suspicious of Riel’s mystical tendencies and would have preferred a more aggressive military strategy.

The provisional government at Batoche, proclaimed on March 19, 1885, was modelled on that of 1869-70 but in much more difficult conditions. The Métis had approximately 300 fighters against a Canadian army that could mobilise thousands of men and transport them by railway in a few days. Riel hoped that the Métis cause would find political support in Quebec, Ontario, and especially in the United States, where the cause of Indigenous self-determination had sympathies in the liberal press. These hopes proved illusory: Quebec did not move significantly, the Americans did not intervene, and the Nêhiyaw Nations did not move in a co-ordinated fashion.

The relationship between the Métis provisional government and the Plains Nêhiyaw Nations was complex and never fully resolved. Riel sought allies among the Nêhiyaw leaders but his political vision was essentially Métis: he had no elaborate response to the specific claims of the Nations that were different from his own. Some Nêhiyaw leaders — in particular within Big Bear’s band — saw

in the Métis Resistance an opportunity to raise their own voice but were not organic allies of the Batoche government. What happened on the Nêhiyaw reserves in that March 1885 was largely independent of what was happening at Batoche, guided by its own dynamics and specific internal tensions.

The Canadian government's response to the proclamation of the provisional government was rapid and decisive. General Frederick Middleton was charged with leading the military expedition and marched toward Batoche with approximately 3,000 men. The Canadian Pacific Railway, not yet fully complete but already operational on the relevant stretch, transported troops from Ontario and Quebec to the Plains in unprecedented time: what would have required months by river and land was done in a few days. The speed of this response was decisive: it left the Nêhiyaw Nations time to mobilise but not to co-ordinate.

> [C1] Riel's life and the first Resistance of 1869-70: Bumsted, J.M. (1996). The Red River Rebellion. Watson & Dwyer. [C1] Riel's spiritual crisis: Flanagan (1983), ch. 5. [C1] The provisional government at Batoche: Beal and Macleod (1984), ch. 8. [C1] Gabriel Dumont as commander: Howard, J.K. (1952). Strange Empire. William Morrow, ch. 12.

8.4 — Frog Lake, April 2, 1885: The Massacre and Its Causes

April 2, 1885 entered Canadian history as "the Frog Lake Massacre": the most violent episode of the Resistance of 1885 and the one that more than any other determined Canadian public perception of the Resistance. Nine people were killed at Frog Lake by members of Big Bear's band. But the understanding of what happened that morning requires moving beyond the simplified narrative that has dominated Canadian historiography for decades.

Frog Lake was a small settlement in the territory of present-day northeastern Alberta, in the area where Big Bear's band was confined to its reserve. The situation in that reserve in the winter of 1884-85 was among the most critical in the entire region: rations had been further reduced, hunting was prohibited outside the reserve boundaries, and mortality from disease and malnutrition was documented even in the reports of the federal agent. The news of the Métis victory at Duck Lake had reached Big Bear's band and had changed the internal dynamics of the group.

The central figure in the Frog Lake episode was not Big Bear but his war leader Wandering Spirit (Kapapamahchakwew). Big Bear was a leader who had refused to sign Treaty No. 6 until 1882 because he understood its implications better than most: he was a man of peace seeking negotiation who had progressively lost control of his own band as living conditions worsened. The young Warriors, led by Wandering Spirit, were furious at the reserve conditions and were waiting for an occasion. The morning of April 2 that occasion arrived.

What happened that morning began with the distribution of rations — or rather with the attempt to obtain them from agent Thomas Quinn. Quinn had the reputation of being particularly harsh and contemptuous toward the Nêhiyawak: he denied or reduced rations, refused to respect traditional leaders, deliberately humiliated men who came to him for food. When Wandering Spirit ordered those present to move to another location and Quinn openly refused, Wandering Spirit shot him. What followed was chaotic: eight other white men present — including two Oblate missionaries, Father Adélard Fafard and Father Fellas — were killed in the panic and violence that exploded after the first shot. Several women and some men were taken prisoner and treated with relative respect in the following months of flight.

Big Bear's role in the Frog Lake massacre has often been misunderstood. Big Bear not only did not order the killings: he actively tried to stop them. Surviving witnesses — including some of the women prisoners — reported that Big Bear had shouted "stop, stop" while the killings were taking place and that he had personally protected some of those present. In the following months, during the flight through the northern forests, Big Bear treated the prisoners with respect and delivered them unharmed when he surrendered to the Canadian government in the summer of 1885. Yet he was convicted of treason-felony and sentenced to three years in prison: the conviction of a man who had done everything in his power to prevent the violence for which he was punished.

The immediate response to the Frog Lake massacre was the flight of Big Bear's bands northward, the occupation of Fort Pitt (from which the NWMP garrison withdrew without fighting, saving many lives), and the beginning of a long pursuit through the forests of northern Saskatchewan. For nearly three months, Big Bear's bands — including Warriors, women, Elders, and children — moved through difficult terrain seeking to avoid the Canadian forces. The white prisoners — a group of approximately 40 people — were carried with them throughout the flight. None of the prisoners was killed during this period.

The recent historiographical reading of the Frog Lake episode has significantly shifted the analysis toward a contextualised understanding. The violence of April 2 was not an act of "savage barbarity" (as the Canadian press of the time described it) but the explosive response of men pushed to the extreme by hunger and systematic humiliation. Thomas Quinn embodied, in his person, all the structural violence that the reserve system had produced: the arbitrary power of a federal agent to distribute or deny the food

necessary for survival. This does not justify the killings but makes them comprehensible as a human response to inhuman conditions.

The impact of the Frog Lake episode on public perception of the Resistance was enormous and lasting. The Canadian press — in particular that of Ontario — used Frog Lake to build a narrative in which all the Indigenous Nations of the Plains were "savages" threatening the lives of settlers. This narrative justified the harsher military response, the exemplary convictions of the leaders, and the suppression policies of the following decade. The distance between what actually happened at Frog Lake and what the public narrative made of it is one of the clearest examples of how history is used to construct political legitimacy.

> [C1] The events at Frog Lake: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 6; Beal and Macleod (1984), ch. 9. [C1] Big Bear's role: McLean, E. (2009). Almighty Voice and His Wife. Talonbooks. [C1] The historiographical revision: Daschuk (2013), ch. 11. [C1] Treatment of the prisoners: testimony of Theresa Gowanlock, reproduced in Stonechild and Waiser (1997).

8.5 — Cut Knife Hill, May 2, 1885: Poundmaker's Victory

While Big Bear's bands moved northward after Frog Lake, in the Battleford area a military episode was unfolding that could have changed the course of the Resistance: the Battle of Cut Knife Hill on May 2, 1885. Poundmaker — the Cree leader who had negotiated Treaty No. 6 alongside Canadian officials and had been adopted as a son by Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot — had been drawn into the Resistance against his initial will and was seeking to maintain control of a situation that risked getting out of hand.

The Poundmaker reserve was located near Battleford, the capital of the North-West Territory. When the news of the Métis victory at Duck Lake had spread and the Battleford garrison had fled

into the fort, abandoning the town, the younger Warriors of Poundmaker's band had looted some abandoned properties. This looting — motivated by hunger and desperation rather than by political strategy — had made Poundmaker's band a military target even though Poundmaker himself had actively tried to stop his Warriors and had kept negotiations with the government open.

Colonel William Otter, commanding approximately 325 men of regular soldiers, provincial militias, and scouts, decided to attack Poundmaker's camp at Cut Knife Hill before dawn on May 2 with the objective of capturing the leader and dispersing his band. The surprise attack at dawn was discovered before it reached the camp: Poundmaker's Warriors dispersed into the surrounding hills and opened effective fire on Otter's forces from the protection of the wooded terrain. After approximately seven hours of combat, Otter ordered a retreat: he had lost 8 men with 14 wounded against 5 Warriors fallen on Poundmaker's side.

The Cut Knife Hill victory was tactical and military but Poundmaker's choice after the battle was strategic and ethical. His Warriors wanted to pursue Otter's retreating forces and destroy them. Poundmaker stopped them. His words, transmitted in Nêhiyaw oral memory and documented by witnesses: "If we had killed them all, the government would have sent more soldiers and this time they would have destroyed us. Our victory today is not worth the lives of our people tomorrow." This decision to stop has been analysed by historians as an act of extraordinary political wisdom, consistent with the Nêhiyaw principle that the Warrior's strength is in the service of protecting the community, not of affirming military superiority.

Poundmaker's clemency after Cut Knife Hill is one of the most cited episodes in the Nêhiyaw oral tradition as an example of the

Warrior's ethical code in action. It is not the military victory that is remembered: it is the capacity to stop the victory in order to protect the future. In the Okichitaw system, this episode is explicitly used as a practical illustration of the principle of proportionality: force used to the extent necessary, not to the extent available. Poundmaker had the strength to destroy Otter's troops: he chose not to use it because the objective was to protect his people, not to win a battle.

In the days following Cut Knife Hill, Poundmaker led his band toward Batoche, where the Métis provisional government was resisting Middleton's siege. They did not arrive in time: Batoche fell before Poundmaker's column reached its destination. When news of the fall of Batoche arrived, Poundmaker decided to negotiate. He invited Middleton to talk and when Middleton refused any negotiation and demanded unconditional surrender, Poundmaker surrendered personally to protect his band from the reprisals that a flight would have triggered.

Poundmaker's trial was held at Regina in July 1885. It was a summary proceeding in which Poundmaker had no access to adequate legal counsel and in which testimony in his favour — including that of the white prisoners he had protected in the days following Battleford — carried minimal weight. He was convicted of treason-felony and sentenced to three years in prison. Imprisoned in the Stony Mountain Penitentiary, his health deteriorated rapidly. He was released after less than a year for health reasons. He died four months later, in July 1886, at just 45 years of age. The Canadian government had sentenced to death one of the most far-sighted men of the Plains through the conditions of the prison system.

Poundmaker's legacy for subsequent Nêhiyaw generations has been enormous. Formally rehabilitated in 2019 by the Canadian

government in a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Trudeau, Poundmaker is today recognised as one of the most important figures in the history of the Canadian Plains. His reserve in Saskatchewan still bears his name. And his choice at Cut Knife Hill — stopping the victory to protect the future — is still taught as an example of the Nêhiyaw Warrior's ethical code in reserve schools and in the Okichitaw Lodge.

> [C1] The Battle of Cut Knife Hill: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 8; Beal and Macleod (1984), ch. 12. [C1] Poundmaker's words on the choice not to pursue: version in oral tradition documented in Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 8. [C1] The trial and death of Poundmaker: Dodson, S. (2020). Poundmaker: A Life. Goodread Biographies. [C1] The rehabilitation of 2019: Government of Canada press release, May 23, 2019.

8.6 — The Siege of Batoche: May 9–12, 1885

Batoche was the heart of the Métis provisional government: a small village on the South Saskatchewan River, home to the church, the cemetery, and the residences of the Métis families who had built their lives on that territory. It was also the defensive position that Gabriel Dumont had chosen — for the reasons already discussed and against his own military judgement — for the final confrontation with the Canadian army.

The defence of Batoche lasted four days: May 9 to 12, 1885. It was an extraordinary resistance by approximately 300 Métis fighters against an army of over 800 men supported by a field cannon and a Gatling machine gun. The trenches dug by the Métis around Batoche were a masterpiece of improvised defensive engineering. Dumont had used his knowledge of the terrain to create a network of ditches and shelters that made every advance by the Canadian army extremely costly. For three days, the Métis held.

By May 12, however, the defenders' ammunition was exhausted: they were firing nails, stones, and pieces of metal instead of bullets. A charge by the Canadian army overwhelmed the defensive lines. The fall of Batoche on May 12, 1885 marked the military end of the Métis Resistance. Dumont escaped to the United States, where he would remain in exile for years. Riel surrendered on May 15 to a group of Canadian scouts and was transported to Regina for trial.

The Métis families of Batoche saw their homes looted by Canadian soldiers who carried away objects, furniture, and keepsakes as war trophies. The village never fully recovered: Batoche is today a Canadian National Historic Site, but it is also the place where the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan held its annual pilgrimage for over a century.

The trial of Louis Riel was held at Regina in July 1885, just two months after the fall of Batoche. It was a political trial in the most direct sense of the term: its outcome was determined before it began. The Macdonald government needed to make an example for Protestant Ontario, which demanded Riel's execution as revenge for the killing of Thomas Scott in 1870. The jury was entirely white and Protestant; the judge was a fervent Conservative. Riel's defence lawyers tried to build an insanity defence: they could have saved their client's life but Riel refused to be found insane because it would have invalidated the legitimacy of the cause he had led.

Riel was convicted of treason and hanged on November 16, 1885, in the Regina penitentiary. His final statement in court — a long speech in which he articulated the Métis political position and defended the legitimacy of their resistance — was applauded even by some of his opponents as an example of political eloquence. In Quebec, where Riel's Franco-Catholic identity had created

sympathies even in Conservative circles, the reaction to the hanging was one of indignation. Honoré Mercier, who would win the Quebec provincial elections a few months later, gave a speech in which he said: "Riel, notre frère, est mort." The execution of Riel opened political fractures in Canada that have never fully closed.

> [C1] The siege of Batoche: Beal and Macleod (1984), ch. 13; Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 9. [C1] Riel's trial: Flanagan (1983), chs. 7-8. [C1] Riel's final statement: full text in Stonechild and Waiser (1997), Appendix A. [C1] The reaction in Quebec: Silver, A.I. (1982). The French-Canadian Idea of Confederation. University of Toronto Press, ch. 6.

8.7 — The Hangings at Fort Battleford: November 27, 1885

On November 27, 1885, in the courtyard of Fort Battleford in Saskatchewan, eight Nêhiyaw men were hanged in the largest mass execution in the history of Canada. Their names were: Wandering Spirit (Kapapamahchakwew), Round the Sky (Ka-wistat), Bad Arrow (Napahkesit), Miserable Man (Iktas), Iron Body (Manichoos), Little Bear (Apischiskoos), Crooked Leg (Itka), and Louison Mongrain. Around the scaffold, by order of the Canadian authorities, hundreds of Nêhiyawak from the surrounding reserves were gathered: men, women, and children forced to watch.

The mass execution at Fort Battleford was not only a punishment of those responsible for the violent acts of 1885: it was a deliberately designed spectacle of power intended to terrorise the Nêhiyaw Nations. General Middleton and the Macdonald government had decided that the executions must be public and that the Indigenous Nations of the Plains must attend. The explicit objective was to transmit the message that any future resistance would bring the same consequences. This type of spectacular justice — which Michel Foucault analysed as a technology of power — was an

established practice in colonisation, and its use at Fort Battleford was not accidental but programmed.

Among the eight hanged, the most complex figure is that of Wandering Spirit. As war leader of Big Bear's band, he had been directly responsible for the Frog Lake killings. His death sentence had a solid factual basis, even if the trial did not respect the minimum standards of fairness. The other seven, however, had very different levels of involvement: some had been present at Frog Lake, others had participated in different actions, and at least one — Louison Mongrain — was accused of having killed an agent in circumstances of self-defence that were not adequately examined by the court.

Judge Hugh Richardson, who presided over most of the 1885 trials including Riel's, was a federally appointed judge without the independence guarantees that the Canadian legal system would develop in the following century. The trials were held in a few days, without adequate time to prepare a defence, with witnesses in favour ignored or with difficulties in finding reliable interpreters for Nêhiyaw witnesses. The royal commission that was supposed to evaluate the convictions was composed of federal officials dependent on the same government that had decided to make examples. In this context, the death sentences were foregone conclusions.

The ceremony of the hangings was constructed as a ritual of collective humiliation. The Nêhiyawak gathered in the courtyard had been disarmed in the preceding months and many had been held in difficult conditions while awaiting the end of the trials. Seeing their leaders, Warriors, and relatives publicly hanged while being forced to watch produced a collective trauma that the Nêhiyaw oral tradition has transmitted for generations. In recent years, some descendants of

the hanged have brought before the Canadian courts requests for posthumous rehabilitation: a process that has not yet concluded.

Beyond the eight hangings, the Canadian government sentenced dozens of other Nêhiyawak to prison terms. Big Bear and Poundmaker (the two most prominent leaders) received three years in prison and were confined in the Stony Mountain Penitentiary in Manitoba. Neither survived incarceration in good health: Poundmaker died four months after his release, Big Bear two months after his. The conditions in the Stony Mountain Penitentiary — cold, damp, with a diet inadequate for Plains men accustomed to living outdoors — were lethal for people of their age and condition.

The total number of Nêhiyawak and Métis convicted in connection with the Resistance of 1885 was approximately 100 people: a judicial operation without precedent on the Plains. But the consequences went beyond the individual convictions: the psychological impression produced on the Nêhiyaw Nations by the military deployment of 1885, the exemplary convictions, and the withdrawal of weapons was one of the most important causes of the relative passivity of the following decades. The generations that grew up after 1885 knew what could happen to those who raised their heads.

> [C1] The hangings at Fort Battleford: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 11; Beal and Macleod (1984), ch. 15. [C1] The names of the hanged and their circumstances: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), pp. 194-198. [C1] Judge Richardson and the trials: Flanagan (1983), ch. 8. [C4] The analysis of the hangings as a spectacle of power and the dimension of collective trauma are the author's.

8.8 — The Immediate Consequences: Disarmament, Pass System, Dismemberment

The consequences of the Resistance of 1885 for the Nêhiyaw Nations unfolded over several levels in the months and years that followed. The Canadian government exploited the military defeat to implement measures that it had been impossible or politically difficult to introduce before the Resistance: the disarmament of the bands, the Pass System, the dismemberment of the rebel bands, and the removal of leaders. These measures, many of which were of dubious legality even within the context of Canadian law at the time, radically transformed life on the Plains reserves.

The disarmament of the Nêhiyaw Nations was not provided for by the treaties and had no legal basis in the Indian Act of 1876. But it was implemented nonetheless in the weeks following the end of the Resistance: federal agents went from house to house on the reserves collecting rifles, pistols, and bows. For peoples who still depended on hunting even after the disappearance of the Buffalo — hunting other animals was still a source of meat and furs — disarmament was not only a political measure: it was a measure that further limited the capacity for survival. The confiscated rifles were not returned even to the reserves that had remained neutral during the Resistance.

The Pass System was introduced in the autumn of 1885 without any legal basis in the Indian Act: it was an administrative measure that Dewdney implemented by internal circular without going through Parliament. The system required that every Nêhiyaw who wished to leave their reserve obtain a written permit from the federal agent. The agent had total discretion in granting or denying the permit, in setting its duration, and in imposing conditions. The Pass System remained in force in informal form until the 1940s: for nearly sixty years, the freedom of movement of the Nêhiyawak depended on the whim of a federal official.

The dismemberment of the bands that had participated in the Resistance was the most devastating measure from the standpoint of social organisation. Big Bear's band — which had maintained its cohesion as a family and economic group for generations — was officially dissolved. Its members were distributed to other reserves or left in the condition of "Indians without a band," deprived of any rights to treaty benefits. The forced dissolution of these social structures was not only a punishment: it was an instrument of social engineering aimed at eliminating the collective units through which the Nêhiyawak organised themselves.

The removal of leaders was another immediate consequence. Leaders who had led the Resistance were stripped of their positions; leaders who had maintained neutrality saw their authority reduced by the introduction of governance systems imposed from outside. The Canadian government began requiring formal elections in the bands according to European procedures that ignored the traditional Nêhiyaw systems of leadership selection. The new leaders elected through these systems often had limited legitimacy in the eyes of their own communities: they were chosen not for the traditional qualities of the Warrior but for their willingness to co-operate with the federal agent.

The border with the United States became in 1885 a barrier that had never before existed for the Plains Nations. The Nêhiyawak had crossed freely what is today the Canada-USA border to follow the Buffalo, to meet other bands, to escape famines. After 1885, Canadian and American authorities collaborated to prevent Nêhiyaw families from fleeing to the American side and to prevent Sitting Bull's Warriors (who had taken refuge in Canada after Little Bighorn) from having contact with the Canadian bands. The closing of the border

separated families, bands, and Nations that had always lived as a unity.

Hayter Reed's policy — who had replaced Dewdney in the direct administration of the reserves — introduced the so-called "block system": each family on the reserve had to cultivate exclusively its own assigned plot of land, without the collective sharing of labour that was the traditional Nêhiyaw practice. The declared objective was "encouraging individualism." The actual effect was to destroy the forms of collective solidarity that were the load-bearing structure of Nêhiyaw society. These measures, combined with the Pass System and the disarmament, created in the Saskatchewan and Alberta reserves the conditions for the "century of suppression" analysed in the following chapter.

> [C1] Disarmament and the Pass System: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 12; Carter, S. (1990). Lost Harvests. McGill-Queens University Press, ch. 5. [C1] The lack of legal basis for the Pass System: Tobias, J.L. (1983). "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation." In Getty and Lussier (eds.), As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows. UBC Press. [C1] The dismemberment of Big Bear's band: Daschuk (2013), ch. 12.

8.9 — The Long-Term Consequences for the Nêhiyaw Nations

The consequences of the Resistance of 1885 were not exhausted in the immediately following months: they shaped the condition of the Nêhiyawak for generations. The military defeat, the public executions, the disarmament, and the Pass System produced a deep psychological fracture in the Plains communities: the awareness that open resistance led to the destruction of one's people. This awareness was not irrational: it was the result of direct experience. And it produced a form of adaptation that Indigenous historians call

"strategic survival": the external cover of conformity that concealed the internal preservation of the culture.

The collective trauma produced by 1885 was transmitted across generations in ways that contemporary research has begun to document. The children who had witnessed the hangings at Fort Battleford became the parents of those who would be the first children of the Residential Schools. The trauma of the loss of leaders, the dissolution of bands, and the confiscation of weapons added to the trauma of the forced removal of children from their families. Research by Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman (2014) has documented how this trauma was transmitted epigenetically and through family structures to the current generations.

The Resistance of 1885 also produced an important change in the demographic distribution of the Nêhiyaw Nations. The bands that had participated in the Resistance were punished with smaller reserves, worse agricultural land, and more limited resources. The bands that had maintained neutrality — or had actively collaborated with the Canadian government — received slightly better treatment but no substantial benefit. The message was clear: loyalty to the Canadian government could protect from the harshest punishment but did not guarantee fulfilment of treaty promises.

The memory of 1885 functioned in subsequent generations simultaneously as an archive of the possibility of resistance and as a warning about its consequences. The Nêhiyaw Warriors who fought in the World Wars of the twentieth century — and there were thousands of them, proportionally more than any other Canadian group — carried this memory within them. Their choice to fight for Canada while not having the right to vote was an act of political

complexity that defies any simplified narrative: it could be loyalty, pragmatism, a claim to citizenship, or all three at once.

The Resistance of 1885 remained in the Canadian historical memory as the "North-West Rebellion" for nearly a century. The historiographical revision that began in the 1960s — especially through the work of Indigenous historians and academics like Blair Stonechild — gradually shifted the narrative toward a more contextualised understanding. The centennial of 1985 was marked by commemorations in both the Métis communities and the Nêhiyaw Nations that inverted the official narrative: not the celebration of a Canadian victory but the mourning of an unjust defeat and the reclaiming of the memory of the fallen.

The connection between the Resistance of 1885 and the birth of Okichitaw a century later is not direct but is real. George Lépine, descendant of Ambroise-Dydime Lépine (adjutant-general of Riel in the first Resistance of 1869-70), carried in his project of recovery the awareness of this history. The decision to reconstruct the martial practices of the Nêhiyaw Warriors was also a response to the "century of suppression" that the Resistance of 1885 had opened: the recovery of a warrior competency that was not armed survival but cultural identity, bodily dignity, and pride in one's own tradition.

> [C1] Collective trauma and its transmission: Bombay, Matheson and Anisman (2014). [C1] Indigenous participation in the World Wars: Scott, J. (2015). The Aboriginal People and the Canadian Military. Dundurn Press. [C1] The historiographical revision of 1885: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), Introduction. [C2] The connection between 1885 and the birth of Okichitaw: okichitaw.com; OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The analysis of "strategic survival" and the connection between the Resistance and Lepine are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The Resistance of 1885 was the moment when the fundamental contradiction of Canadian policy toward the Plains Nations exploded into open conflict. The Nêhiyawak did not choose to resist: they were pushed to Resistance by a combination of structural famine, systematic treaty violations, a deliberately punitive policy, and the closing of every peaceful way out.

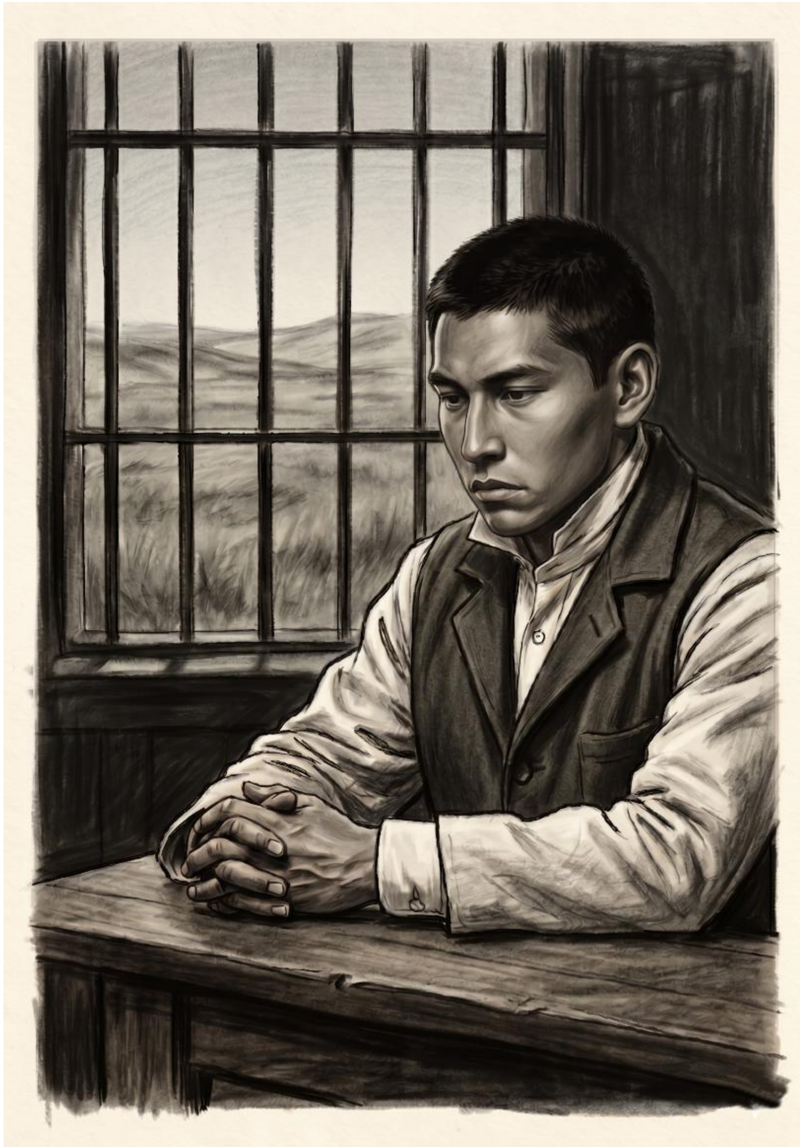
Their defeat — inevitable given the balance of forces — opened a century of suppression that would seek to erase every trace of their traditions, including the martial ones that the Okichitaw system would recover a century later. Chapter 9 will analyse this "century of suppression": the period between 1885 and 1951 in which the Indian Act, the Residential Schools, and the prohibition of ceremonies systematically sought to eliminate every dimension of Nêhiyaw identity.

* * *

PART THREE

HISTORY

Chapter 9 — The Century of Suppression (1885–1951)



If the Resistance of 1885 represented the culmination of the open conflict between the Nêhiyaw Nations and the Canadian government, the sixty-six years that followed represented a different kind of war: a bureaucratic, legal, and institutional war conducted not with weapons but with laws, not with soldiers but with federal agents, not with battles but with schools.

The declared objective of this war — to absorb, assimilate, eliminate — was not the physical destruction of the Nêhiyawak but something more insidious: the destruction of their collective identity, their language, their ceremonies, and their traditional practices, including the martial ones.

This chapter reconstructs the period between 1885 and 1951 — the year in which amendments to the Indian Act removed the most explicit prohibitions on cultural practices — as a coherent system of measures designed to produce the disappearance of Indigenous peoples as culturally distinct entities. The term used by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to describe this system is cultural genocide: a precise and documented term, not a rhetorical hyperbole. Understanding this system in its specific components is necessary for understanding from which condition the cultural resurgence of the 1950s and 1980s had to emerge, and why the recovery of Okichitaw was an act not only of sport but of politics.

9.1 — The Indian Act: Architecture of a Control System

The Indian Act of 1876 — passed the same year as Treaty No. 6 — was the legal structure that defined the legal condition of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. It was an extraordinary law in the literal sense of the term: it had no parallels in ordinary Canadian law. No other group of Canadians was subject to specific legislation regulating every

aspect of their lives, from the local governance system to the disposition of their property, from movement rights to the right to consume alcohol. The Indian Act did not protect the rights of Indigenous peoples: it managed them as a resource to be administered.

The fundamental structure of the Indian Act was based on an internal contradiction that made it a nearly inescapable trap. The law defined who was an “Indian” in the legal sense of the term and guaranteed those persons certain rights: access to reserves, treaty benefits, exemption from some taxes. But these same rights were conditioned on accepting a status of diminished legal capacity: “registered Indians” could not vote, could not take loans on reserve properties, could not leave the reserve without permission. The alternative was “enfranchisement”: renouncing registered Indian status in exchange for full Canadian citizenship. But enfranchisement meant losing every right to reserve land and every treaty benefit.

The enfranchisement system was modified many times over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In some versions of the law, enfranchisement was automatic for Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men — with the immediate consequence that they lost the right to return to the reserve and to be buried in the territory of their own community. In other versions, enfranchisement was applied to men who obtained a university degree or who became professionals: the implicit message was that individual success required abandoning collective identity.

The Indian Act concentrated extraordinary power in the figure of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (later the Minister of Indian Affairs) and, at the local level, in the federal agent. The agent had authority over: the distribution of rations, the approval of

agricultural work, the management of band funds, the control of movements outside the reserve, and after 1885 also the authorisation of ceremonies. This concentration of power in a single figure — often a man with no specific background or knowledge of Indigenous culture — created the conditions for systematic abuses documented in hundreds of testimonies and reports of the era.

The Indian Act system also produced structural economic dependency that blocked any path toward autonomy. The Nêhiyawak who sought to develop commercial agriculture on the reserves faced the impossibility of selling their products freely: the federal agent controlled the sales and often blocked them to protect the white producers of the region from competition. Hayter Reed introduced in 1889 a policy requiring that agriculture on the reserves be conducted exclusively with hand tools — prohibiting the use of mechanical equipment that white settlers could freely use — to maintain Indigenous agricultural production below competitive levels.

The legal system of the Indian Act was accompanied by a system of racial categorisation that divided the Indigenous population into mutually exclusive categories each subject to different rules. “Registered Indian,” “Métis,” “Non-status Indian,” “enfranchised Indian”: these categories did not reflect the self-defined identity of the people but the administrative needs of the Canadian government. Families could be divided into different categories with different rights. Hybrid identities — like that of the Métis, who were both Indigenous and Francophone but fell into no category of the Indian Act — were simply invisible to the legal system. This artificial fragmentation produced divisions in communities that facilitated control and impeded inter-tribal solidarity.

The revisions of the Indian Act over the century did not attenuate the fundamental structure of the system: they updated it to maintain its effectiveness. The amendment of 1884 introduced the prohibition of ceremonies. The amendment of 1927 prohibited Indigenous bands from collecting funds for legal causes without the Superintendent's approval: a measure introduced specifically to block the territorial claims that the Plains Nations were bringing before the courts. Only in 1951 did a significant revision of the Act remove the most explicit prohibitions of cultural practices.

The Indian Act remains in force today, though profoundly amended. Its persistence is one of the paradoxes of Canadian Indigenous policy: the law that produced cultural genocide is also the law that guarantees treaty rights and recognition of Indigenous status. Abolishing it without replacing it with something different would risk eliminating the few protections it still guarantees. This paradox — the dependency on the mechanisms of one's own oppression — is one of the most complex challenges of contemporary decolonisation policy.

> [C1] The Indian Act of 1876 and its amendments: Tobias, J.L. (1983). "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation." In Getty and Lussier (eds.), As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows. UBC Press. [C1] The enfranchisement system: Lawrence, B. (2004). Real Indians and Others. University of Nebraska Press, ch. 2. [C1] Hayter Reed's agricultural policy: Carter, S. (1990). Lost Harvests. McGill-Queens University Press, ch. 7. [C1] The prohibition on collecting funds for legal causes (1927): Tennant, P. (1990). Aboriginal Peoples and Politics. UBC Press, ch. 5.

9.2 — The Prohibition of Ceremonies (1885–1951)

Among all the measures of the Indian Act, the one with the most direct consequences for the transmission of Nêhiyaw martial practices was the prohibition of traditional ceremonies. The ceremonial practices of

the Plains Nations — the Sun Dance, the Ghost Dance, the healing ceremonies, the inter-tribal gatherings — were the context in which not only spirituality was transmitted but also the physical and martial competencies: the warrior dances, the rituals of preparation for hunting and combat, and the initiation ceremonies of young Warriors. To prohibit the ceremonies was to prohibit the transmission.

The first restrictions on ceremonies were introduced by the 1884 amendment to the Indian Act, which prohibited the potlatch on the Pacific coast and the Ghost Dance on the Plains. The 1895 amendment extended the prohibition much more broadly, making illegal any ceremony involving the distribution of goods, the torture or mutilation of the body (a provision that included the devotional practices of the Sun Dance such as skin piercings), or the sacrifice of animals. In practice, this vague formulation gave federal agents the faculty to criminalise almost any traditional ceremony.

The Sun Dance, the most important ceremony in the Nêhiyaw spiritual calendar, was exactly the kind of gathering that the Canadian government wanted to eliminate. Not only for the bodily devotional practices it involved, but because it brought different bands together in assemblies of hundreds or thousands of people: assemblies in which political decisions were made, marriages and alliances negotiated, the competencies of Warriors transmitted, and the inter-tribal social network maintained. The Sun Dance was, among other things, the principal initiation ceremony of Warriors: young people who participated demonstrated their courage through intense physical practices and received recognition from the community.

The application of the prohibition varied significantly depending on the local federal agent and the region. In some areas,

the prohibition was applied with immediate severity: NWMP agents broke into ceremonial gatherings, arrested participants, and confiscated ritual objects. In other areas, agents turned a blind eye or permitted reduced and modified versions of the ceremonies. This variability created a chaotic situation in which communities did not know which practices were tolerable and which would lead to arrest.

The confiscation of ritual objects was one of the most devastating consequences of the prohibition. Ceremonial drums, traditional garments, sacred pipes, medicine bundles, and objects connected to warrior ceremonies were confiscated by federal agents and ended up in Canadian, American, and European museums. The Museum of Man in Ottawa, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and numerous other institutions built their collections of Native art largely through these coercive confiscations. The loss of the ritual objects was not only material: they were the embodied memory of the ceremonies, irreplaceable in the transmission process. The repatriation processes for these objects are still ongoing in the twenty-first century.

The response of Nêhiyaw communities to the prohibition was adaptive and multifaceted. Some bands moved the ceremonies to periods and dates when the federal agent was absent or distracted. Others adapted the visible form of the ceremonies — eliminating the elements most easily identifiable as illegal — while keeping the spiritual content intact. Others still made use of Catholic ceremonies as cover: in some Saskatchewan reserves, Holy Week celebrations included Nêhiyaw ceremonial elements not recognisable as such by external agents. This practice of adaptation — which historians call strategic syncretism — was a fundamental mechanism of cultural survival.

The prohibition also had a specific impact on Nêhiyaw martial practices. The warrior dances, the rituals of preparation for combat, the ceremonies for the blessing of weapons, and the gatherings in which hand-to-hand combat techniques were transmitted were all interwoven with the broader ceremonies. There was no sharp separation between "martial practice" and "spiritual ceremony": the Warrior's body was simultaneously a body in training and a body in prayer. When the prohibition struck the ceremonies, it also struck the transmission of the martial competencies embodied within them.

> [C1] The prohibition of ceremonies in the Indian Act: Pettipas, K. (1994). Severing the Ties That Bind. University of Manitoba Press. [C1] The confiscation of ritual objects and museums: Nicks, T. (1992). "Museums and First Nations." Museum Management and Curatorship, 11(1). [C1] Strategic syncretism as a response to the prohibition: Lux, M.K. (2001). Medicine That Walks. University of Toronto Press, ch. 4. [C4] The specific impact of the prohibition on martial practices and the persecution of Knowledge Keepers are the author's.

9.3 — The Residential Schools: Structure and Ideology

If the prohibition of ceremonies sought to block cultural transmission through legal restrictions, the Residential Schools sought to eliminate it at the source: by separating children from their parents during the period of life when culture is learned most deeply. The system of residential schools for Indigenous children was not a mistake of Canadian policy: it was its most deliberate and most sophisticated instrument. Between 1870 and 1996, approximately 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly separated from their families and confined in these institutions.

The idea of residential schools did not originate in Canada: it was imported from the United States, where Colonel Richard Henry Pratt had founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in

Pennsylvania in 1879. Pratt was the author of the formula that became the founding principle of the system: “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” The logic was brutally coherent: the “Indian problem” was solved not by physically eliminating the people but by eliminating the Indigenous identity within them. Once “civilised” — that is, English-speaking, Christian, and individualistic — the children would be absorbed into Canadian society and the “Indigenous problem” would disappear.

In Canada, the Residential Schools system was formalised by the Davin Report of 1879, commissioned by the Macdonald government after a visit to Pratt’s schools in the United States. Nicholas Flood Davin recommended building residential schools managed by the Christian Churches with federal funds: a system that would exploit the capillarity of the missionary network and the credibility of religious orders to implement the assimilation policy. The main Churches that managed the system were the Catholic (through the Oblates of Mary Immaculate), the Anglican, the Methodist, and the Presbyterian.

The structure of the residential schools was designed to maximise the child’s separation from their own culture. The schools were deliberately built far from the reserves: too far for parents to visit frequently, close enough that children could not easily escape. Upon arrival, children had their traditional clothing removed and were given European-style uniforms. Their hair was cut — an act of enormous spiritual significance for many Indigenous Nations, in which the cutting of hair was associated with mourning and the loss of someone important. They were assigned English names to replace their traditional names. And above all: the use of their own language was prohibited.

The prohibition of the mother tongue was the most effective mechanism of the assimilation system. Language is not only a means of communication: it is the cognitive structure through which the world is thought. The Nêhiyawêwin — like most Algonquian languages — is a verb-centred language that conceives the world as a set of processes and relationships rather than objects: a linguistic structure profoundly incompatible with the industrial-possessive worldview the schools wanted to transmit. Children who were caught speaking their own language were physically punished: mouths washed out with soap, beatings on the hands, deprivation of food.

The Residential Schools system was structurally insufficient even on its own terms: it provided Indigenous children with an education of lower quality than that available to white children. The curriculum was oriented toward manual and domestic work: girls learned to sew and cook, boys to farm and work the land. Academic education — mathematics, literature, science — was rudimentary and often conducted by personnel without adequate qualifications. The result was a double failure: the children acquired neither the culture of their Ancestors nor the competencies necessary for success in Canadian society.

The funding of the system was structurally inadequate and contributed to the difficult living conditions. The federal government paid a per-capita contribution for each child that was lower than the actual cost of management. The schools therefore depended on the unpaid labour of the students themselves to cover their operating costs: children worked in the fields, the kitchens, the laundries for hours each day instead of attending lessons. This exploitation of child labour was legal in the context of the era and was practised systematically for decades.

The overall number of Residential Schools throughout their history was approximately 130 institutions distributed across all Canadian provinces except New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Some remained open for over a century: the Mohawk Institute in Ontario opened in 1829 and closed in 1970. The last Residential School — the Gordon's Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan — closed in 1996: just twenty-eight years before the publication of this volume. This is not distant history: it is the history of the grandparents and parents of many contemporary Okichitaw practitioners.

> [C1] Pratt's formula and the Residential Schools system: Miller, J.R. (1996). Shingwauk's Vision. University of Toronto Press. [C1] The Davin Report of 1879: Davin, N.F. (1879). Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds. [C1] The geographic distribution of the schools: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Canada's Residential Schools: The History. Vol. 1. [C1] The last school closed in 1996: TRC (2015), Vol. 1, ch. 12.

9.4 — The Residential Schools: Daily Life, Abuses, and Deaths

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, in the course of its investigations between 2008 and 2015, gathered the testimonies of over 7,000 Residential School survivors. These testimonies — accessible to the public through the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba — construct a detailed picture of daily life in these institutions that cannot be ignored by those who wish to understand the conditions of which the Okichitaw system is both inheritance and response.

The initial separation from family was the foundational trauma. Children were taken from the reserves starting at six years of age, sometimes with the co-operation of parents who believed in the

promises of education and sometimes by force: RCMP agents took children away while mothers screamed. For the youngest children, this separation — without comprehensible explanations, without a return date, and in a linguistically incomprehensible context — was experienced as total abandonment: a rupture of the fundamental attachment bond that contemporary psychological research associates with permanent consequences for neurological development.

The material conditions in the schools varied considerably from institution to institution and from period to period. Some schools, particularly in the more recent decades, offered reasonable conditions; many, particularly in the earliest decades and in the most remote areas, were characterised by overcrowding, inadequate heating, insufficient and poor-quality food, and primitive sanitary facilities. Tuberculosis was endemic in many schools: overcrowding and chronic malnutrition created ideal conditions for transmission. Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, the Canadian government's medical inspector, wrote in 1907 a report documenting mortality rates in the schools of up to 24% annually: a report the government chose not to publish.

The discovery in 2021 of anonymous burials around several former residential schools — beginning with the 215 remains identified with ground-penetrating radar around the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia — brought to light the most shocking dimension of the system. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission had already documented at least 6,000 deaths in the schools — an estimate historians consider conservative — from disease, malnutrition, accidents, and causes never clarified. The fact that these burials were anonymous, without notification to the families, without traditional funeral rites, and often without even a

cross to mark them, is itself a measure of the dehumanisation the system produced.

The physical and sexual abuses in the Residential Schools are documented by hundreds of testimonies and by several criminal proceedings in the decades following the closure of the schools. The structure of the system — children far from their families, in closed institutions, under the total authority of adults who were rarely monitored and almost never punished for abuses — was a structure that favoured and protected abusers. The Government of Canada officially recognised the systematic nature of the abuses in the formal apology presented by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in June 2008.

The impact of the Residential Schools on the transmission of parenting practices has been one of the most studied and documented effects. Children who grew up in the schools learned a model of adult-child relationships based on authoritarianism, corporal punishment, and the denial of physical affection: a structure radically different from the loving care and gradual transmission that characterised Nêhiyaw pedagogy. When these children became parents, they had no healthy models of care to draw on: they had only the traumatising models of the schools. This mechanism largely explains the phenomenon of intergenerational trauma that contemporary research documents.

The residential schools also produced a paradoxical effect on the internal cohesion of the Nêhiyaw communities. Children who grew up in them returned to the reserves after years of absence as strangers in their own environment: they no longer spoke the Nêhiyawêwin fluently, they did not know the ceremonies, they did not know how to hunt or gather. They were alienated both from Canadian society — which racially discriminated against them despite their

partial assimilation — and from their own original community — which they no longer recognised. This double alienation is one of the deepest sources of the identity crisis that Canadian Indigenous communities faced in the twentieth century.

> [C1] Survivor testimonies: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report. 6 vols. [C1] The Bryce Report of 1907: Bryce, P.H. (1922). The Story of a National Crime. James Hope & Sons. [C1] Anonymous burials and the death count: National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (2021). [C1] Harper's apology of 2008: Government of Canada, June 11, 2008. [C1] Intergenerational trauma: Bombay, A., Matheson, K. and Anisman, H. (2014). Transcultural Psychiatry, 51(3).

9.5 — The Silent Resistance: Clandestine Transmission of Culture

Despite the systematicity of the repressive system, Nêhiyaw culture did not disappear. It survived through networks of clandestine transmission that operated continuously throughout the century of suppression, adapting their forms to survive adverse conditions without sacrificing the core of the knowledge. Understanding these mechanisms of survival is fundamental because it is through them that the warrior knowledge reached George Lépine and made the construction of Okichitaw possible.

The most important mechanism of clandestine transmission was that of direct family transmission: the transmission of knowledge from an adult to a specific child within the extended family, often in a discreet fashion and outside the contexts visible to the federal agent. A grandfather who taught his grandson hunting techniques was simultaneously transmitting the knowledge of the territory, the spirituality of the hunter, and the ethical principles of the Warrior in a context that had no form recognisable as a “ceremony” to an external observer.

The figure of the uncle had a specific and documented role in this transmission. In the Nêhiyaw social structure — as in many North American cultures — the mother's brother had a specific responsibility in the education of his nephews: he was the transmitter of practical competencies, the model of Warrior behaviour, the custodian of family traditions. In the context of the oppression system, this role of the uncle became even more important as a transmission channel relatively protected from external observation. In George Lépine's case, the figure of Uncle Ted — who transmitted traditional techniques within the family — is explicitly documented as the primary source of his learning.

The winter stories — the âtayôhkana, the great cosmological stories that could only be narrated in winter by authorised narrators — continued to be told in the homes of Nêhiyaw families even during the period of suppression. The domestic form of narration — a family gathered around the fire, an Elder speaking in the Nêhiyawêwin — was not visible to external agents and was not explicitly prohibited. These stories carried the cosmology of the Medicine Wheel, the values of the Seven Teachings, and the memory of the great Warriors of the past through the dark period to the generations that would be able to receive them freely.

Adapted ceremonies were another mechanism of survival. In some reserves, Sun Dances continued to take place disguised as gatherings of another type: agricultural fairs, Christmas celebrations, sports meetings. The participants knew what was really happening; the federal agents saw what was presented to them. This dualism — a reality visible to those who did not know and a reality invisible to those who knew — was costly in terms of energy and produced a culture of secrecy with its own psychological costs. But it allowed the knowledge to survive.

The inter-tribal network of communication and transmission survived despite the Pass System. Travel permits — which were necessary to move between reserves — did not prevent all movements: some categories of people (seasonal workers, traders, missionaries) had relatively free access and carried with them messages, objects, and knowledge. Women who married into different bands carried their family knowledge; young men who worked on white settlers' farms met young people from other bands and shared what they knew. The transmission network survived not despite the limited mobility but through the few cracks the system could not seal.

Resistance through bodies is perhaps the most subtle and most difficult to document form of clandestine transmission. Posture, the way of walking, the quality of bodily attention, the physical reactions to environmental stimuli: these competencies are transmitted through imitation before language can articulate them. A Nêhiyaw child who had spent even just the first six years with their parents and grandparents already had in their body a bodily competency that no residential school could entirely eliminate: the way of standing still and listening, the way of moving in the territory, the quality of attention that Okichitaw practitioners recognise as the gift of the East.

> [C2] The figure of Uncle Ted in the transmission of knowledge to Lepine: okichitaw.com; OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C3] Family transmission in Indigenous cultures: Battiste, M. (2000). Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision. UBC Press, ch. 4. [C1] Religious syncretism as resistance: Lux (2001), ch. 5. [C4] Resistance through bodies and the connection with Okichitaw practice are the author's.

9.6 — Nêhiyaw Warriors in the World Wars

One of the most paradoxical aspects of the period of suppression is the massive participation of the Nêhiyawak and other Canadian Indigenous peoples in the World Wars. Men who did not have the right to vote — who were not even considered full citizens in their own country — enlisted voluntarily in proportions exceeding any other Canadian demographic group. This choice was not simple: it reflected a complex mix of loyalty to the warrior tradition, a search for dignity, economic pragmatism, and the hope that military service would produce recognition of their rights.

In the First World War (1914-1918), approximately 4,000 Indigenous Canadians are estimated to have served out of a total of approximately 105,000 in Canadian battalions on the Western Front. Considering that the total Indigenous population of Canada was approximately 100,000 people and that many were women, children, or Elders, the proportion of Indigenous men of military age who enlisted was extraordinarily high. Among the Nêhiyawak specifically, participation was significant: the warrior tradition, even suppressed in its traditional forms, seemed to express itself through the forms available in that context.

Indigenous soldiers brought with them specific competencies that proved valuable in a military context. The capacity to move silently through difficult terrain, to read environmental signals, to endure conditions of cold and hardship, and to maintain concentration under extreme stress — all competencies developed in the tradition of Plains hunting and warfare — made them excellent scouts, snipers, and patrol fighters. Sergeant Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwe from Parry Sound, became the most lethal sniper in the

Canadian army in the First World War and received the Military Medal three times.

In the Second World War (1939-1945), Indigenous participation was even more massive: approximately 12,000 Indigenous Canadians served, many of them Nêhiyawak from Saskatchewan and Alberta. Chief Joseph Dreaver of the Mistawasis reserve in Saskatchewan was one of the most prominent Indigenous leaders in the recruitment process: he convinced the young people of his community to serve by emphasising that the Nêhiyaw warrior tradition was a value to be expressed even in contemporary forms. Upon his return, Dreaver would become one of the most important defenders of Indigenous rights in Canada.

A specific dimension of the Nêhiyaw participation in the Second World War was that of the Cree Code Talkers: soldiers who used the Nêhiyawêwin as an encrypted communication language in radio transmissions. The principle was the same as the better-known Navajo Code Talkers in the Pacific: a language unknown to the enemy and impossible to decipher without native speakers. The contribution of the Cree Code Talkers was officially recognised by the Canadian government only decades after the war, in 2016, when Parliament passed the Code Talkers Recognition Act. The paradox of this story is evident: the very language that was punished with beatings in the Residential Schools was being used by Indigenous soldiers to help win the war.

The return of Indigenous veterans after the World Wars was marked by deep disappointments. Men who had fought for Canada — and who had received decorations and recognition during the conflict — returned to the reserves without the rights they expected to have earned. They could not vote. They did not receive the same benefits

as non-Indigenous veterans. They could not drink alcohol in public. They could not leave the reserve without permission. These discriminations — documented in numerous testimonies and analysed by post-war historiography — produced in Indigenous veterans a form of political indignation that would fuel the movement for Indigenous rights in the 1950s and 1960s.

> [C1] Indigenous participation in the First World War: Dempsey, J. (1983). Warriors of the King. Canadian Plains Research Center. [C1] Francis Pegahmagabow: Hele, K. (2013). Lines Drawn Upon the Water. Wilfrid Laurier University Press. [C1] Joseph Dreaver and Nehiyaw participation in the Second World War: Stonechild, B. (2006). The New Buffalo. University of Manitoba Press, ch. 3. [C1] The Cree Code Talkers and the recognition of 2016: Code Talkers Recognition Act, S.C. 2016, c.11.

9.7 — The Indian Act of 1951 and the End of Explicit Prohibitions

The year 1951 marks a formal turning point in Canadian policy toward Indigenous peoples: the revision of the Indian Act removed the explicit prohibition of traditional ceremonies and simplified some of the most oppressive procedures of the system. This revision was not the product of a spontaneous maturation of the Canadian government: it was the response to converging pressures that made the policy of suppression increasingly unsustainable on the international and domestic levels.

On the international level, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 had established standards that Canadian policy toward Indigenous peoples openly violated. Canada had signed the Declaration and found itself in an embarrassing position: a propagandist of human rights in the Cold War while maintaining a domestic system of institutionalised discrimination. The UN had begun discussing the question of colonised peoples in the process of

African and Asian decolonisation: the position of Canadian Indigenous peoples was not very different from that of the colonised populations of Africa that Canada was condemning.

On the domestic level, the post-war Indigenous veterans and the first Indigenous political movements — such as the Brotherhood of Canadian Indians and the provincial Métis and Cree associations — had begun pressing for the reform of the Indian Act through the available political structures. A parliamentary inquiry of 1946-48 had gathered testimonies from dozens of Indigenous communities documenting conditions on the reserves and in the schools. The conclusions of the inquiry were critical enough to make it impossible to ignore the need for reform.

The 1951 revision of the Indian Act removed Section 141 prohibiting bands from collecting funds for legal causes — a change that would open the door to the territorial claims of the following years. It removed Section 140 prohibiting traditional ceremonies. It simplified enfranchisement procedures. And it introduced for the first time some protections for Indigenous women — though the protections were still far weaker than the women's rights movements would have required.

The removal of the prohibition on ceremonies did not produce an immediate resumption of ceremonial life. Sixty years of suppression had eroded the necessary knowledge: many of the holders of ceremonial knowledge had died without being able to transmit what they knew; the ritual objects were in museums; the language was disappearing. The ceremonial resurgence of the 1950s and 1960s was a slow and painful process of reconstruction from fragments: the memories of surviving Elders, the documents of nineteenth-century ethnographers (who had recorded but also

stripped), and the traditions that had survived in the communities that had best resisted suppression.

The right to vote was extended to the Indigenous peoples of Canada only in 1960, by decision of the Diefenbaker government. Until that date, Indigenous Canadians were the only citizens of the country denied the federal vote without a reason related to age or mental capacity. The extension of the vote was not universally acclaimed in Indigenous communities: some leaders feared that participating in the Canadian electoral system would legitimise that very system and weaken the sovereignty claims of the Indigenous peoples.

The White Paper of 1969, proposed by the (first) Trudeau government, represented an attempt to resolve the "Indigenous question" through the abolition of the Indian Act and the full integration of Indigenous peoples as ordinary Canadian citizens: without special status, without reserves, without treaty rights. The Indigenous response was immediate and unified: the Red Paper of 1970, "Citizens Plus," drafted by the Indian Association of Alberta, rejected the White Paper, affirming that Indigenous peoples were both Canadian citizens and members of Nations with specific rights guaranteed by treaties. The response to the White Paper marked the beginning of the modern Indigenous political movement in Canada and the end of the open assimilationist strategy.

> [C1] The 1951 revision of the Indian Act: Tobias (1983), ch. 5. [C1] The Universal Declaration and international pressure: Tennant (1990), ch. 8. [C1] The right to vote of 1960: Banting, K. and Simeon, R. (eds.) (1983). And No One Cheered. Methuen. [C1] The White Paper of 1969 and the response: Cardinal, H. (1969). The Unjust Society. M.G. Hurtig. [C1] Citizens Plus (Red Paper): Indian Association of Alberta (1970).

9.8 — Toward Section 35: Indigenous Rights in the Constitution of 1982

The year 1982 is the most important in the legal history of Canadian Indigenous rights since 1876. Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution — passed on April 17, 1982 — affirmed for the first time the recognition and confirmation of the "existing aboriginal and treaty rights" of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. It was a vague formulation, deliberately left open because of political disagreement between the federal government and the provinces, but it was also the legal foundation on which decades of territorial and cultural claims would be built through the courts.

Section 35 was the product of years of intensive lobbying by Indigenous organisations that had managed to insert themselves into the constitutional process against the initial resistance of many politicians. Harold Cardinal — the author of the Red Paper of 1970 — and the leaders of the Assembly of First Nations had conducted a campaign that included legal actions, international pressure (including a delegation to the United Nations), and public demonstrations. The result was not perfect: Section 35 did not define the content of the rights it recognised and left their interpretation to the courts.

The three Supreme Court decisions that have most defined the content of Section 35 are those in the Sparrow (1990), Van der Peet (1996), and Haida Nation (2004) cases. The Sparrow decision established that Indigenous rights existing before 1982 were protected by Section 35 and that laws limiting them had to pass a rigorous justification test. The Van der Peet decision defined aboriginal rights as practices that were an integral part of Indigenous culture "before European contact." The Haida Nation decision

established the duty to consult: the government had to consult Indigenous Nations before making decisions that impacted their rights.

Bill C-31 of 1985 addressed one of the most visible injustices of the Indian Act: the automatic loss of status for Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men. Bill C-31 reinstated status to women who had lost it and to their children, allowing the return to reserves of thousands of people who had been excluded for decades. The demographic impact was significant: many reserves saw the return of families that had been absent for a generation, bringing with them urban experiences and cultural perspectives different from those of reserve communities.

For the Nêhiyawak specifically, the period between 1951 and 1985 was a time of gradual and contradictory resurgence. Ceremonies resumed but with gaps in transmission that required reconstruction. The language was used by Elders but decreasingly by young people. Indigenous political organisations were growing in strength but had to operate in a legal system that still did not fully recognise their sovereignty. In this context — between the removal of explicit prohibitions and the full recognition of rights — George Lépine was undertaking between 1988 and 1997 his research work that would lead to the birth of Okichitaw.

> [C1] Section 35 of the Constitution of 1982: Hogg, P.W. (1997). Constitutional Law of Canada. Carswell, ch. 28. [C1] The Sparrow, Van der Peet, and Haida Nation decisions: original texts, Canlii.org. [C1] Bill C-31 of 1985: Lawrence (2004), ch. 3. [C4] The gradual and contradictory resurgence and the connection with Lepine's path are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The period between 1885 and 1951 — and in some of its dimensions up to 1982 — was for the Plains Nêhiyawak a war without weapons: a systematic attempt to eliminate them as a culturally distinct people through the Indian Act, the prohibition of ceremonies, and the Residential Schools.

This attempt failed: Nêhiyaw culture survived through the clandestine transmission networks, the creative adaptation of ceremonial forms, and the bodily resistance of Elders who carried in their own bodies knowledge that no law could take from them. Chapter 10 takes up the story from 1951, analysing the cultural resurgence and the path that led George Lépine to found Okichitaw as a creative and historically rooted response to the century of suppression that this chapter has documented.

* * *

PART THREE
HISTORY

Chapter 10 — The Resurgence and the Birth of Okichitaw (1951–2002)

The story this chapter tells is that of a double parallel movement: the slow, laborious, non-linear resurgence of Nêhiyaw culture from the

ruins of the century of suppression and, within it, the specific trajectory that led George J. Lépine to construct the Okichitaw system. These two movements are inseparable: Okichitaw is the child of the resurgence and is simultaneously its product and its contribution. Understanding the context of the cultural resurgence is understanding why Okichitaw was possible in the 1980s and 1990s and not before, and why it took the specific form it did.

The period covered by this chapter is half a century of accelerated transformations. In 1951, Nêhiyaw ceremonies were still illegal; in 2002, Okichitaw was recognised by UNESCO as a living martial heritage. Between these two moments: the Indigenous civil rights movement, the first generations of Indigenous university intellectuals, Section 35 of the Constitution of 1982, the resurgence of language and ceremonies, the growth of the urban diaspora, and finally the research and systematisation work that Lépine conducted between 1988 and 1997.

10.1 — The Ceremonial and Linguistic Resurgence (1951–1970)

The removal of the explicit prohibition of ceremonies from the Indian Act in 1951 did not produce an immediate resumption. Sixty-six years of suppression had left deep wounds in the transmission: many of the holders of ceremonial knowledge had died, the ritual objects were dispersed in museums, and the generation that had grown up in the Residential Schools had lost fluency in the Nêhiyawêwin and familiarity with ceremonial protocols. The resurgence was a slow and laborious process of reconstruction, proceeding by comparing the fragmentary memories of Elders with the notes of nineteenth-century

ethnographers and with the traditions of communities that had best resisted suppression.

The first public post-suppression Sun Dance is documented on the Piapot reserve in Saskatchewan in 1951, a few months after the amendment to the Indian Act. It was organised by Elders who had participated in the last legal Sun Dances of the 1920s and who had maintained the knowledge through the clandestine transmission networks described in the preceding chapter. The ceremony was incomplete: some elements had been lost during the decades of prohibition. But it was a beginning, and it created a precedent that other communities followed in subsequent seasons.

The situation varied greatly from reserve to reserve. Some communities in Saskatchewan and Manitoba — particularly those in the most remote areas, less exposed to the direct control of federal agents during the years of suppression — had maintained relatively more intact ceremonial traditions. It was these communities that became the centres of the ceremonial resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s, welcoming visitors from other reserves who came to learn what had been lost in their own communities.

The resurgence of the Nêhiyawêwin proceeded through different but equally slow channels. The language had survived as the idiom of Elders and domestic narration, but the generation in their forties and fifties in the 1950s — those who had attended the last residential schools or the first provincial schools without language instruction — was often semi-lingual: they understood the Elders' Nêhiyawêwin but could not speak it with fluency. This phenomenon, which linguists call language attrition, created a break in the chain of transmission that threatened to become irreversible within a generation.

The response to the linguistic crisis came from several directions. Some communities launched informal adult language teaching programmes, conducted by fluent Elders in community centres or local churches. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, founded in 1946, included linguistic preservation among its objectives from the first assemblies. The Oblate missionaries who had learned the Nêhiyawêwin for evangelising purposes produced vocabularies and grammars that, despite their own aims, provided useful tools for subsequent revitalisation efforts.

Pow Wows — the traditional gatherings combining dance, music, crafts, and social encounter — regained vigour in the 1960s as spaces of cultural expression relatively accessible even to communities that had lost much of the more reserved ceremonial tradition. Pow Wows became inter-Indigenous meeting points: Nêhiyawak, Lakota, Anishinaabe, and Nakoda came together at these events sharing dance techniques, songs, regalia, and traditions. This inter-Indigenous circulation enriched local traditions but also created tensions around the question of authenticity and appropriation.

An aspect of the ceremonial resurgence of the 1950s and 1960s with direct implications for Okichitaw is the recovery of the warrior dances. The Nêhiyaw warrior dances — which had been among the principal targets of the 1895 prohibition because they kept alive the memory and practice of Warrior competencies — began to reappear in Pow Wows and community gatherings. The original forms were often incomplete or hybridised: elements of different traditions had mixed during the decades of suppression. But their reappearance signalled that the desire to recover the martial tradition was an integral part of the broader cultural resurgence.

> [C1] The first post-1951 public Sun Dance: Pettipas (1994), ch. 8. [C1] The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations: Pitsula, J.M. (2013). As One Who Serves. University of Regina Press. [C1] Pow Wows as spaces of cultural expression: Ellis, C., Lassiter, L.E. and Dunham, G.H. (2005). Powwow. University of Nebraska Press. [C4] The recovery of warrior dances as precursor to Okichitaw is the author's.

10.2 — The Indigenous Political Movement (1960–1982)

The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of a generation of Indigenous political leaders who combined traditional cultural rootedness with the capacity to operate in Canadian political and legal structures. This generation had benefited from the right to vote obtained in 1960, the progressive access to university education, and the growth of Indigenous organisations that provided structures through which to co-ordinate at the provincial and national levels. It was a generation determined not to repeat the defeat of 1885: it would use law, politics, and culture instead of weapons.

The response to the White Paper of 1969 — which proposed the abolition of the Indian Act and the full individual integration of Indigenous peoples — was rapid, unified, and intellectually powerful. The Red Paper of 1970 (Citizens Plus), produced by the Indian Association of Alberta and in particular by Harold Cardinal, established the fundamental principle that Indigenous peoples are simultaneously Canadian citizens and members of Nations with specific rights guaranteed by treaties: not “one or the other” but “both.” This principle of dual belonging became the foundation of all Canadian Indigenous policy in the following half-century.

Harold Cardinal was one of the most prominent faces of this new generation. A Cree from northern Alberta, he was just twenty-four years old when he wrote "The Unjust Society" in 1969 — a direct response to the White Paper that became one of the most important

books in Canadian political history. Cardinal argued that the objective of assimilationist integration was in reality the continuation of the policy of cultural elimination under a new guise: removing the Indian Act's name while maintaining its substance. The power of his argument, his vivid and precise English writing, and his capacity to speak simultaneously to Indigenous communities and the Canadian public made him a model for the next generation.

The constitutional conferences of 1983-87 — provided for by Section 35 itself of the Constitution of 1982 to define the content of the aboriginal rights recognised — were the principal arena in which Indigenous organisations brought their claims in the period immediately preceding Lépine's research. The negotiations failed in the objective of an agreed definition of the "right to self-government": the federal government and the provinces were not ready to recognise Indigenous sovereignty to the extent the organisations required. But the process itself was educational: the Indigenous Nations learned constitutional language, the mechanisms of federalism, and the legal levers available to protect their rights.

The Oka Blockade of 1990 — when the Mohawk of Quebec blocked for seventy-eight days the expansion of a golf course on territory they considered sacred — shook Canadian public opinion with a force that no political campaign had had before. Images of Mohawk warriors in gas masks confronting Canadian soldiers circulated worldwide. For Canadian Indigenous Nations, Oka demonstrated that direct resistance — even unarmed but physically determined — could obtain international attention and put the government in difficulty. For Lépine, who in 1990 was in the second year of his own research, Oka was also a demonstration that the Indigenous Warrior was not a figure of the past but a necessity of the present.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), established in 1991 partly in response to Oka and which published its final report in 1996, was the most comprehensive survey ever conducted by the Canadian government of the conditions of Indigenous peoples. The five-volume report documented in detail the history of suppression, contemporary conditions on reserves and in cities, and formulated 440 recommendations for a radical transformation of the relationship between Canada and the Indigenous Nations. Most of the recommendations were not implemented, but the report remains one of the most important reference documents for anyone studying the history and contemporary condition of the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

In this politically ebullient context, Lépine's work on the Nêhiyaw martial tradition was acquiring a significance that went beyond the recovery of combat techniques. It was a contribution to the broader project of reconstructing Indigenous identity on solid and documented foundations: not the romanticisation of an imagined past but the rigorous and honest recovery of a real tradition rooted in a specific people with a specific history. In this sense, Okichitaw was also a political act: the demonstration that the suppression had not destroyed what it sought to destroy.

> [C1] The White Paper of 1969 and the Red Paper of 1970: Cardinal, H. (1969). The Unjust Society. Hurtig; Indian Association of Alberta (1970). Citizens Plus. [C1] The constitutional conferences 1983-87: Hawkes, D.C. (1985). Aboriginal Self-Government. Institute of Intergovernmental Relations. [C1] The Oka Blockade 1990: York, G. and Pindera, L. (1991). People of the Pines. Little, Brown. [C1] The RCAP 1996: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). Final Report. 5 vols. CCAP.

10.3 — Nêhiyaw Cultural Revitalisation: Language, Ceremonies, and Identity

In parallel with the political movement, a specific cultural revitalisation of the Nêhiyaw Nations was taking shape on the Saskatchewan and Manitoba reserves and in the Indigenous communities of Manitoba and Ontario. This revitalisation is the direct context within which Lépine's work acquires meaning: not an isolated initiative of an eccentric individual but part of a collective movement that sought, in different forms, to reconnect the post-Residential Schools generations with the tradition from which they had been torn.

The Wanuskewin programme, inaugurated with the construction of Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon in Saskatchewan at the end of the 1980s, is an emblematic example of this institutionalised revitalisation. The site — occupying a territory with over 6,000 years of continuous human occupation — was returned to the Indigenous peoples as a centre of conservation and education. The park hosts ceremonies, educational programmes for schools, archaeological research conducted with the participation of local communities, and a collection of artefacts including objects from the Plains traditions. It was inaugurated in 1992: in the midst of the years of Lépine's research.

Nêhiyaw linguistic revitalisation received a decisive impulse from the academic work of H.C. Wolfart and Freda Ahenakew. Ahenakew — a Nêhiyaw linguist from Saskatchewan, professor at the University of Manitoba — spent decades recording and transcribing the stories and speeches of Elders fluent in the Nêhiyawêwin, producing a textual corpus that is still today the principal academic resource for the study of the language. Her work was not only academic: the transcriptions were used in language teaching

programmes on reserves and in the universities of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Healing ceremonies — in particular Healing Circles and Sweat Lodge Ceremonies — became in the 1980s central instruments of community wellness work on reserves and in urban centres. These ceremonies integrated traditional practices with an explicit awareness of the intergenerational trauma produced by the Residential Schools: they were environments in which people could speak of their pain in a culturally recognisable and ritually contained context. The distinction between spiritual ceremony and psychological therapy — fundamental in the Western worldview — did not carry the same weight in the Nêhiyaw tradition: healing was always simultaneously physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Nêhiyaw literature and literature about Nêhiyaw culture exploded in the 1970s and 1980s with works by authors such as Maria Campbell (whose "Halfbreed" of 1973 narrated the Métis condition with a rawness and power that Canadian narrative had never seen before), Tomson Highway (whose plays "The Rez Sisters" and "Dry Lips" brought the reality of the reserve to the most prestigious stages in Canada), and many others. These artistic voices did not only document suffering: they affirmed the vitality, the humour, and the complexity of Nêhiyaw culture in a way that challenged the narrative of a "people in the process of extinction."

The tradition of Nêhiyaw craft and art experienced a parallel resurgence in this period. The making of traditional ceremonial garments, beadwork, and musical instruments such as the drum required knowledge of techniques that had been transmitted clandestinely during the suppression and that could now emerge into the light of day. These craft practices were not only aesthetically

significant: they were also physically formative. The process of making a drum, of tanning a hide, of sewing a ceremonial garment transmitted bodily competencies that were part of the same tradition from which the martial competencies came. The recovery of craftsmanship and the recovery of warrior practices were two branches of the same tree.

> [C1] Wanuskewin Heritage Park: Wanuskewin Heritage Park Authority (1992). Wanuskewin: Land of the Northern Cree. [C3] Freda Ahenakew: Ahenakew, F. (1987). Cree Language Structures. Pemmican Publications. [C1] Restorative Justice Circles: Stuart, B. (1996). "Circle Sentencing." Mediation Quarterly 13(4). [C4] The connection between craft resurgence and the recovery of martial practices is the author's.

10.4 — Toronto and the Indigenous Urban Diaspora

The history of Okichitaw is also the history of Toronto: of what happens when thousands of Indigenous people find themselves living in a large city far from their own reserves and communities of origin. Toronto today hosts the largest urban Indigenous population in Canada: approximately 100,000 people from different Nations and backgrounds. This population is not homogeneous: it includes people from dozens of different Nations, with different migration histories and very different degrees of connection with their culture of origin.

The urban context posed specific challenges to the cultural resurgence that did not exist on the reserves: lack of ceremonial spaces, absence of Elders, pressure from the surrounding environment toward assimilation. The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT), founded in 1962, is one of the oldest urban Indigenous community centres in Canada. Born as a meeting point for the Nêhiyawak and other Indigenous people who arrived in Toronto in the post-war period, it developed over the decades into a multipurpose centre offering: Indigenous language programmes,

ceremonies and Pow Wows, support and therapy groups, youth programmes, legal and employment assistance services, and spaces for Indigenous arts and culture. It is in this space that George Lépine found the institutional base and the community for the Okichitaw Lodge.

The Sixties Scoop — the mass phenomenon in which Canadian social services removed Indigenous children from their families and placed them in non-Indigenous adoptive families — produced in Toronto a specific population: adults who had grown up without Indigenous cultural identity and who were seeking their roots in the city. These "Scoop survivors," as they were called, often did not know their own language, had no family members on the reserve to return to, and did not know which Nation they came from. The NCCT and similar community centres were for them the first point of contact with an Indigenous identity that they felt they had been deprived of but to which they felt they belonged.

The challenge of recruitment and retention in Indigenous community programmes was a constant challenge for the NCCT. Young urban Indigenous people were attracted to programmes offering physical activities, group belonging, and a sense of bodily competency: qualities that in many cases they were seeking in street gangs for lack of alternatives. Okichitaw offered exactly these qualities but framed in a cultural context and an ethical code that transformed bodily competency from an instrument of violence to an instrument of protection and identity. This capacity to attract young people who would otherwise have looked elsewhere for a sense of strength and belonging was one of the Lodge's most important contributions to the NCCT community.

> [C1] The urban Indigenous population of Toronto: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census. [C2] The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto: ncct.on.ca; OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C1] The Sixties Scoop: Sinclair, R. (2007). First Peoples Child & Family Review, 3(1). [C4] Recruitment and retention in community programmes, and Okichitaw as an alternative to street gangs, are the author's.

10.5 — The Intellectual Context: Indigenous Studies and Decolonisation

In the 1970s and 1980s, a new academic discipline developed in Canada that would provide the conceptual tools for Lépine's work: Indigenous Studies, or the study of Indigenous populations conducted with and by Indigenous people rather than simply about them. This methodological distinction — which scholars call "indigenous research methodologies" — was fundamental: it recognised that Indigenous knowledge could not be adequately understood by those who did not share it from within, and that Indigenous researchers had a specific epistemic advantage in the study of their own culture.

The University of Saskatchewan and the University of Manitoba opened Indigenous Studies programmes among the first in Canada, hosting researchers such as Freda Ahenakew and Blair Stonechild who produced academic work on Nêhiyaw history and culture. The presence of these academic figures in universities close to the large Saskatchewan reserves created a direct link between academic research and the communities that were both the object and the subject of that research. Lépine, in the course of his research between 1988 and 1997, had access to these works and probably to direct contacts with some of these researchers.

The concept of decolonisation, applied to the Indigenous peoples of countries of internal colonisation such as Canada,

Australia, and New Zealand, became in the 1980s the dominant conceptual framework. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori scholar from New Zealand, published in 1999 "Decolonizing Methodologies": a foundational text that formulated in a systematic way the principles of research conducted by and for Indigenous peoples. Although published after the conclusion of Lépine's research, the book codified principles that were already present in the practices of Canadian Indigenous Studies in the 1980s and 1990s.

The revisionist historiography of the period produced works that reformulated the understanding of the history of the Canadian Plains and that Lépine explicitly cited in the curriculum sources. Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser with "Loyal Till Death" (1997) provided the most critical reconstruction of the Resistance of 1885. James Daschuk with "Clearing the Plains" (2013) documented the politically induced famine. Katherine Pettipas with "Severing the Ties That Bind" (1994) analysed the prohibition of ceremonies. These works were not only academia: they were instruments of a politics of memory that returned to the Indigenous Nations their own version of their own history.

An element of the intellectual context often overlooked is the influence of Asian martial arts on Indigenous reflection on identity and resistance. Taekwondo and martial arts in general had a significant presence in urban Indigenous communities in the 1970s and 1980s: they were economically accessible, offered structure and discipline attractive to young people, and had a philosophical dimension that resonated with some Indigenous values (respect, discipline, humility). Many young Indigenous people who practised Asian martial arts also had the awareness that their own traditions had a martial dimension that suppression had made invisible. This awareness created the terrain for a project like Lépine's.

> [C3] Indigenous research methodologies: Smith, L.T. (1999). Decolonizing Methodologies. Zed Books. [C3] Wolfart and Ahenakew (1998); Stonechild and Waiser (1997); Pettipas (1994); Daschuk (2013). [C4] The influence of Asian martial arts on Indigenous reflection is the author's.

10.6 — Lépine's Research: The Three Fronts (1988–1997)

Between 1988 and 1997, George J. Lépine conducted the research and reconstruction work that would lead to the birth of Okichitaw. Lépine himself describes his method as founded on a "threefold root": written sources, oral tradition, and direct bodily transmission. None of the three was sufficient by itself: the written sources were filtered through the perspective of European observers; the oral tradition was fragmented by the decades of suppression; the direct bodily transmission survived only in fragments. Their critical combination — using each source to verify and complete the others — produced a synthesis that none of the three could have produced alone.

The first front: written sources. Lépine systematically consulted the archives and publications available on Nêhiyaw warrior culture. Among these: the diaries and reports of seventeenth to nineteenth century explorers and missionaries (many available in the Hudson's Bay Company and North-West Company archives), the works of nineteenth to twentieth century ethnographers (in particular Mandelbaum 1940 and the Boas school research tradition), the transcriptions of stories and testimonies produced by Ahenakew and other researchers, and the academic literature of Indigenous Studies. The principal problem with these sources was not the accuracy of the descriptions but the perspective: external observers describing practices they often did not fully understand and recording what was visible while ignoring what was reserved.

The second front: oral tradition. Over the course of nearly ten years, Lépine visited Nêhiyaw reserves and communities in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta, collecting the testimonies of Elders who still remembered — or who had heard their grandparents describe — the pre-suppression warrior practices. These visits required patience and humility: knowledge was not asked for directly but received when the Elder decided that the moment and the person were right. Lépine participated in ceremonies, contributed to community work, built relationships over time before asking specific questions. This approach, rooted in respect for Indigenous protocols of knowledge transmission, was decisive in gaining the Elders' trust.

The third front: direct bodily transmission. Through his family and community networks, Lépine had access to people who carried in their own bodies fragments of the transmission of the warrior tradition. The model of bodily transmission — as opposed to transmission through texts or descriptions — was the oldest and the most faithful: the body knows things that words cannot describe. A combat technique learned by observing and imitating a master contains information about timing, muscular tension, intention, and balance that no text can capture. Lépine sought these bodily transmissions with the same determination with which he sought the written sources.

The process of synthesis — the transformation of the gathered fragments into a coherent and transmissible system — was Lépine's specific contribution. It was not simply an assembly: it required the capacity to assess the coherence of the different fragments, to identify the gaps where transmission had been interrupted, and to find solutions that were faithful to the principles of the tradition even when the specific details were not recoverable. Lépine's training in Taekwondo and Hapkido provided the technical framework: he knew

how to recognise a functional technique from one that was not, a valid principle of movement from a hypothetical reconstruction.

The epistemic transparency of the system is one of the most distinctive aspects of Lépine's work. The manuscript prepared for the OIMA/UNESCO explicitly classifies every element of the curriculum in four categories: C1 (verifiable primary sources), C2 (OIMA documentation), C3 (academic sources), C4 (author's interpretation). This classification — which this volume adopts as the structure of its own notes — is an act of Honesty in the sense of the Seven Teachings: not to exaggerate the antiquity or completeness of the system but to present exactly what it is and what it is not. This transparency distinguishes Okichitaw from many attempts to recover Indigenous martial traditions that present as "authentic" largely reconstructed systems.

The Elders' mandate was the culminating moment of the research: the moment when Lépine's work acquired the community legitimacy necessary to transform itself from individual research into a publicly transmissible system. In a process that took place between approximately 1994 and 1997, Lépine presented his work to a group of Nêhiyaw Elders who had participated in the research process. These Elders assessed the system, verified its coherence with the tradition they knew, and gave their assent to its public transmission. The title Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew ("Chief Teacher") they conferred upon him was not an empty honour: it was the formal recognition of a specific responsibility in the chain of transmission of Nêhiyaw culture.

> [C2] The three fronts of Lepine's research and the Elder validation process: okichitaw.com; OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; Farrer, C.R. (2009) in Green and Svinth (eds.), Martial Arts of the World. ABC-Clio. [C4] The synthesis process,

> the assessment of technical coherence, and the analysis of epistemic transparency as an act of Honesty in the Seven Teachings are the author's.

10.7 — The Founding of the Lodge and the Curriculum (1997)

In 1997, at the end of nearly a decade of research and with the Elders' mandate obtained, Lépine founded the Okichitaw Lodge at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. The choice of the NCCT as the venue was not random: it was the heart of the urban Indigenous community of Toronto, a space already recognised and respected by the community the system intended to serve. Opening the Lodge at the NCCT meant inserting oneself in an already-built network of community relationships and presenting Okichitaw not as a private project of Lépine's but as a contribution of the community to the community.

The structure of the Four Gates consolidated in the early weeks of the Lodge. The First Gate (Awareness/East) focuses on the development of basic bodily awareness, the quality of attention, and the fundamental principles of movement. The Second Gate (Combat/South) introduces direct confrontation with a real opponent and the specific combat techniques. The Third Gate (Preservation/West) is the level of the instructor in training: the one who learns to transmit what they have received. The Fourth Gate (Building/North) is the level of the master: the one who has integrated the curriculum into their own life and contributes to the development of the system.

The traditional Nêhiyaw weapons included in the curriculum required specific reconstruction work. Lépine collaborated with craftspeople, historians, and Elders to reconstruct functional forms of the weapons documented in the sources: the long war club (pakamahakan), the combat knife, the lance with stone or bone tip,

the bone knife, and the hand-to-hand combat instruments. The weapons reconstruction work required not only historical knowledge but craft competency: knowing that the Nêhiyawak used a certain weapon is not enough to know how to build it and how to use it effectively.

The Nêhiyawêwin language component in the curriculum was developed progressively. From the beginning, the sessions incorporated the basic terminology: the names of the Four Gates, the Seven Teachings, the opening greetings and prayers. Over time, the technical vocabulary of the system — the names of postures, techniques, weapons, and principles — was formulated in the Nêhiyawêwin, creating a specific lexicon that was simultaneously a contribution to the vitality of the language and an instrument of cultural anchoring for the practice. For many students, the Lodge became the first context in which they heard their own language used in a systematic and functional way.

The Okichitaw International Martial Arts (OIMA) was founded as the organisational structure of the system, with the task of managing instructor training, level certification, curriculum documentation, and international relations. The founding of the OIMA transformed the NCCT Lodge from an individual initiative into an organisation with a formal structure: a structure capable of surviving its founder and expanding beyond Toronto through the training of certified instructors who could open Lodges in other cities and communities.

> [C2] The founding of the Lodge and the curriculum structure: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; okichitaw.com. [C2] The OIMA as organisational structure: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The collaborative calibration of the curriculum in the early weeks and the progressive development of the Nehiyawewin vocabulary are the author's.

10.8 — The Community Response and the Healing Effects

In the early years of the Lodge, Lépine and the instructors alongside him discovered that bodily practice had effects that went beyond the development of martial competencies. Students who entered the Lodge with histories of trauma, addictions, or cultural disconnection often reported, over the course of months, significant changes not only in their own bodies but in their sense of identity and in their relationship with Nêhiyaw culture. These effects were not the result of an explicit therapeutic programme: they were the collateral product of a practice that connected the body, the culture, and the community in a way that was new for many of the students.

The CBC News report of 2018 — cited in this volume as C1 in multiple sections — told the story of young Indigenous people in Toronto who had found in the Lodge an alternative to addictions and street violence. One of the testimonies cited a student who described the Lodge as the place where he had learned for the first time that his Indigenous body was a body capable of strength and grace rather than a body to be ashamed of: a transformation of the relationship with the body that resonated directly with the theories of bodily trauma and somatic decolonisation developed by contemporary research.

The community dimension of the Lodge is one of the most important aspects of its impact. The Lodge was not only a place where techniques were learned: it was a community with an internal culture, with protocols of relationship, with a system of shared values. Students who practised together developed trust relationships that extended beyond the Lodge; families who brought their children came into contact with other families in the Toronto Indigenous community; instructors who grew in the system became reference points in their own social networks. The Lodge functioned as a

generator of social capital: it produced not only individual competency but community cohesion.

The reception of the Elders to the system is documented in the visits that Lépine conducted periodically on the reserves. Elders who participated in demonstration sessions recognised in the curriculum elements of the warrior tradition they knew from their own childhood or from the stories of their grandparents: a recognition that was not uncritical agreement but the specific recognition that something authentic had been recovered. Some Elders offered corrections or additions that Lépine incorporated into the curriculum, keeping the validation process open and dynamic even after the founding of the Lodge.

> [C1] The CBC News report of 2018: Reddekopp, L. (2018). "Martial arts keep culture alive." CBC News, November 1, 2018. [C4] The community dimension of the Lodge as a generator of social capital, the Elders' reception, and the scalability challenge are the author's.

10.9 — International Recognition: WoMAU 2002 and the Global Panorama

In 2002, in Chungju, South Korea, the World Martial Arts Union (WoMAU) — the international organisation founded under the patronage of UNESCO to document and preserve the world's martial traditions — recognised Okichitaw as the traditional martial art of the Great Canadian Plains. It was the first formal recognition by an accredited international organisation of a North American Indigenous martial art. The recognition was not a formality: Lépine had presented extensive historical documentation, a public demonstration of the system, and a detailed argument for its cultural specificity.

The significance of the WoMAU recognition goes far beyond the specific Okichitaw system. It was also the affirmation that the Nations of the Canadian Plains had had, and continued to have, a martial tradition of their own: not a form of primitive violence but an elaborate system of bodily, philosophical, and spiritual development. Inserting Okichitaw into the UNESCO database of the world's martial arts — alongside Taekwondo, Kung Fu, Capoeira, and the other recognised martial traditions — was affirming that Nêhiyaw culture belongs to the heritage of humanity with the same legitimacy as the cultures that dominate world public perception.

The Diamond Jubilee Medal of 2012, conferred on Lépine by the British Crown for his contributions to the Canadian community, was a further institutional recognition that combined irony and significance. For a descendant of Ambroise-Dydime Lépine — condemned to death by the same Crown in 1874 and pardoned only under political pressure — to receive a medal from the Crown for having recovered the tradition that Crown had sought to eliminate is an act of historical reconciliation that surpasses any explicit intention of its promoters.

The document prepared by the OIMA for UNESCO — the manuscript that is one of the primary sources of this volume — was produced in collaboration with Lépine in the years following the Chungju recognition as part of a systematic effort of documentation. The document includes the history of the system, the Four Gates curriculum with its C1-C4 epistemic classification, the glossary of terms in the Nêhiyawêwin, and the source list. It is the most complete document on the Okichitaw system available and has provided the foundation for many of the technical and historical aspects analysed in this volume.

The Lodge remains active at the NCCT in Toronto with Alexander Lépine as the second-generation instructor: the transmission is ongoing and the system is alive.

> [C2] The WoMAU 2002 recognition and the Diamond Jubilee Medal 2012: okichitaw.com; OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; Farrer (2009). [C3] Mau rakau Maori: Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand. [C1] Arnis as Philippine national heritage: Republic Act 9850, 2009. [C4] The geopolitical significance of the WoMAU recognition, the irony of the Diamond Jubilee Medal, and the challenges of the period 2002-2024 are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The birth of Okichitaw is the product of a precise convergence between the right historical moment (the Indigenous cultural resurgence of the 1970s and 1980s, the constitutional recognition of 1982), the right context (the urban Indigenous community of Toronto and the NCCT), the individual with the necessary competencies (Lépine, with his martial training, his cultural rootedness, and his capacity for rigorous research), and the structure of community legitimacy (the Elders' mandate and the OIMA).

None of these elements would have been sufficient by itself: their combination is what produced the Okichitaw system as we know it today. Chapter 11 analyses more closely the figure of George J. Lépine: his genealogy, his formation, his path toward the Elders' mandate, and his legacy as the Founder of the only internationally recognised martial art of the Great Canadian Plains.

* * *

PART FOUR

THE FOUNDER

Chapter 11 — George J. Lépine: The Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew

The lives of those who found lasting cultural systems are never random in relation to the systems they found. The biographical history of George J. Lépine — his family roots, his training in Oriental martial arts, the Elders' mandate, and the recognitions he received —

is the key to understanding why Okichitaw has the form it has. It is not the form of a system designed at a drawing board by a martial arts technician: it is the form of a system that emerged from the specific intersection of a family genealogy, a professional formation, and a precise historical moment in the history of the Canadian Indigenous peoples.

The biographical treatment that follows is founded on sources of different quality. Lépine's direct statements in available interviews (CBC News 2018, Cowboys and Indians 2022) constitute the primary sources. The OIMA/UNESCO manuscript provides verifiable institutional information. The historical sources on the Lépine family and the Red River Resistance are documented and peer-reviewed. The sections containing the author's inferences or interpretations are marked C4 according to the epistemic system of this volume.

11.1 — The Family Roots: Plains Cree, Nakoda, and Métis

George J. Lépine identifies as Michif Plains-Cree — a plural identity that carries within it at least three distinct cultural traditions and connects them in a single person. The term Michif identifies the Francophone Métis culture of the Canadian Plains, with its own language (Michif, a Franco-Cree creole), its own traditions, and its own political history (the Red River Resistance of 1869-70 and that of the North-West of 1885). Plains Cree indicates the Nêhiyaw heritage of the family. The Nakoda — present through family lines of descent — adds the heritage of the Assiniboine, historical allies of the Nêhiyawak in the Iron Confederacy.

This plural identity is not an anomaly in the history of central Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It is the demographic norm of a region in which centuries of inter-ethnic marriages between Nêhiyawak,

Nakoda, Métis, and Franco-Canadians have produced populations with culturally composite genealogies. The Métis of the Red River were not “half-people” of two different cultures, as the pejorative English term Half-breed suggested: they were a Nation with their own history, their own language, and their own territory, recognised as such even in the Manitoba Act of 1870.

The Métis identity has specific implications for understanding Okichitaw that go beyond the biographical genealogy. The Plains Métis had developed in the nineteenth century practices of Buffalo hunting and mounted warfare that combined elements of the Indigenous tradition with elements of the European tradition of the voyageurs and chasseurs. Their organisation of the collective Buffalo hunt — with a hunt captain performing functions analogous to the okichitawak in the policing of the great Nêhiyaw hunts, with precise rules and punishments for transgressors — is documented by researchers as one of the most sophisticated on the nineteenth-century Plains.

The surname Lépine — with the acute accent on the e that is an integral part of the French spelling — carries with it the history of the Francophone community of the Red River. The Franco-Canadian families that settled in the region from the end of the eighteenth century integrated through marriage with local Nêhiyaw and Nakoda families, creating the kinship networks from which the Métis Nation was born. The most prominent figure of the family in documented history is Ambroise-Dydime Lépine, analysed in the following section.

The plurality of Lépine’s roots is a richness of the system, not a defect of authenticity: it mirrors the real composition of the community to which the system is directed, in which the Michif Plains-Cree identity is the most common demographic norm. The

Okichitaw system is not an exclusively Plains Cree system: it carries within it also elements of the Nakoda tradition, visible in the ethical principles (including the Assiniboine proverb "Make my enemy strong"), and of the Métis tradition, visible in the practical organisation of the curriculum and in the logic of Two-Eyed Seeing.

> [C2] Lepine's self-identification: okichitaw.com; Cowboys and Indians (2022). [C1] Metis culture: Payment, D.P. (1990). The Free People — Otipemisiwak. Parks Canada. [C4] The implications of the plural identity for the system are the author's.

11.2 — Ambroise-Dydime Lépine: Riel's Adjutant-General

The figure of Ambroise-Dydime Lépine (1840-1923) is fundamental for understanding the historical weight that the surname Lépine carries in Canadian Métis history. Ambroise-Dydime was the Adjutant-General of Louis Riel's provisional government during the Red River Resistance of 1869-70: the second in military command of the Resistance, responsible for the organisation of the Métis forces that occupied Fort Garry (present-day Winnipeg) in the autumn of 1869 and that resisted the Canadian troops for months.

The Red River Resistance of 1869-70 was triggered by Canada's purchase of Rupert's Land from the British government without consulting the Métis who inhabited it. Riel and Lépine organised the armed resistance, occupied Fort Garry, and proclaimed a provisional government that negotiated with Ottawa the conditions of Manitoba's entry into Confederation. The result — the Manitoba Act of 1870 — was largely a Métis political victory: it guaranteed land rights, the French language, and the Catholic school in the new province.

The personal story of Ambroise-Dydime Lépine after the Resistance is a microcosm of the fate of Métis leaders in post-1870 Canada. He was arrested in 1873 on a charge of murder for the death of Thomas Scott. The trial that followed was politically orchestrated: the jury found him guilty, the judge sentenced him to death, but the Governor General commuted the sentence to perpetual exile from Canada. Lépine accepted the exile and went to the United States, where he remained for several years before obtaining a partial pardon and being able to return to Canada. He spent the rest of his life at Saint-Vital, Manitoba, dying in 1923.

The genealogical connection between Ambroise-Dydime and George J. Lépine is mentioned in the OIMA materials. The precise details of the genealogy — how many generations separate the two, through which line of descent — are not documented in the available public materials and constitute one of the documentary gaps in the Founder's biographical profile. What is verifiable is that George J. Lépine acknowledges this family connection and that it informs his sense of mission in the recovery of the Métis and Nêhiyaw warrior tradition.

The weight of bearing the surname Lépine in the Canadian Métis community has significant symbolic valence: it is a name that connects those who bear it to a history of resistance, of sacrifice, and of struggle for the dignity of their people. George J. Lépine was aware of this weight: in his public statements, the reference to family history is never folkloristic or nostalgic, but inserted in a discourse of continuity and responsibility. The mandate to recover and codify the Nêhiyaw warrior tradition was also, for him, a way of honouring what his Ancestors had sought to protect.

> [C1] Ambroise-Dydime Lepine: Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 11. [C1] The Lepine trial (1873-74): Stanley, G.F.G. (1963). The Birth of Western Canada. University of Toronto Press. [C1] The Red River Resistance: Morton, W.L. (1956). Manitoba: A History. University of Toronto Press.

11.3 — Childhood, Lake Manitoba, and Uncle Ted's Lessons

George J. Lépine was born in 1950 in Manitoba, in a family and community context marked by the history analysed in the preceding chapters. He was born four years before the Canadian government guaranteed for the first time the federal right to vote to Status Indians (1960); he was an adolescent when the "no work, no food" policy was still devastating Nêhiyaw communities on the Saskatchewan reserves; he was a young adult during Red Power and the founding of AIM. His generation is that of the transition: born in the period of suppression, grown up in the period of revitalisation, adult during the constitutional recognition of 1982.

The most documented biographical episode of Lépine's childhood is the one transmitted in the Cowboys and Indians interview of 2022: the informal lessons in combat techniques received from Uncle Ted on the shores of Lake Manitoba. This episode is not only a moment of cultural transmission, but a formative experience that planted in Lépine the fundamental question that would guide his research for decades: what exactly had Uncle Ted learned? From whom? In what form? And what remained of that knowledge after a century of suppression?

Lake Manitoba — manitow-sâkahikan, the lake of the spirit — is not a random backdrop for this transmission. It is the lake that Nêhiyaw and Métis bands of central Manitoba used as a seasonal camp for fishing and waterfowl hunting; it is the ancestral territory of

the region in which the Lépine family has documented roots. Receiving the first lessons in warrior techniques in this specific place — from an uncle who had probably received them from his own uncle in a chain of family transmission — meant receiving them in the original geographical and relational context. Not in a gym, not from a manual, but on the shores of the lake that one's Ancestors had frequented for millennia.

Uncle Ted's lessons were almost certainly fragments, not a complete curriculum. They were what could be transmitted from one individual to another in conditions of informality and discretion: basic postures, fundamental movements, elementary tactical principles, perhaps some stories about the warrior practices of the Ancestors. They were not the complete protocols of formal transmission — those structures had been destroyed by the suppression — but the fragments that an individual had been able to preserve and transmit to an attentive nephew without attracting the attention of government agents.

The value of these fragments was not in their completeness but in their authenticity: they were real, they had been lived, they had arrived from someone who had received them from someone else. The question that Uncle Ted's fragments planted in the young Lépine is the one that researchers of Indigenous martial traditions know as the question of the "lost treasure": what had been beyond these fragments? What had Nêhiyaw and Métis Warriors known how to do before the suppression interrupted the chain of transmission? How much of that knowledge was recoverable, and through which sources? These questions guided Lépine's path for two decades, from the late 1970s to the founding of the Lodge in 1997.

> [C2] Uncle Ted's lessons and Lake Manitoba: Lepine in Cowboys and Indians (May 2022). [C3] Family transmission as a mechanism of cultural survival: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 7. [C4] The characterisation of the transmitted fragments and the question of the "lost treasure" are the author's.

11.4 — Training in the Oriental Martial Arts

Lépine’s path in the Oriental martial arts is documented in the OIMA materials. He attained a 6th Dan in Taekwondo and a 4th Dan in Hapkido, both within the World Police Martial Arts Federation. This formation was not a parallel and separate path from his Nêhiyaw cultural identity: it was, from the beginning, oriented by the question of how the acquired competencies could serve to codify and transmit the Indigenous warrior tradition. Taekwondo and Hapkido were for Lépine what Western musical notation was for African composers who wanted to transcribe their traditional music: a technical instrument adopted to serve a content different from the one for which it was originally developed.

Modern Taekwondo was codified in the 1950s and 1960s by a group of Korean masters seeking to recover and systematise Korean martial traditions after decades of Japanese occupation that had almost eliminated them. The parallel with the Nêhiyaw situation post-1885 is structurally evident: in both cases, a people undergoing colonial cultural suppression must recover its warrior tradition through a process of research, codification, and adaptation to the contemporary context. That Lépine chose Taekwondo as a pedagogical container is not a coincidence: it was the choice of someone who had recognised in Taekwondo the same logic of cultural recovery he wanted to apply to his own tradition.

Hapkido, the second system in Lépine’s formation, contributes to the Okichitaw technical corpus in a different way.

Where Taekwondo offers the pedagogical framework (the grade system, the forms, the systematic drilling), Hapkido offers the technical principles of joint control and defence against bladed weapons. The techniques of joint leverage, wrist control, disarming, and attacker neutralisation that characterise Hapkido are technically coherent with the weapon-based paradigm of Okichitaw: controlling the arm that holds a weapon means controlling the weapon itself. The Hapkido training gave Lépine the technical tools to elaborate the close-quarters combat system that became the core of the Okichitaw curriculum.

The World Police Martial Arts Federation (WPMAF), within which Lépine obtained his certifications, is an organisation that trains law enforcement professionals. This professional context is not random in relation to the Okichitaw system: the ruleless Close Quarters Combat that characterises the system has partial roots in the tradition of operational combat of the police forces, as well as in the Nêhiyaw warrior tradition. Lépine worked as a martial arts instructor for Canadian law enforcement, an experience that reinforced his understanding of the principles of real combat as opposed to sporting combat.

> [C2] Lepine's certifications (6th Dan Taekwondo, 4th Dan Hapkido, WPMAF): OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; okichitaw.com. [C1] The codification of modern Taekwondo: Gillis, A. (2011). A Killing Art. ECW Press. [C4] The parallel between the codification of Taekwondo and that of Okichitaw, and the characterisation of the three research fronts, are the author's.

11.5 — The Elders' Mandate: Community Legitimation

No cultural system that claims Indigenous roots is authentic without the legitimation of the community from which it comes. This is not an ideological position but a logical consequence of the structure of

knowledge in oral cultures: knowledge belongs to the community, not to the individual who carries it. An individual can codify, transmit, and elaborate knowledge, but cannot give it legitimacy by themselves: legitimacy is recognised by the community through its carriers of traditional authority, the Knowledge Keepers and the Elders. This is the principle that makes the Elders' mandate from Manitoba the most important source of legitimacy for Okichitaw, superior to any external institutional certification.

The consultations that Lépine conducted with Nêhiyaw Elders from Manitoba at the end of the 1980s unfolded according to the traditional protocol of seeking Elder approval in the Plains cultures. It was not a single formal meeting but a prolonged process of encounters, sharing, listening, and revision. Lépine brought to the Elders what he had found in the written sources and what he had received from family tradition, and asked for their assessment: was this authentic? Was this appropriate? The process was iterative and bidirectional, not a simple approval of what Lépine had already decided.

Two specific results of these consultations are documented. The first is the choice of the name of the system: it was the consultation with the Elders that suggested the name okichitawak as the most appropriate for capturing not only the structure of combat but the whole of the values of the Indigenous way of living. The second is the validation of the philosophical principles of the system: the Elders confirmed that the Seven Teachings of the Grandfathers could be used as the ethical foundation of a Nêhiyaw martial system.

The consultation with the Elders also had a guard function: to ensure that the system did not improperly appropriate ceremonial elements or sacred knowledge that should not be diffused outside the

appropriate ceremonial context. In the Indigenous cultures of the Plains, there is a fundamental distinction between what is shareable (practical techniques, ethical principles, some opening ceremonies such as smudging) and what is not (specific healing ceremonies, the secrets of warrior societies, sacred songs belonging to specific families). The Okichitaw curriculum respects this distinction: it uses shareable elements without pretending to transmit sacred knowledge that would require particular contexts and authorisations.

The Elders' mandate distinguishes Okichitaw structurally from many combat systems that use Indigenous nomenclature without having this community root. A system that calls itself "okichitaw" without the mandate of the Nêhiyaw Elders is not Okichitaw in the sense that this volume documents: it is a use of the name without the substance that gives it meaning. The distinction is not technical but cultural: the system is authentic not because it uses the right weapons or the right techniques, but because it has been recognised by the community that carries those weapons and those techniques in its own history.

> [C2] The Elder consultation process and the mandate: Lepine in Cowboys and Indians (May 2022); OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C3] The structure of Elder recognition in the Plains cultures: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 7. [C1] The Seven Teachings: Benton-Banai, E. (1988). The Mishomis Book. Indian Country Communications. [C4] The implications for the succession of the system are the author's.

11.6 — The Title: Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew

The official title of George J. Lépine in the Okichitaw system is *Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew*: a Nêhiyaw compound term designating his position as Founder, guide, and principal teacher of the system. The first component, *okimaw* (in the modified form *okimakahn*), means "chief," "leader," the one who guides. The second

component, *kiskinahumakew*, means “teacher,” “the one who transmits knowledge.” The combination produces a title that can be rendered as “the Chief Teacher” or “the leader of knowledge transmission”: not the title of the one who commands, but of the one who carries and transmits.

The structure of the title is relevant for understanding the conception of power in the system. A chief in the Nêhiyaw sense — as analysed in Chapter 3 — does not command: he persuades, guides, carries the responsibility. A teacher in the Nêhiyaw sense does not instruct from above: he shares what he carries, opens spaces in which the student can develop their own understanding. The title Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew combines these two conceptions: the Founder of the system is not the owner of a school selling educational services, but the carrier of a community responsibility who has the mandate to transmit and not the right to withhold.

The conferral of the title is part of the community validation process already analysed in Section 11.5. It is not a self-conferral: the title is recognised by the community through the Elders who validated the system. This distinction is important in the context of martial arts, where it is common for founders of new systems to confer elevated titles upon themselves in an autonomous and unilateral fashion. Okichitaw instead follows the logic of community recognition: the title comes from the outside, not the inside. This is consistent with the Nêhiyaw principle that a person’s value is determined by the community that recognises it, not by the individual who affirms it.

> [C2] The title Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; okichitaw.com. [C1] The root okimaw and kiskinahumakew in the CRO corpus: Wolfart, H.C. and Ahenakew, F. (1998). The Student's Dictionary of Literary Plains Cree. Memoir 15. [C4] The analysis of the structure of the title and its implications are the author's.

11.7 — Institutional Recognitions: WoMAU (2002) and Diamond Jubilee Medal (2012)

George J. Lépine has received two institutional recognitions that complete the picture of his public figure. The first is the WoMAU recognition at Chungju in 2002, already analysed in Chapter 10. The second is the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, received in 2012 on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne. The medal is awarded to "Canadians who have made significant contributions to their community, their province, or to Canada." It is not a recognition of the martial art as such: it is a recognition of Lépine's work as custodian and transmitter of Indigenous cultural heritage.

The symbolic value of the Diamond Jubilee Medal in the context of this volume is notable for a historical paradox worth making explicit. The British Crown is the institution that, through its Canadian agents, signed the treaties that confined the Nêhiyawak to reserves, that passed the Indian Act prohibiting their ceremonies, that hanged Nêhiyaw Warriors at Fort Battleford in 1885. It is the same institution that in 2012 awarded a medal to a man who had dedicated his life to recovering what those policies had sought to destroy. The paradox does not diminish the value of the recognition: it situates it in a history in which institutions change more slowly than policies.

Together, the two recognitions — WoMAU 2002 and Diamond Jubilee Medal 2012 — build for Lépine a double institutional legitimation that complements the community one of the Elders. The Elders' legitimation says: "the Nêhiyaw community recognises this system as authentic." The WoMAU recognition says: "the international martial arts community recognises this system as worthy of promotion." The Diamond Jubilee Medal says: "the

Canadian State recognises this man's contribution to the Canadian community." These three forms of legitimation do not replace each other but reinforce each other: together they build the multidimensional credibility of a system that aspires to be simultaneously authentic, recognisable, and sustainable.

> [C2] The WoMAU recognition (2002) and the 2004-2008 delegations: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; womaukorea.org. [C1] The Diamond Jubilee Medal (2012): Rideau Hall, award criteria (gg.ca). [C4] The reading of the historical paradox of the Diamond Jubilee Medal and the structure of the double legitimation are the author's.

11.8 — Alexander Lépine: The Second Generation

The question of succession in a martial system that claims cultural authenticity is always delicate. The history of martial arts is full of systems that lost their integrity with the death of the Founder. Okichitaw addresses this challenge through the formation of Alexander Lépine, son of George J. Lépine and the first generation formed entirely within the system that his father codified. Alexander represents something structurally different from the successors of many traditional martial systems: he is not someone who learned from another system and then converted, but someone who has had the system in his body since childhood.

The formation of Alexander Lépine is documented in the OIMA materials as a process of intergenerational transmission. Alexander grew up within the Lodge, received the technical training of the complete curriculum, participated in the ceremonies, and developed the linguistic competency in the Nêhiyawêwin that is an integral part of the system. This path positions him as the natural successor to the system, but — consistently with the logic of community legitimation — his formal succession will need to be

recognised by the Nêhiyaw community through its Elders, not simply declared by the Founder.

The father-to-son transmission has a deep history in Nêhiyaw culture. As already analysed in Chapter 9, the transmission of warrior knowledge traditionally occurred through the uncle-nephew relationship, with the father transmitting to the son through daily example. Alexander's training by George reproduces the structure of paternal transmission, integrated by access to the Lodge's codified curriculum. It is a simultaneously familial and institutional transmission: the model that could guarantee the continuity of the system combining the authenticity of direct transmission with the structure of the formalised curriculum.

One aspect of Alexander's formation that deserves specific attention is the online platform that Lépine developed to reach Nêhiyaw communities on remote reserves in Saskatchewan and northern Manitoba. A young Nêhiyaw from La Ronge, Saskatchewan, cannot attend the weekly sessions of the Toronto Lodge. The online platform — videos, texts, linguistic resources — allows at least some elements of the system to be brought to those who cannot access the Lodge physically. Alexander has grown up as the natural interlocutor of this digital expansion: his generation knows the digital media with the same naturalness with which his father knows the protocols of the physical Lodge.

> [C2] Alexander Lepine as the first generation formed in the system: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; okichitaw.com. [C2] The online platform for remote communities: okichitaw.com. [C4] The implications of Alexander's formation for the succession and geographic expansion of the system are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The biography of George J. Lépine is the living proof that lasting cultural systems are not born out of nothing: they are born from the intersection of a family genealogy, a professional formation, a historical moment, and a community mandate.

The Michif Plains-Cree roots carried the weight of the history of Ambroise-Dydime and the Red River Resistance. Uncle Ted's lessons planted the question that would guide two decades of research. The training in Taekwondo and Hapkido offered the pedagogical container in which the Nêhiyaw content could be transmitted. The Elders' mandate transformed the individual research into community responsibility. The title Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew codified this responsibility in a role. The WoMAU and Diamond Jubilee Medal recognitions built the institutional legitimation. Alexander Lépine opens the prospect of generational continuity.

But the picture would remain incomplete without a final observation: the personal dimension that no documentary source fully captures. George J. Lépine has dedicated most of his adult life to a project that has never been easy, remunerative, or secure. He recovered fragments of a tradition that his government had sought to eliminate for a century. He built a system in a context where young people carried the traumas of generations. He resisted the simplifications — neither "my culture as spectacle" nor "my culture as a commercial product" — maintaining his vision of a system genuinely useful to his community. This silent persistence, more than any institutional recognition, is what defines the Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew.

PART FIVE

PHILOSOPHY AND COSMOLOGY

Chapter 12 — The Medicine Wheel: Cosmology, Orientation, and Practice

The Medicine Wheel — *askiy-mâcihowin* in the Nêhiyawêwin, “that which moves upon the earth” — is the most pervasive and most misunderstood cosmological symbol of the North American Indigenous cultures. Pervasive because it appears in some form in almost all the Plains Nations. Misunderstood because it has often been reduced to a kind of New Age mandala, emptied of its specific cosmological meaning and filled with generic content.

This chapter reconstructs the meaning of the Medicine Wheel in the Nêhiyaw tradition specifically, its conceptual structure, its practical applications, and its central function in the Okichitaw system as a map of the Lodge space, the curriculum progression, and the itinerary of human growth. This volume uses exclusively verifiable sources, explicitly signalling where the interpretation applied to the Okichitaw system is the author’s and where it is documented by Lépine or by the Elders.

12.1 — Origins and Diffusion: The Medicine Wheel in Plains Cultures

The physical structures known as Medicine Wheels — circles of stones with spokes radiating from a centre, some with diameters exceeding 25 metres — are among the oldest monuments of the North American Plains. The Bighorn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, dated between 300 and 800 years ago, is the most studied; but over 100 have been documented in the Great Plains between Wyoming and Alberta. Their original function is debated: some research suggests an astronomical use, others a funerary use, others still a ritual function of seasonal renewal. What is verifiable is that structures of this type were built and used long before European contact.

The Medicine Wheel as a symbolic system — distinct from the physical stone structures — is probably older than the structures themselves. The cosmological principle of the four directions is documented in different forms in almost all cultures of the North American continent. In the specific Nêhiyaw tradition, the Medicine Wheel is not a static symbol to contemplate but a dynamic map to inhabit. The four directions are not abstract points of space but entities with specific character, function, and power. Each direction is associated with a colour, a season, a time of day, a phase of human life, a guide animal, an element, a type of knowledge, and a Teaching of the Grandfathers.

The distinction between the Nêhiyaw versions of the Medicine Wheel and the versions of other Nations is crucial for understanding why Okichitaw associates the Four Gates of the curriculum with the four directions in the way it does. Using the wrong associations — those of a Nation different from the one to which the system belongs — does not produce a "generically Indigenous" system: it produces an incorrectly specified system. Cultural precision is not academic formalism: it is the condition for the system to be what it says it is.

The Nêhiyaw tradition distinguishes between the Wheel as a cosmic map — the universal schema governing the movement of the sun, the seasons, and the cycle of life — and the Wheel as a personal map: the diagram of the growth path of each specific individual. Every person is born with a dominant direction that mirrors their fundamental nature, and the path of life consists in integrating the other three directions to achieve the balance of the complete Wheel. The Okichitaw system translates this principle into the curriculum: the four Gates are not hierarchical levels but four directions that must all be traversed to reach the maturity of the Warrior.

> [C1] The Bighorn Medicine Wheel: Eddy, J.A. (1974). "Astronomical Alignment of the Bighorn Medicine Wheel." Science, 184(4141). [C1] The distribution in the Plains: Brumley, J.H. (1988). Medicine Wheels on the Northern Plains. Archaeological Survey of Alberta. [C4] The distinction between specific cultural versions and the critique of the pan-Indigenous syncretic version are the author's.

12.2 — The Four Directions: Character, Power, and Function

The four directions of the Medicine Wheel constitute the core of the Nêhiyaw cosmological system. Each is far more than a cardinal point: it is a character, a type of energy, a quality of existence with associations that cross the natural world and the human world. These associations are not arbitrary: they are the product of millennia of observation of nature, seasonal experience, and cosmological reflection codified in the Nêhiyaw oral tradition.

The East: Light, Beginning, and Awareness

The East (*wâpihk*, "place where the light arrives") is the direction of dawn and new beginnings. It is associated with the season of spring, the moment of morning, the phase of birth and childhood in the cycle of human life. The colour traditionally associated with the East in Nêhiyaw cosmology is yellow — the colour of the rising sun. The guide animal of the East is often the Eagle, which flies high and sees far: a metaphor of the broad vision and elevated perspective that characterises the gift of the East.

In Okichitaw, the East corresponds to the First Gate of the curriculum (Level 1, Awareness). The student who enters the Lodge for the first time comes from the East in a symbolic sense: they do not yet know, do not yet see, do not yet perceive their own physical and mental condition with the clarity the system requires. The work of the First Gate is exactly this: to develop awareness of one's own body,

one's own movements, one's own automatic reactions. The light of dawn that illuminates what was in the darkness is the metaphor for the process: awareness as the first form of transformation.

In Okichitaw, every session opens with the smudging ceremony and with the opening words in the Nêhiyawêwin: this ritual belongs to the East in cosmological terms. It is the moment when the Lodge space is consecrated through word and through the smoke of the four sacred medicines, creating the passage from the ordinary to the sacred that every session of practice requires.

The Seven Teaching associated with the East in Okichitaw is Humility (Dabâseyimâkosiwin). Humility is not the lowering of oneself but the readiness to learn, the capacity to enter the Lodge as a beginner even when one is experienced in other areas. The student who arrives with their mind already full of their own certainties cannot receive the light of the East: their vessel is already occupied. Humility as a prerequisite of awareness is one of the deepest pedagogical principles of the system.

The physical dimension of the East in Okichitaw is expressed in the listening posture: the position in which the student stands with the body open, the senses active, the mind receptive. It is not a passive posture: it requires an active tension of the body toward perception. The East practitioner does not yet move but is ready to move, like the Eagle that glides motionless in the thermal currents keeping its eyes fixed on the prey long before striking. This active readiness — the bodily attention that precedes action — is the specific competency that the First Gate develops.

The South: Growth, Heat, and Relationship

The South (*sâwanohk*) is the direction of the high sun, of heat and growth. It is associated with summer, with midday, with the phase of youth and adolescence in the cycle of human life. The colour associated with the South in the Nêhiyaw tradition is often red — the colour of blood flowing in the veins, of vital force at its apex, of the fire burning at full strength. The guide animal of the South is often the coyote or the deer: the animal that is close to the earth, that lives in the immediacy of the moment, that moves swiftly on the ground.

In Okichitaw, the South corresponds to the Second Gate of the curriculum (Level 2, Combat). The Second Gate is the moment when the student begins to confront the real opponent: no longer only one's internal bodily awareness, but the relationship with another body in shared space. The heat of the South mirrors the intensity of this confrontation: combat requires energy, physical commitment, and the willingness to make contact. The relationship with the opponent is always, in Okichitaw, a relationship of mutual respect: the partner is not an enemy to defeat but a fellow traveller who helps develop one's own competencies.

The gift of the South in the Nêhiyaw tradition is trust and relationship: the capacity to entrust oneself to the other, to believe in the goodness of the relationship, to keep the heart open even in the intensity of confrontation. The Seven Teaching associated with the South is Respect (Kitimâkiêtisowin). Respect is the practice that keeps relationships intact during growth: it allows intense confrontation without its degenerating into violence.

The physical dimension of the South in Okichitaw is expressed in the techniques of distance and timing. The Second Gate is the moment when the student learns to manage the distance from the

opponent: not too close (where short weapons are dangerous), not too far (where long weapons dominate), but in the optimal distance zone for their own weapons and competencies. Decisions in the middle distance zone must be rapid, instinctive, guided by bodily perception rather than cognitive reflection. The South is the direction of rapid action and intense relationship.

The West: Transformation, Depth, and Honesty

The West (*pâcimohtahisowin*, "the direction toward which one walks at the end of the day") is the direction of sunset and transformation. It is associated with autumn, with late afternoon, with the phase of maturity and adulthood in the cycle of human life. The colour associated with the West in the Nêhiyaw tradition is often black — not the black of death but the black of the night sky that contains all the stars: the colour of depth, mystery, and accumulated wisdom. The guide animal of the West is often the Bear: the animal that hibernates, that withdraws into the darkness to regenerate, that carries within itself the knowledge of medicines and healing.

In Okichitaw, the West corresponds to the Third Gate of the curriculum (Level 3, Preservation). The Third Gate is the moment when the student begins to internalise what they have learned and to transmit it: it is the level of the instructor in training, of the one who carries the responsibility of preserving the system and transmitting it to future generations. The setting sun of the West is the metaphor for this passage: the sun that sets does not disappear, but carries its light to another plane of existence, ready to reappear in the East the following day. Preservation is not immobile conservation: it is the dynamic transmission that keeps the tradition alive through change.

The gift of the West in the Nêhiyaw tradition is inner vision and the capacity for introspection. The Third Gate practitioner is

called to look within themselves with honesty: to recognise their strengths and their weaknesses, to understand how their own traumas and conditionings influence their way of moving and reacting. This introspection is not self-pity: it is the condition for being able to teach with integrity. The Seven Teaching associated with the West is Honesty (Tâpitawâtâkêyiwin): not only truthfulness in external declarations, but authenticity in being oneself, the correspondence between what one is inside and what one shows outside.

The physical dimension of the West in Okichitaw is expressed in the work with weapons at reduced distance and in the healing and first aid techniques. The Nêhiyaw warrior tradition did not separate combat from healing: the Warrior who knew how to inflict damage had to also know how to treat it. The Bear of the West is the animal of medicine in many Plains traditions because it is the animal that knows the medicinal roots: it smells the ground, finds the healing plants, uses the knowledge of the territory to survive.

The North: Wisdom, Cold, and Discipline

The North (*kîwatin*, “north wind”) is the direction of winter and accumulated wisdom. It is associated with winter, with night, with the phase of old age in the cycle of human life, but also with the transformation that death brings as renewal. The colour associated with the North is often white — the colour of snow, of ice, of the purity of winter that covers the earth and prepares it for renewal. The guide animal of the North is often the Wolf or the White Buffalo: the animals of endurance and strength in the cold.

In Okichitaw, the North corresponds to the Fourth Gate of the curriculum (Level 4, Building). The Fourth Gate is the level of the master: the one who has traversed all the seasons of the path and can

look back with the understanding that only the complete experience permits. The wisdom of the North is the wisdom of the Elder: not the technical knowledge of the East or the physical strength of the South or the inner honesty of the West, but the integration of all three in a unified understanding. The practitioner of the Fourth Gate has no need to think about techniques: they have internalised them to the point that the body executes them without the mediation of the cognitive mind.

The gift of the North in the Nêhiyaw tradition is wisdom in its broadest sense: not only accumulated knowledge but the capacity to use it in the service of the community. The Seven Teaching associated with the North is Wisdom (niisoohpikihawasowin). The Warrior's wisdom of the North is expressed in the capacity to evaluate a conflict situation in its totality: not only the immediate threat, but the relational context, the possible consequences, the values at stake. The wise Warrior does not fight every battle: they choose with discernment when defence is necessary and when de-escalation is the correct response.

The winter season associated with the North in the Nêhiyaw tradition was the season of storytelling, of indoor teaching, and of intergenerational transmission. It was the period when Elders narrated the âtayôhkana — the great cosmological stories narrated only in winter — and when the young received the most elaborate instructions of the tradition. The Fourth Gate of Okichitaw carries this tradition into the urban context: the master of the Fourth Gate is the narrator of the deepest stories of the system, the one who can connect the technique of combat with the cosmology of the Medicine Wheel and with the history of the Nêhiyaw People in a unified and coherent account.

> [C2] The associations of the four directions in the Okichitaw system: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; okichitaw.com. [C3] The associations in the broader Nehiyaw tradition: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 7 "Religion". [C4] The analysis of the pedagogical implications of each direction for the Okichitaw curriculum, and the doctrine of the shadow face, are the author's.

12.3 — The Sacred Colours, Guide Animals, and Natural Correspondences

The system of correspondences of the Medicine Wheel is not limited to the directions and seasons: it includes a network of associations connecting colours, animals, natural elements, and human qualities in a coherent system. These correspondences are not decorative: they are mnemonic (they help remember complex systems of knowledge through concrete sensory images), pedagogical (they provide metaphors for abstract qualities such as courage or wisdom), and cosmological (they affirm the connection between the natural world and the human world that is at the heart of the Nêhiyaw worldview).

The Okichitaw system uses a colour system validated by the Elders: yellow for the East, red for the South, black for the West, white for the North. This system has a coherent visual logic: the yellow of the rising sun, the red of the high sun and of blood, the black of the night, the white of the snow. These associations are those of the Okichitaw system, not necessarily of the entire Nêhiyaw tradition.

The guide animals of the four directions are not totems in the reductive sense in which the term is used in popular culture. They are models of behaviour and of quality: the Eagle of the East teaches vision from above; the coyote of the South teaches agility and presence in the moment; the Bear of the West teaches introspective strength and knowledge of the medicines; the Wolf of the North teaches discipline and long-term strategy. In the Lodge practice, these

animals are invoked not as supernatural entities but as behavioural archetypes that the practitioner can deliberately cultivate.

The four sacred medicines used in smudging — the purification ceremony with which every Lodge session opens — also correspond to the four directions. Sage is the medicine of the East: it purifies the space and the mind, opens perception. Cedar is the medicine of the South: it protects the practitioner and the practice space. Tobacco is the medicine of the West: it is the medicine of prayers and thanksgiving. Sweetgrass (wihkask) is the medicine of the North: it is the medicine that attracts good spirits and the wisdom of the Ancestors. Using the four medicines in the correct sequence during smudging is invoking the four directions and preparing the practitioner to receive their gifts.

The shadow face of each direction deserves mention. Every gift of the Wheel, when used in a distorted fashion, produces its negative counterpart. The gift of the East is clear vision, but its shadow is the presumption of seeing what others cannot. The gift of the South is strength and trust, but its shadow is impulsivity and violence. The gift of the West is introspection, but its shadow is isolation and depression. The gift of the North is wisdom, but its shadow is rigidity and cynicism. The practitioner who knows their dominant direction must also work on their shadow: the Okichitaw system does not permit a spirituality without confrontation with one's own weaknesses.

> [C2] The four sacred medicines in the Okichitaw system: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C3] The animal correspondences in the Plains traditions: Walker, J.R. (1917). The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies. American Museum of Natural History. [C4] The analysis of the implications of the directions for the composition of the Lodge group is the author's.

12.4 — The Medicine Wheel as a Map of Human Life

Among all the dimensions of the Medicine Wheel, the one with the most direct impact on the daily practice of Okichitaw is its function as a map of the path of human life. Every human being, in the Nêhiyaw vision, makes a journey on the Wheel: born in the East (the dawn, innocence, awareness), grows in the South (strength, relationship, energy), matures in the West (depth, transformation, inner honesty), and ages in the North (wisdom, detachment, preparation for renewal). This journey is not linear: it is circular, like the Wheel. Death is not the end of the path but the return to the East that prepares the next cycle.

The map of human life on the Wheel has direct implications for how Okichitaw treats students of different ages. A child carries the natural gift of the East: wonder, openness, the readiness to learn without prejudice. A young adult carries the natural gift of the South: energy, intensity, the desire to confront. A middle-aged adult carries the natural gift of the West: depth, patience, the capacity to see beyond the surface. An Elder carries the natural gift of the North: broad perspective, understanding of long-term consequences.

But the Wheel is not only a map of biological age: it is also a map of the phases of any learning process. A 50-year-old practitioner who enters the Lodge for the first time is in the East relative to that specific system, even if they are in the West relative to the cycle of their own life. An adolescent who has already completed the Third Gate is in the West relative to that specific path, even if they are in the South relative to the cycle of life. This distinction between the position on the Wheel of biological life and the position on the Wheel of specific learning is one of the most interesting pedagogical subtleties

of the system: it prevents both the arrogance of the talented young person and the humiliation of the elderly beginner.

The map of life on the Wheel also has a therapeutic dimension documented in the CBC report of 2018. Many urban Indigenous practitioners who enter the Lodge have lived traumas that have blocked them in a specific direction: childhood trauma often leaves people blocked in the East, unable to trust enough to pass to the South; trauma of violence often blocks people in the West, in a form of protective introversion; trauma of loss can bring people to the North before their time, in a bitter and cynical wisdom that has not yet healed. The path in the Lodge helps unblock these stases: not through explicit psychotherapy, but through bodily and ceremonial work that addresses the trauma in the language in which the trauma itself was registered — the body.

The Nêhiyaw conception of time as circular rather than linear is the foundation of this map. European linear time conceives life as an arrow: born, grows, dies, end. Nêhiyaw circular time conceives life as a spiral: every cycle recommences, but at a different level of understanding. The Elder who returns to the East in their life is in the East of a completely different person from the newborn: they carry with them all the knowledge accumulated in the preceding directions. The Okichitaw system is built on the same circular logic: practitioners of the Fourth Gate do not abandon the competencies of the preceding Gates but integrate them into a unified corpus.

> [C1] Circular time in Nehiyaw cosmology: Hallowell, A.I. (1955). Culture and Experience. University of Pennsylvania Press, ch. 10. [C1] The therapeutic testimony: CBC News, November 1, 2018. [C4] The application of the map of human life on the Wheel to the Okichitaw curriculum and the therapeutic dimension of the Lodge are the author's.

12.5 — The Medicine Wheel and the Lodge: Space, Ceremony, and Orientation

The Okichitaw Lodge is not a neutral space: it is a cosmologically oriented space according to the Medicine Wheel. The entrance to the Lodge is in the East, in the direction of dawn and new beginnings. The four quadrants of the practice space correspond to the four directions. The position of the master, the advanced students, and the newcomers within the Lodge mirrors the directions corresponding to their level of training. This spatial orientation is not purely symbolic: it has practical effects on the dynamics of the sessions and on the bodily perception of the space by each practitioner.

The opening ceremony of every session — the smudging with the four sacred medicines, the welcoming words in the Nêhiyawêwin, the acknowledgement of the Ancestors — is structured according to the sequence of the four directions. The smudging begins in the East and proceeds clockwise (following the path of the sun) toward the South, the West, and the North, then returns to the East to close the circle. This circular movement is not random: it is a micro-representation of the complete path of the Wheel that every session of practice sets out to honour.

The drum (mêsisêkihk) used in Lodge ceremonies has the form of a circle: this is not random. The circle of the drum is the Medicine Wheel in acoustic form: the sound it emits propagates in all directions simultaneously, filling the space uniformly. The rhythm of the drum is the rhythm of the heart: four beats for life, four directions for the universe, four Gates for the curriculum. In Lodge sessions in which the drum is used, the rhythm structures not only the ceremony but also the movement sequences.

The spatial structure of the Lodge also has implications for the management of internal conflict within the community. When two students have a disagreement or mutual tension, the Lodge protocol provides that resolution occurs at the centre of the Wheel: the space that belongs to all directions equally and to none exclusively. The centre of the Medicine Wheel is the point of balance between the four directions: the place where the ceremonial fire is lit in the Sun Dance. Bringing a conflict to the centre of the Lodge means submitting it to the light of all directions simultaneously.

A little-documented aspect is the distinction between the fixed Lodge space (the NCCT in Toronto) and the temporary Lodge space. When Lépine conducts sessions in other locations — on Manitoba reserves, in schools, or in community centres in other cities — the Lodge space is ceremonially recreated on site. This is possible because the Lodge space is defined not by the physical walls but by the cosmological orientation: a practice circle opened with the correct ceremony, oriented to the four directions with the appropriate protocols, is a Lodge regardless of the physical place in which it is located. This portability is one of the most adaptive characteristics of the system.

> [C2] The spatial structure of the Lodge and the opening and closing ceremonies: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; okichitaw.com. [C4] The analysis of conflict dynamics in the Lodge, the portability of the Lodge space, and the intergenerational dimension are the author's.

12.6 — The Medicine Wheel and the Pedagogy of the Okichitaw System

The Medicine Wheel is not only a cosmological backdrop to the curriculum: it structures its deep pedagogical logic. Understanding the Wheel as a learning system is understanding why the Okichitaw

curriculum has the form it has, why the four Gates succeed each other in the order they do, and why each Gate includes elements that might seem non-martial (ceremony, language, history, philosophy) alongside the technical combat elements.

The fundamental pedagogical principle deriving from the Wheel is cyclic completeness: no competency is truly mastered until it has been traversed in all four directions. A technique learned only at the East level is a technique understood intellectually but not executed under pressure. A technique brought to the South is a technique one knows how to execute in direct confrontation, but which is lost when focus is absent. A technique brought to the West is a technique one knows how to teach. A technique brought to the North is a technique internalised to the point of being automatic: the body knows it without the mind having to remember it.

This progression through the four directions applies to any element of the curriculum. The understanding of the Seven Teachings of the Grandfathers, for example, traverses the same four phases: at the East level, the student knows their names and definitions; at the South, they put them into practice in Lodge relationships; at the West, they use them as a tool for reflection on their own life; at the North, they embody them such that their behaviour expresses them naturally. The mastery of an ethical principle is no different from the mastery of a technique: it requires the same four phases of internalisation.

The curriculum also uses the Wheel as a pedagogical diagnostic instrument: for identifying where a student is in their path not only in terms of formal level but also in terms of which direction they are developing and which they are neglecting. A technically capable student (South developed) who lacks bodily awareness (East

underdeveloped) needs a different pedagogical approach from a very aware student (East developed) who avoids direct confrontation (South underdeveloped). The Medicine Wheel provides a shared vocabulary for this diagnostics.

The assessment of progress in Okichitaw incorporates the Wheel dimension: the student is assessed not only on "how many techniques they can execute" but on "how many directions they have developed in a balanced way." A student who excels in physical strength (South) but neglects awareness (East) does not advance: the Wheel requires balanced development, not specialisation in a single direction. This pedagogical principle produces more complete practitioners: in the Nêhiyaw logic, the community needs all the gifts, not just one.

The Medicine Wheel as a pedagogical system also distinguishes itself from linear curricular approaches in its conception of return: the practitioner who completes the Fourth Gate does not "finish" the path in the sense of having exhausted it. The path of the Wheel is infinite: every time one recommences from the East, one is a different person with a deeper understanding. The great masters of Okichitaw continue to work on the competencies of the East with the same dedication with which they work on those of the North: they know that the awareness that can be developed in the East is infinite, like the light of dawn that every day illuminates something that yesterday was in the shadow.

> [C2] The pedagogy of the Medicine Wheel in the Okichitaw curriculum: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The analysis of cyclic completeness, pedagogical diagnostics, the generalisation gap, multidimensional assessment, and the conception of return as an infinite path are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The Medicine Wheel is not a decoration of the Okichitaw system: it is its load-bearing structure. The four directions organise the Lodge space, the time of the ceremonies, the curriculum progression, and the assessment of progress. The associations between the directions, the colours, the guide animals, the seasons, the phases of human life, and the Seven Teachings construct a system of correspondences that allows the practitioner to navigate their path of growth with multiple and mutually coherent references.

The cosmological map and the pedagogical map coincide: growing as a Warrior and growing as a human being are the same path on the same Wheel.

Chapter 13 analyses the Seven Teachings of the Grandfathers in their complete structure, showing how each Teaching corresponds to a direction of the Wheel and how together they build the ethical code of the Okichitaw system.

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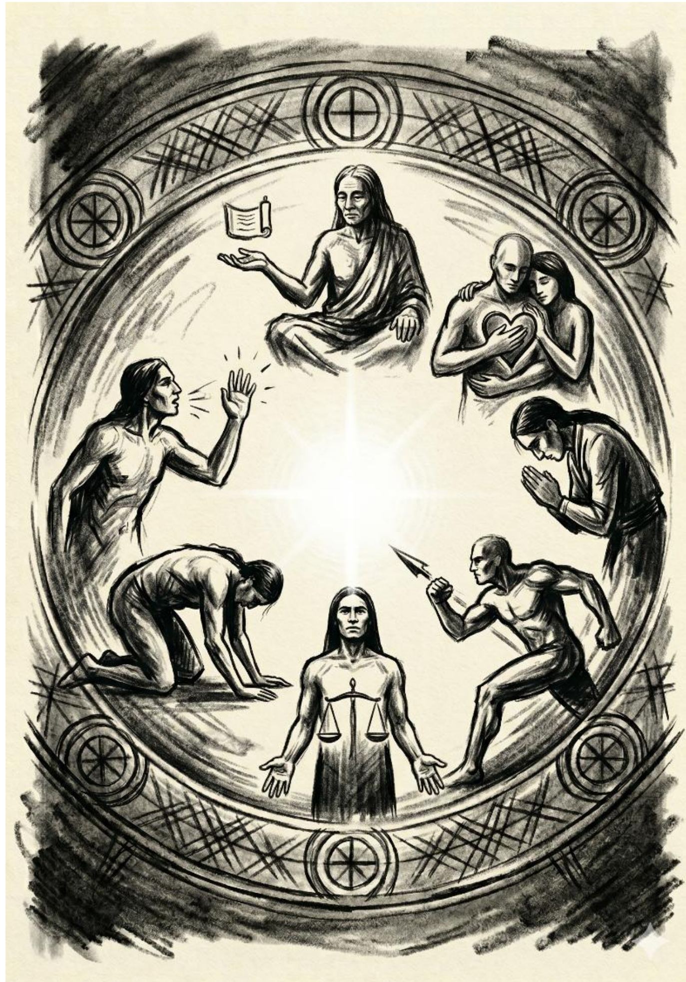
PART FIVE

PHILOSOPHY AND COSMOLOGY

Chapter 13 — The Seven Grandfather Teachings



The Seven Grandfather Teachings — known also as the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers — constitute the ethical core of the

Anishinaabe spiritual tradition and, in adapted versions, of numerous other Algonquian Nations including the Nêhiyaw Cree cultures. These seven principles — Wisdom, Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Humility, and Truth — are not simple rules of conduct: they are cosmologically rooted concepts that define the quality of the human being in relation to oneself, to one's community, to the natural world, and to the Creator.

In the Okichitaw system, the Seven Teachings are an integral part of the curriculum: each Gate of the training path incorporates specific Teachings, and their mastery is assessed alongside the technical competencies. This chapter uses the Seven Teachings in their version recognised by the contemporary Canadian Indigenous community, which is the integrated Anishinaabe-Cree one, reporting both terminologies where available in the consulted sources.

13.1 — Origins and Narrative Tradition of the Seven Teachings

The narrative tradition of the Seven Teachings has deep roots in Anishinaabe cosmology. The most widespread story narrates that, at the beginning of the world, when the Creator had just brought human beings into existence, he was concerned that the new creature — the most fragile and most in need of guidance — should be able to survive and prosper. He then sent Seven Grandfathers — seven ancient sages who had lived so long they had absorbed the wisdom of all the creatures and all the worlds — to bring human beings the gifts that would allow them to live in harmony with Creation. These seven gifts were the Seven Teachings.

The animals associated with the Seven Teachings in the most widespread Anishinaabe version are: the Beaver for Wisdom, the

Eagle for Love, the Buffalo for Respect, the Bear for Courage, the Sabe (a large and wise being, related to the Bigfoot of the Western tradition) for Honesty, the Wolf for Humility, and the Turtle for Truth. These animals carry the Teaching not because they execute it perfectly but because their nature and behaviour embody the quality the Teaching requires.

The Seven Teachings have a circular internal structure in which each one supports and requires the others. Humility without Courage becomes fear; Courage without Honesty becomes arrogance; Honesty without Love becomes cruelty. The system is complete only when all seven are present and balanced: lacking even one of them means having an incomplete system that can easily degenerate into its shadow forms.

The relationship between the Seven Teachings and the Four Gates of the curriculum is not a one-to-one correspondence: each Gate incorporates all Seven Teachings but emphasises them differently. The First Gate (East, Awareness) emphasises Humility and Wisdom; the Second Gate (South, Combat) emphasises Courage and Respect; the Third Gate (West, Preservation) emphasises Honesty and Love; the Fourth Gate (North, Building) emphasises Truth and their integration. But a practitioner of the Fourth Gate who lacked Humility would have lost something essential: the Teachings are not “surpassed,” they are deepened.

> [C3] The Seven Teachings in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai, E. (1988). The Mishomis Book. Indian Country Press. [C3] The narrative version of the animal carriers: Johnston, B.H. (1976). Ojibway Heritage. McClelland and Stewart. [C2] The use of the Seven Teachings in the Okichitaw curriculum: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] The circular structure of the Seven Teachings and their relationship with the Four Gates are the author's.

13.2 — *Nibwaakaawin: Wisdom* (niisoohpikihawasowin)

Nibwaakaawin — Wisdom — is the first of the Seven Teachings and its carrier animal is the Beaver. The Beaver is not the strongest animal of the Plains, nor the fastest, nor the most aggressive: it is the animal that builds with the greatest care and precision, that plans its work in anticipation of the coming winter, that modifies its own environment with intelligence rather than passively adapting to it. The Beaver's Wisdom is not the wisdom of the Elder who knows everything: it is the wisdom of the patient builder who knows how to use what they have to create what is needed.

The Nêhiyaw terminology for Wisdom is *niisoohpikihawasowin*, a term containing the root *niso* (two, second) and *ohpikihawasowin* (growth, nourishment). Nêhiyaw Wisdom is therefore not only accumulated knowledge but the capacity to make what one knows grow, to nourish knowledge so that it produces fruit in real life.

In the Okichitaw system, Wisdom manifests at three distinct levels. At the level of the First Gate (Awareness), Wisdom is the capacity to observe without judging: to see one's own body, movements, and reactions with the same objectivity with which a naturalist observes an animal in its habitat. At the level of the Second Gate (Combat), Wisdom is the capacity to read the situation: to understand the opponent's intentions, assess one's own resources and limits, choose the appropriate response rather than reacting automatically. At the level of the Third and Fourth Gates, Wisdom is the capacity to transmit: to understand where each student is in their path and to offer the right guidance at the right moment.

The shadow form of Wisdom is the presumption of knowing: the illusion of having already understood everything that prevents continued learning. A practitioner who has reached the Fourth Gate

and stops learning from First Gate students has lost Wisdom: they are using accumulated knowledge as a shield instead of as a field of cultivation.

> [C3] Nibwaakaawin in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai (1988), ch. 2. [C3] The Nehiyaw root niisoohpikihawasowin: Wolfart, H.C. and Ahenakew, F. (1998). The Student's Dictionary of Literary Plains Cree. [C4] The application of Wisdom to the three levels of the curriculum and its bodily dimension are the author's.

13.3 — *Zaagi'idiwin: Love* (sâkihitowin)

Zaagi'idiwin — Love — is the second of the Seven Teachings and its carrier animal is the Eagle. The Eagle flies higher than any other bird: its position in the sky allows it to see the totality of the territory, to embrace with its gaze what is visible from above and obscured from below. Its high flight is the metaphor for Love that rises above tribal, family, and personal divisions to embrace the totality of Creation. The Eagle carries prayers to the Creator: its flight is the bridge between the human world and the spiritual world.

The Nêhiyaw terminology for Love is *sâkihitowin*, a term derived from the root *sâkihitow* meaning both "to love" and "to go out from": the idea that Love is a movement outward, an expansion of the self that surpasses its own boundaries to include the other. Nêhiyaw Love is an expansion of one's capacity for care that progressively extends from family to community, from community to Nation, from Nation to all creatures.

In the Okichitaw system, Love manifests first of all as the intention of practice. Every technique of the system — every parry, every hold, every projection — can be executed with a destructive intention or with a protective intention. The same technique that can break a wrist can also block an attack without causing permanent damage. The difference is Love as the fundamental intention: the

Warrior practising Okichitaw uses the techniques with the intention to protect — themselves, their family, their community — not with the intention to destroy.

Love as a Teaching has a special relationship with bodily care in the context of Indigenous communities. The colonial history produced deeply distorted relationships between Indigenous peoples and their bodies: the Residential Schools experience, where children were punished even for speaking their own language, created generations of people who learned to dissociate from their own body, not to feel it, not to care for it. In the Okichitaw Lodge, the intense bodily practice accompanied by the Teaching of Love becomes a process of reconciliation with one's own body: learning to feel it again, to respect it, to care for it.

Love in the Lodge context also expresses itself as mutual care between practitioners. The sparring partner in Okichitaw is not an opponent to defeat: they are a fellow traveller who offers their own body as a field of learning. This requires deep mutual trust and a specific responsibility: the practitioner who uses the partner's body to develop their own techniques must do so with Love as guide. Every technique executed with a partner is an act of mutual care.

> [C3] Zaagi'idiwin in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai (1988), ch. 2. [C3] Sakihitowin in Nehiyawewin: Wolfart and Ahenakew (1998). [C1] The trauma of Residential Schools and bodily dissociation: Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). [C4] Love as the intention of practice, practice as offering, and mutual care between practitioners are the author's.

13.4 — *Minaadendamowin: Respect* (kitimâkiêtisowin)

Minaadendamowin — Respect — is the third Teaching and its carrier animal is the Buffalo. No animal embodies Respect like the Buffalo in the North American Plains cultures. The Buffalo offered everything to the Nations that depended upon it: the meat was food, the hide was

the blanket and the tipi, the bones were tools, the hair was insulation, the sinews were ropes. Nothing was wasted: every part of the Buffalo was used with gratitude and respect. The Buffalo as carrier of Respect teaches that Respect is first of all the recognition of the gift that every being brings to the community.

The Nêhiyaw terminology for Respect is *kitimâkiêtisowin*, a term containing the root *kitimâkisi* meaning “to treat with care,” “to treat as something precious.” Nêhiyaw Respect is not primarily an attitude of deference toward authority or age: it is the practice of recognising the value and sacredness of every being, every thing, and every moment.

In the Okichitaw system, Respect manifests first of all as respect for the Lodge and its protocols. Entering the Lodge requires the correct preparation: the smudging, the appropriate posture, the greeting to the other practitioners in the established manner. These protocols are not empty formalities: they are the concrete form of Respect toward the shared space, toward the tradition that space custodies, and toward the other practitioners who share the path.

Respect in combat is one of the most complex principles of the system. How does one respect someone one is seeking to neutralise? The answer of the Okichitaw system is that combat is a dialogue, not a destruction. The combat technique must be the exactly proportionate response to the threat: neither more nor less than necessary to protect oneself and others. Using a force excessive relative to the threat is a violation of Respect toward the opponent. This principle — called “proportionality” in the Western military tradition — has deeper ethical roots in the Nêhiyaw tradition: it is the expression of Respect even toward the one who attacks.

The shadow form of Respect is deference: the respect that does not recognise the value of the other but bends to authority out of fear or habit. Colonial systems produced centuries of forced deference in Indigenous peoples. Rediscovering authentic Respect — the kind that recognises the value of every being without subordinating it to authority — is part of the decolonisation process the Okichitaw Lodge promotes.

> [C3] Minaadendamowin in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai (1988), ch. 2. [C3] The relationship between the Buffalo and Respect in Plains culture: Meili, D. (1991). Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta's Native Elders. NeWest Press. [C4] Respect as proportionality in combat, the critique of colonial deference, and Respect as Lodge pedagogy are the author's.

13.5 — *Aakode'dewin: Courage* (sôhkâtisiwin)

Aakode'dewin — Courage — is the fourth Teaching and its carrier animal is the Bear. The Bear is the Warrior par excellence of the Plains: not the fastest predator, not the most agile, but when defending its own family or territory it demonstrates a determination and strength that no other animal of the Plains can equal. The Courage of the Bear is not the absence of fear: it is the capacity to act with determination despite fear.

The Nêhiyaw terminology for Courage is *sôhkâtisiwin*, a term containing the root *sôhk* meaning “strong,” “steadfast,” and the root *âtisiwin* meaning “manner of being,” “character.” Nêhiyaw Courage is therefore literally “strong-being” as a quality of character, not as a physical performance.

In the Okichitaw system, Courage manifests at several levels. The Courage of the First Gate (Awareness) is the courage to see oneself honestly: to look at one’s own fears, weaknesses, and automatic reactions without fleeing. The Courage of the Second Gate

(Combat) is the physical courage of direct confrontation: the capacity to enter the danger zone and act with precision despite the adrenaline.

The Courage that Okichitaw cultivates most systematically is what contemporary psychology calls moral courage: the capacity to do the right thing even when it is socially uncomfortable or personally costly. A practitioner who sees a training partner doing something incorrect with a younger student and says nothing to avoid conflict is failing in Courage in the sense of the Bear: they are choosing their own comfort above the protection of the more vulnerable.

Poundmaker at Cut Knife Hill, who held back his victorious Warriors from pursuing the retreating troops, is the clearest historical example of this type of Courage: the courage to stop the victory in order to preserve one's own humanity. The shadow form of Courage is recklessness: action without fear that is not Courage but thoughtlessness.

> [C3] Aakode'ewin in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai (1988), ch. 2. [C3] Sohkatisiwin in Nehiyawewin: Wolfart and Ahenakew (1998). [C1] The historical example of Poundmaker: Stonechild, B. and Waiser, B. (1997). Loyal Till Death. Fifth House Publishers, ch. 8. [C4] Moral courage, the relationship with fear, and Courage as healing are the author's.

13.6 — *Gwayakwaadiziwin: Honesty* (tâpitawâtâkêyiwin)

Gwayakwaadiziwin — Honesty — is the fifth Teaching and its carrier, in the Anishinaabe version, is the Sabe (a large and wise being related to the Bigfoot of the Western tradition). The Sabe is the only one of the carrier animals not commonly found physically on the Plains: it is a being at the boundary between the human world and the spiritual world. This choice is not random: Honesty is the Teaching that requires standing in that boundary territory between what one sees and what one does not want to see, between what one knows and what one prefers to ignore.

The Nêhiyaw terminology for Honesty is *tâpitawâtâkêyiwin*, a term containing the root *tâpitawât* meaning “to be straight,” “to walk straight.” Nêhiyaw Honesty concerns not only words: it is a way of being, a way of walking in the world. An honest person in the Nêhiyaw sense is a person who “walks straight”: whose actions correspond to their words, whose words correspond to their values, whose values correspond to their actions.

In the Okichitaw system, Honesty manifests first of all as realistic self-assessment. An honest practitioner knows exactly where they are in their path: they know their strengths and weaknesses without minimising the former or amplifying the latter. The Lodge cultivates a culture of honest feedback: the uncomfortable truth, spoken with respect and the intention to help, is more precious than a thousand words of insincere encouragement.

Honesty toward the tradition is a specific aspect that Lépine has emphasised in numerous interviews. The Okichitaw system cannot be presented as something it is not: it is not an ancient unchanged system, it is not a complete collection of all Nêhiyaw martial arts, it is not the only Nêhiyaw combat system. It is a system created by Lépine between 1988 and 1997, based on written sources, oral tradition, and martial competencies validated by the community. This honesty about the origins of the system is an integral part of the Teaching of Honesty.

The shadow form of Honesty is cruelty: the truth used as a weapon rather than as care. Honesty without Love becomes harshness. And Honesty in the context of Indigenous history has a political dimension that cannot be ignored: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission chose Truth as the first word of its

mandate because without shared historical truth, no reconciliation is possible.

> [C3] Gwayakwaadiziwin in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai (1988), ch. 2. [C3] Tapitawatakeyiwin in Nehiyawewin: Wolfart and Ahenakew (1998). [C2] Honesty about the origins of the system: Lepine in okichitaw.com. [C1] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission: TRC Canada (2015). [C4] Realistic self-assessment, honest feedback, and Honesty as opposition to colonial narrative are the author's.

13.7 — *Dabaadendiziwin: Humility* (dabâseyinâkosiwin)

Dabaadendiziwin — Humility — is the sixth Teaching and its carrier animal is the Wolf. The Wolf is one of the most efficient hunters of the Plains, a pack predator capable of bringing down prey much larger than itself. Yet the Wolf does not hunt alone: it depends on the pack, co-ordinates with others, shares food according to precise but flexible hierarchies. The strength of the Wolf does not lie in its individual superiority but in its capacity to be part of something greater than itself. The Wolf's Humility is not weakness: it is the wisdom of knowing one's place in the pack and contributing from one's real position.

The Nêhiyaw terminology for Humility is *dabâseyinâkosiwin*, a term containing the root *dabâseyinâko* meaning "to appear small," "to see oneself as small." Nêhiyaw Humility is not the lowering of oneself in the sense of self-deprecation: it is the capacity to see oneself in one's real proportion relative to the totality of Creation.

In the Okichitaw system, Humility is the prerequisite of all learning. A practitioner who arrives in the Lodge believing they already know cannot receive anything: their vessel is already full. Humility is the emptying of the vessel: the readiness not to know, to recommence from the beginning even after years of practice, to receive corrections from someone younger or less experienced if that

correction is right. Many of the most advanced practitioners of the Okichitaw system come from different martial backgrounds: black belts in karate, Taekwondo masters. Entering the Lodge as beginners, after years of competency in another system, is one of the most difficult and most precious acts of Humility.

Humility and Courage form one of the most important pairs of the system. Without Courage, Humility becomes passivity: the person who makes themselves small out of fear of occupying space is not Humble in the Nêhiyaw sense but submissive. Without Humility, Courage becomes arrogance. The shadow form of Humility is shame: the self-lowering that is not recognition of proportion but destructive self-deprecation. Shame was used systematically by the colonial system against Indigenous peoples. Distinguishing between authentic Humility and internalised colonial shame is an internal decolonisation work that the Lodge supports through practice and through the Teachings.

> [C3] Dabaadendiziwin in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai (1988), ch. 2. [C3] Dabaseyinakosiwin in Nehiyawewin: Wolfart and Ahenakew (1998). [C1] Shame as a colonial tool: Bombay, Matheson and Anisman (2014). Transcultural Psychiatry. [C4] The Humility-Courage pair, the distinction between Humility and colonised shame, and the Wolf as a metaphor for mutual dependency are the author's.

13.8 — *Debwewin: Truth* (tâpwêwin)

Debwewin — Truth — is the seventh and last Teaching and its carrier animal is the Turtle. The Turtle carries the world on its back in the cosmology of many North American Nations: it is the foundation upon which everything else is built. The Turtle's shell is divided into thirteen sections corresponding to the thirteen lunar months of the year, and its perimeter into twenty-eight sections corresponding to the twenty-eight days of each month. The Turtle is therefore an embodied cosmic calendar: it carries within itself the structure of time

and the connection between the lunar cycle and the cycle of life. The Truth the Turtle carries is the foundational truth: the structure of reality that holds everything else.

The Nêhiyaw terminology for Truth is *tâpwêwin*, a term containing the root *tâpwâ* meaning “speaks the truth,” “is as it is said.” Nêhiyaw Truth is not only the correspondence between words and facts but the correspondence between one’s being and the deeper reality of Creation. Truth is not only spoken: it is lived.

In the Okichitaw system, Truth is the Teaching of the Fourth Gate: the fruit of the complete path through the four directions. Truth is the Turtle that carries the other six Teachings: without the groundedness that Truth provides, the other Teachings risk becoming forms of self-satisfaction or social performance. Wisdom without Truth becomes knowledge for its own sake; Love without Truth becomes sentimentality; Courage without Truth becomes random violence.

Truth in the practice of combat has a specific manifestation that advanced Okichitaw practitioners describe as “the right response”: the moment when the body knows without the mind having decided. In the pressure of a real defence situation, there is no time for rational thought: the body responds before the mind formulates the question. This “right response” of the body is embodied Truth in the gesture.

The shadow form of Truth is dogmatism: the absolute certainty that stifles doubt and prevents growth. The Okichitaw system is anti-dogmatic by structure: it recognises that Truth is larger than any system, including its own. In the context of reconciliation, practising Truth includes recognising historical truth: the cultural

genocide of the Residential Schools, the expropriation of lands, the suppression of ceremonies are facts that must be acknowledged as true before healing can begin.

> [C3] Debwewin in the Anishinaabe tradition: Benton-Banai (1988), ch. 2. [C3] The Turtle as world-carrier in North American cosmology: Erdoes, R. and Ortiz, A. (eds.) (1984). American Indian Myths and Legends. Pantheon Books. [C1] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission: TRC Canada (2015). [C4] Truth as the right response of the body, dogmatism as the shadow form, and Truth in the context of reconciliation are the author's.

13.9 — The Seven Teachings as an Integrated System

The Seven Teachings are not seven separate rules that can be practised independently: they are an organic system in which each one supports, completes, and requires the others. The systemic structure of the Seven Teachings can be visualised as a Wheel in which each Teaching occupies a position that defines its relationships with the others. Wisdom and Truth form the vertical axis of the system. Love and Honesty form the axis of relationship. Respect and Humility form the axis of attitude. At the centre of everything: Courage, the capacity to act despite obstacles, which allows the other six to manifest in the real world.

The interdependencies between the Teachings are visible in their shadow forms. Wisdom without Humility becomes presumption. Love without Honesty becomes destructive indulgence. Respect without Courage becomes deference. Courage without Respect becomes violence. Honesty without Love becomes cruelty. Humility without Courage becomes shame. Truth without the other six becomes dogmatism or nihilism. This schema of interdependencies explains why the Teachings must be practised as a system: cultivating only one always produces the shadow form of the others.

The Seven Teachings in the specific context of Okichitaw are transmitted through three parallel channels, consistently with the Nêhiyaw tradition. The first channel is narration: the stories of the Elders, the historical examples, the ceremonial discussions that make the Teachings explicit. The second channel is embodied practice: every technique of the system, every Lodge protocol, every opening and closing ceremony is an occasion to practise one or more Teachings. The third channel is modelling: the master who embodies the Teachings in their own life is the most powerful curriculum, because students see how Wisdom, Love, and Respect manifest in the daily practice of those who have truly integrated them.

The legacy of the Seven Teachings in Okichitaw is that of a complete ethical code that does not separate technique from ethics nor ethics from spirituality. In many modern martial arts systems, these three levels have been separated: technique is taught as efficiency, ethics as a rulebook, spirituality as an individual option. In the Okichitaw system, the three levels are inseparable: a technique executed without Love as intention is not an Okichitaw technique, it is simply a violent action. This is perhaps the most original and most important contribution of the system to the global conversation on martial arts.

> [C2] The integration of the Seven Teachings in the Okichitaw curriculum: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; Lepine's statements. [C4] The systemic structure, interdependencies and shadow forms, three transmission channels, and the critique of the separation of technique-ethics-spirituality in modern martial arts are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The Seven Grandfather Teachings — Wisdom, Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Humility, and Truth — are not a decorative

addition to the Okichitaw curriculum: they are its ethical heart. Every technique, every protocol, every ceremony is an expression of one or more of these Teachings; every assessment of progress includes an assessment of their development.

The Nêhiyaw Warrior is defined not only by what they know how to do but by how they are oriented in the world: with what intention they act, with what care they treat others, with what honesty they see and show themselves, with what courage they face their fears, and with what Truth they inhabit their life.

Chapter 14 completes Part Five by analysing the specific ethical principles governing the Warrior's behaviour inside and outside the Lodge: the code of combat, the role of the Warrior in the contemporary community, and the relationship between martial practice and the social responsibility of the practitioner.

* * *

PART FIVE

PHILOSOPHY AND COSMOLOGY

Chapter 14 — The Fundamental Ethical Principles of the Warrior

If Chapter 13 analysed the Seven Grandfather Teachings as a cosmologically rooted ethical system, this chapter examines their practical applications in the concrete life of the Warrior. The fundamental question is simple in its formulation and complex in its answer: how does a Nêhiyaw Warrior behave? Not in the Lodge, where the protocols are codified and the master's supervision is present, but in daily life, in interactions with family and community, in real conflict situations, and in the decisions that define character far more than technical performance.

The answer the Okichitaw system offers is not a list of rules: it is a set of principles that, internalised through years of practice and reflection, guide the Warrior's judgement in situations that no rule can fully anticipate. This approach through principles rather than rules is consistent with the Nêhiyaw tradition: the ethical code is not transmitted as a list of commands but as an understanding of the right way of being in the world that the practitioner must integrate until it becomes their natural way of acting.

14.1 — The Warrior's Code in the Nêhiyaw Tradition

The Nêhiyaw warrior tradition was not a combat system devoid of ethics: it was an ethical system embodied in the body and actions of the Warrior. The Nêhiyaw term closest to the concept of "warrior" is *okichitaw* (from which the name of the system derives), meaning literally "one who prepares" or "they are ready": the Warrior is the one who is always ready — ready to defend, ready to serve, ready to protect. This notion of readiness has no aggressive connotation: it is not the readiness of the predator waiting for prey but the readiness of the guardian who watches so that those who depend on them may be safe.

The Nêhiyaw warrior code articulated itself around three primary responsibilities: the protection of one's own family and band, the defence of the community's territory and resources, and the mediation of internal conflicts. These three levels of responsibility required different competencies: protecting the family required presence, vigilance, and physical strength; defending territory required strategy, endurance, and co-ordination with other Warriors; internal mediation required judgement, moral authority, and the capacity for listening.

The history of the Great Canadian Plains offers concrete examples of this code in action. Big Bear, who refused to sign Treaty No. 6 in 1876, did not do so out of aggressiveness but out of responsibility toward his own people: he understood that the treaty terms would imprison his band on a reserve depriving it of the resources necessary for survival. His resistance was an act of protection, not provocation. Poundmaker, who refused to pursue the defeated army at Cut Knife Hill, did so because he understood that the massacre of prisoners would have compromised his people's moral position and brought harsher reprisals. Both these leaders embodied the Warrior's code in its fullest sense: strength in the service of protection, not of affirmation.

Honour in the Nêhiyaw tradition was not the honour of personal glory typical of many Eurasian warrior traditions: it was the reputation of the one who behaves well toward their community. The Nêhiyaw warrior code also applied to enemies. The tradition distinguished between the enemy in battle and the captured prisoner: the treatment of the prisoner followed precise protocols that vary among different bands and historical periods, but that in general prohibited gratuitous torture and permitted adoption or exchange.

The contemporary Okichitaw system inherits this code and adapts it to the Canadian urban context of the twenty-first century.

> [C1] The term okichitaw and its etymology: Wolfart, H.C. and Ahenakew, F. (1998). The Student's Dictionary of Literary Plains Cree. [C1] Warrior codes in Plains cultures: Hoebel, E.A. (1960). The Cheyenne. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, ch. 5. [C1] Big Bear and Poundmaker as examples of the warrior code: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), chs. 6-8. [C4] The adaptation of the code to the contemporary urban context is the author's.

14.2 — The Fundamental Distinction: Violence and Strength

The most fundamental ethical principle of the Okichitaw system is the distinction between violence and strength. These two concepts are often confused in contemporary culture because they share the superficial characteristic of involving the use of the body as an instrument of physical pressure. But the ethical distinction between the two is absolute: violence is the use of the body to dominate, injure, or destroy regardless of necessity; strength is the use of the body to protect to the exact degree that the situation requires. A martial arts system that does not make this distinction does not teach the art of the Warrior: it teaches techniques of violence.

The distinction between violence and strength does not depend on the intensity of the physical action: a light blow inflicted gratuitously is violence; a painful projection used to stop an aggression that would have caused greater damage is strength. The distinction depends on three factors: intention (to protect or to dominate), necessity (did the situation require this response?), and proportionality (was the response adequate to the threat?). All three factors must be present for the use of strength to be ethically justified in the Okichitaw system.

Necessity as an ethical criterion translates in practice into the principle of the last-resort response: the use of physical strength is justified only when all reasonable alternatives have been exhausted or are not available. The alternatives include: withdrawing from the situation (when possible), verbal de-escalation (when reasonably practicable), requesting external help (when time permits), and demonstrating determination without use of strength (which is often sufficient to discourage an aggressor). A Nêhiyaw Warrior who has many options and chooses physical strength before exploring the others is not applying the ethical code of the system.

The distinction between violence and strength has direct implications for the pedagogy of the Lodge. Students who enter the system often carry stories of violence suffered or perpetrated, and often confuse technical competency with the power to cause harm. The pedagogical work of the first Gates is also the work of re-orienting this understanding: showing through practice and reflection that the technical competency of Okichitaw is the capacity to respond with precision to a real threat, not the capacity to injure whoever one wishes. A student who uses the techniques learned in the Lodge outside a situation of genuine necessity violates the fundamental principle of the system and may be expelled.

> [C3] The cosmological vision of violence in the Nehiyaw tradition: Mandelbaum (1940), ch. 7. [C4] The distinction between violence and strength as a founding principle, the last-resort response, the pedagogical work with anger, and the graduated response as an embodied form of proportionality are the author's.

14.3 — The Warrior as Protector: The Hierarchy of Responsibilities

The fundamental role of the Nêhiyaw Warrior is protection: of one's own immediate family, one's extended band, one's Nation, and in a

broader sense of the territory and the creatures that inhabit it. This protection is not an abstraction: it expresses itself through physical presence, constant vigilance, the readiness to act when necessary, and the construction of conditions that make aggression less likely. The Warrior is the custodian of the space in which the community's life can flourish.

The hierarchy of protective responsibilities has a concentric structure: it begins with the protection of oneself (because one cannot protect others if not able to function), then of the immediate family, then of the extended community, then of vulnerable strangers. This concentric structure does not mean that the more external responsibilities are less important: it means that the capacity to exercise them depends on the fulfilment of the more internal ones. A Warrior who neglects their own family to protect strangers is violating the natural hierarchy of responsibilities.

In the contemporary urban context of Okichitaw, the protective responsibility of the Warrior translates into specific behaviours. The Okichitaw practitioner is the one who intervenes when they see someone being harassed on the bus or in the subway, not because they seek conflict but because their training has given them both the technical competency and the ethical clarity to do so. This intervention is never automatic: it requires a rapid assessment of the situation before any action.

The protection of territory is a responsibility that the Okichitaw system inherits from the tradition but reinterprets in the contemporary context. The traditional Nêhiyaw territory — the Great Plains of Saskatchewan and Alberta — is not recoverable in its pre-colonial form. In the meantime, the concept of "territory" has expanded to include cultural space: the Nêhiyawêwin language, the

ceremonies, the stories, the traditional practices. Protecting this cultural territory is the responsibility of the contemporary Warrior in the dimension of decolonisation.

A specific tension that the Okichitaw system addresses explicitly is that between the protective responsibility of the Warrior and the risk of paternalism. A Warrior who protects without asking the consent of those they intend to protect is violating that person's autonomy. The Okichitaw system teaches that authentic protection recognises and respects the autonomy of those who are protected: it offers its own presence and competencies but leaves the decision on intervention to the one who has the right to make that decision. This distinction between protection and control is one of the most difficult to internalise and one of the most important.

> [C2] The role of the Warrior as protector in the Okichitaw system: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript; okichitaw.com. [C1] The crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women: National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019). Reclaiming Power and Place. [C4] The concentric hierarchy of responsibilities, the risk of paternalism, and the protection of cultural territory are the author's.

14.4 — The Hierarchy of Responses: De-escalation, Withdrawal, Strength

One of the most practical ethical principles of the Okichitaw system is the hierarchy of responses to a potentially conflictual situation. This hierarchy is not a list of techniques to apply in sequence: it is a fundamental orientation of the Warrior's judgement that establishes which options must be considered first and in what order escalation toward more intense responses is justified.

The first option in the hierarchy is prevention: early recognition of the signals indicating that a situation could become

dangerous and the change of context before conflict materialises. This requires the capacity to read the environment — the behaviours, postures, and movements of surrounding people — with the same quality of attention that the practitioner develops in Lodge practice. Spatial awareness, reading of body language, early identification of signs of tension: these are competencies developed by the First Gate of the curriculum with direct application in conflict prevention.

The second option is withdrawal: leaving the potentially conflictual situation before it degenerates. Withdrawal is not cowardice in the Okichitaw system: it is the most efficient response to many situations of potential danger. A Warrior who has the technical competency to fight but chooses to withdraw is exercising the judgement of the experienced Warrior: they know that combat always entails risks and that avoiding unnecessary combat is wiser than winning an avoidable one. The Humility of Okichitaw includes the Humility of not needing to demonstrate one's strength.

The third option is verbal de-escalation: the use of communication to reduce tension and move the conflict away. Verbal de-escalation requires specific competencies that the Okichitaw system develops explicitly: the capacity to maintain calm and mental clarity while under pressure, the capacity to communicate with authority without provoking, and the capacity to offer the potential aggressor a way out that preserves their dignity. This last capacity is particularly important: many conflict situations intensify because the aggressor feels trapped and sees no way to withdraw without losing face.

The fourth option is dissuasive physical presence: the demonstration, through posture, positioning, and gaze, of being fully present and fully capable of responding. Many aggressors choose

their targets based on the perception of vulnerability: a target who appears aware, determined, and prepared is far less attractive than one who appears distracted or frightened. Dissuasive physical presence requires no words and no physical action: it is the bodily communication of a readiness to respond that often resolves the situation without contact.

The fifth and last option in the hierarchy is the use of physical strength. This level is justified only when all the preceding options are not available or have proved insufficient, and when the threat is real, imminent, and grave. Physical strength, in this context, is the last resort of protection, not the preferred or most effective response. The Okichitaw system teaches the techniques of physical strength because there are situations in which no other option is available: but it teaches equally, with equal emphasis, that reaching this level of the hierarchy is always, in some measure, a failure of the preceding options.

> [C4] The hierarchy of responses as an ethical principle of the Okichitaw system, verbal de-escalation competencies, dissuasive physical presence, and the special case of intervention in defence of another are the author's. [C3] Comparative approaches to the hierarchy of responses in martial arts: Lowry, D. (1985). Autumn Lightning. Shambhala Publications.

14.5 — Proportionality: The Ethical Measure of Action

Proportionality is the principle that measures the correspondence between the threat and the response. A proportionate response is one that uses exactly the strength necessary to neutralise the threat without exceeding it. A response disproportionate by deficiency is insufficient to protect; a response disproportionate by excess is ethically unjustified and legally problematic. Finding the proportionate response is one of the most difficult tasks of the

Warrior because it requires a rapid and precise judgement under conditions of high stress.

Proportionality in Lodge practice is cultivated through graduated sparring: the sessions of direct confrontation are calibrated in increasing intensity, and the practitioner progressively learns to manage ever-higher levels of pressure while maintaining control of the response. A practitioner who in a controlled sparring session cannot stop their technique before contact has a proportionality problem that must be addressed in the curriculum before proceeding to more intense levels of practice.

The principle of proportionality also applies to the temporal dimension of the response. A right response at the right moment is more effective than a perfect response applied too late. The Okichitaw system develops timing as an ethical as well as technical competency: the capacity to choose the right moment to act is an integral part of the proportionality of the response. Acting too early, before the threat is real, is aggression; acting too late, when the effective defence window has closed, can lead to greater harm.

Poundmaker at Cut Knife Hill is the most emblematic historical example: his Warriors could have pursued and destroyed the retreating troops but he held them back because the immediate threat had ceased and continuing the action would have been disproportionate to the objective. Poundmaker was not weak: he was proportionate. That choice of proportionality has remained in the memory of the Nêhiyaw Nation as one of the wisest acts in its history.

The gradation of physical strength is the technical manifestation of proportionality. The Okichitaw system explicitly teaches the difference between control techniques without damage,

control techniques with temporary pain, techniques causing reversible damage, and techniques causing permanent damage or death. Every level of this gradation corresponds to a specific threat level: the permanent damage techniques are justified only in the face of a threat of permanent damage. Using the higher-level techniques in the face of lower-level threats is a violation of proportionality and of the Warrior’s ethical code.

> [C1] Proportionality as an ethical principle of combat: Walzer, M. (1977). Just and Unjust Wars. Basic Books. [C1] The Poundmaker case: Stonechild and Waiser (1997), ch. 8. [C4] Proportionality in the Okichitaw system, its temporal and social dimension, the technical gradation of strength, and the case of the aggressor in conditions of vulnerability are the author's.

14.6 — The Warrior and Contemporary Law

Okichitaw practitioners operate within the Canadian legal context of the twenty-first century, and the system explicitly concerns itself with forming its practitioners in the understanding of the legal framework governing the use of strength. This is not only practical prudence: it is part of the Warrior’s ethical code. A Warrior who uses their strength in a technically correct but legally problematic manner causes harm to their community: they suffer the legal consequences, lose the capacity to protect those who depend on them, and compromise the reputation of the system.

The relevant Canadian legal framework for martial arts practitioners is primarily the Criminal Code of Canada, Section 34, which codifies the right to self-defence. Section 34 establishes that a person is exempt from criminal liability for actions taken in defence of themselves or another person if: the threat was real or reasonably perceived as real, the action taken had the purpose of defending themselves, and the actions were reasonable in the circumstances.

The “reasonableness” factor is assessed by a court considering the nature of the threat, the history between the parties, the reasonably available options, and the proportionality of the response.

The Okichitaw system trains practitioners in a practical understanding of these legal criteria that substantially overlaps with the ethical principles of the Nêhiyaw Warrior. The hierarchy of responses — prevention, withdrawal, de-escalation, strength — is consistent with the legal requirement that defensive actions be “reasonable in the circumstances.” Ethical proportionality corresponds to legal proportionality. The Warrior’s code and Canadian criminal law are more aligned than might appear.

The relationship between law and ethics in Indigenous communities has a historical complexity that the Okichitaw system recognises. Canadian law was used systematically to suppress Indigenous cultural practices: the prohibition of ceremonies, the Pass System, the criminalisation of non-compliance with reserve restrictions. This history creates an ambivalent relationship between Indigenous communities and law. The Okichitaw system navigates this ambivalence by recognising the legitimacy of specific laws protecting the physical integrity of persons while simultaneously claiming the right to its own ethical code that in certain respects exceeds what the law requires.

Canadian statistics show that Indigenous peoples are represented in Canadian prisons in disproportionate numbers: approximately 5% of the general population but approximately 30% of inmates. This disparity reflects both systemic racism in the judicial system and the social consequences of intergenerational trauma. An Indigenous Okichitaw practitioner who uses strength in a legitimate self-defence situation faces a systematically greater legal risk than a

non-Indigenous practitioner in the same situation. This reality makes the training in the conservative hierarchy of responses even more important.

> [C1] The Criminal Code of Canada, Section 34: Government of Canada, R.S.C., 1985, c. C-46. [C1] Indigenous overrepresentation in Canadian prisons: Correctional Service Canada (2020). Indigenous Community Development. [C4] The alignment between the Warrior's ethics and Canadian law, the divergence on the duty to retreat, the historical ambivalence toward law, and the specific implications for Indigenous practitioners are the author's. Nothing in this chapter constitutes legal advice.

14.7 — Responsibility toward Future Generations

Nêhiyaw cosmology has a temporal orientation that extends much further into the future than is typical in contemporary culture. The principle attributed to the Iroquois tradition — “make decisions considering the impact on the seven generations to come” — has a parallel in the Nêhiyaw tradition in the idea that every present action carries consequences that propagate through the subsequent cycles of the Wheel. This extended temporal responsibility is an integral part of the Warrior’s ethical code.

In the Okichitaw system, the responsibility toward future generations expresses itself first of all in the quality of transmission. Every master who trains a student is responsible not only for what that student learns but for what that student will in turn transmit. A flawed transmission — whether technically or ethically — multiplies through successive generations: today’s student is tomorrow’s master, and the defects of their learning will become the defects in the teaching of their students.

The responsibility toward future generations includes the responsibility to transmit not only the techniques but their cultural context. A combat system emptied of its cultural context is a sequence

of dangerous movements without the ethical structure that makes them safe. The risk that the Okichitaw system will be adopted as a technical system and stripped of the Medicine Wheel, the Seven Teachings, and the Nêhiyaw history is a real risk in the context of the global commercialisation of martial arts. The Warrior's ethical code includes resistance to this cultural appropriation and the care to ensure the system remains intact in its totality.

The environmental dimension of the responsibility toward future generations is explicit in Nêhiyaw cosmology. The Nêhiyaw territory — the Great Canadian Plains with their biodiversity, their waterways, their ecosystems — has been profoundly transformed by colonisation, intensive agriculture, and oil and gas extraction. The Nêhiyaw warrior tradition included the protection of this territory as a fundamental responsibility. Contemporary Okichitaw Warriors express this responsibility through environmental activism and participation in consultation processes on projects impacting Indigenous territories.

The Nêhiyawêwin language is a specific dimension of the responsibility toward future generations that the Okichitaw system carries. The Nêhiyawêwin is classified as an endangered language: the number of native speakers is declining and the majority of urban Okichitaw practitioners are not fluent speakers. The fact that the system uses Nêhiyaw terminology for the fundamental concepts and incorporates phrases and prayers in the Nêhiyawêwin in the Lodge ceremonies is a contribution to the vitality of the language: it keeps alive the sound and meaning of the language in the ears and mouths of practitioners, even those who do not speak it fluently.

> [C1] The seven generations principle: Clarkson, L., Morrissette, V. and Regallet, G. (1992). Our Responsibility to the Seventh Generation. International Institute for Sustainable Development. [C1] The state of the Nehiyawewin as an

> endangered language: UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2010). [C2] Alexander Lepine as second generation: okichitaw.com. [C4] Quality of transmission, the risk of cultural appropriation, environmental and psychological responsibility are the author's.

14.8 — The Ethics of Training: The Lodge as a Safe Space

The Okichitaw Lodge is a training space in which dangerous techniques are taught: projections, joint locks, impact techniques that could cause serious physical harm if executed without control. This makes the Lodge a context requiring a much more rigorous ethics of training than that required by any other educational activity. The ethics of training in Okichitaw articulates itself around four fundamental principles: physical safety, respect for autonomy, transparency about expectations, and responsible management of the instructor's power.

Physical safety in the Lodge is the absolute priority that surpasses every other consideration. Every technique is introduced with a gradual progression that builds competency before increasing intensity. Sparring sessions are supervised and immediately interrupted if a practitioner signals discomfort or pain. Safety protocols — the tap-out (the agreed signal for stopping), the rules on prohibited techniques at specific curriculum phases, the policy on protective equipment — are non-negotiable and their violation has immediate consequences.

Respect for students' autonomy is a principle requiring specific attention in the context of a martial arts system. The Lodge is a space in which the instructor has authority and in which students normally follow the instructor's directions. This hierarchical structure is functional to learning but also creates a risk: students might feel social pressure to execute techniques with which they are

uncomfortable, to exceed their physical limits in an unsafe manner, or to maintain silence about negative experiences. The system's ethical code establishes explicitly that every student has the absolute right to say no to any technique or exercise at any moment, without this having any consequences for their path.

Transparency about expectations is the principle requiring that students know exactly what the system expects of them at every level of the curriculum. The criteria for passage from one Gate to the next must be clear, knowable in advance, and applied consistently. A student working toward the Second Gate must know exactly which technical competencies they need to demonstrate, which ethical principles they should have internalised, and which behavioural standards in the Lodge are assessed. Transparency eliminates the instructor's arbitrary power to decide case by case based on personal sympathies or antipathies.

The responsible management of the instructor's power is perhaps the most delicate principle and the one requiring the most attention. The instructor in the Lodge has significant power over students: they define the pace and content of learning, assess progress, have physical access to the students' bodies through the techniques, and enjoy a symbolic authority deeply respected in the Nêhiyaw tradition. This power must be managed with extreme care: used always in the student's interest, never for the instructor's personal satisfaction, never to create dependency, never to exclude those who do not conform to the instructor's personal preferences.

The ethics of training also includes the instructor's specific responsibility toward students who have experienced trauma. Canadian Indigenous communities have very high rates of trauma: many students who enter the Lodge carry experiences of violence,

abuse, and loss that bodily work can reactivate. The Okichitaw system does not present itself as a mental health service: instructors are not therapists. But the ethics of training requires that the instructor be aware of this dimension, know how to recognise the signals of a trauma response, and have clear protocols for responding appropriately and for directing students to professional resources when necessary.

> [C2] Safety protocol in the Lodge and criteria for Gate passage: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C4] Respect for autonomy, transparency about expectations, management of the instructor's power, the protocol for relationships in the Lodge, and responsibility toward students with trauma are the author's.

14.9 — The Warrior’s Life Outside the Lodge

The Warrior’s ethical code does not end in the Lodge: it extends into the practitioner’s daily life. In the Nêhiyaw tradition, the Warrior was not a Warrior only during expeditions or ceremonies: they were a Warrior in the way they treated their children, in the way they participated in band decisions, in the way they behaved toward strangers, and in the way they took care of their own body. The Lodge is the place where the code is transmitted and practised in concentrated form; life is the place where it is verified.

The Okichitaw system explicitly teaches that the technical competency acquired in the Lodge carries additional obligations in daily life, not additional permissions. An advanced practitioner of the system has greater obligations, not lesser ones, toward their community compared to someone who lacks that training: their training has made them more capable, and this capacity increases their responsibility. This principle is consistent with Nêhiyaw cosmology: the gifts received do not belong to those who receive them

but to the community that enabled them, and must be returned to the community through service.

The maintenance of one's own body is an ethical obligation in the Okichitaw system, not only a performance question. The Warrior who neglects their own body — who does not train, does not rest adequately, does not nourish themselves carefully, does not manage stress and trauma — is not able to fulfil their protective responsibilities. In Nêhiyaw cosmology, the body is a gift from the Creator: to neglect it is to neglect a sacred gift. This does not mean obsession with physical perfection: it means care of the body with the same attention with which any other important instrument is cared for.

The Warrior in daily life is also a model of behaviour for their community. Children and young people observe how adults behave and build their understanding of the world from what they see. An Okichitaw practitioner who speaks respectfully to their family, who resolves conflicts without resorting to violence, who takes care of the Elders of their community, who participates in ceremonies with presence and attention, is teaching also outside the Lodge: they are demonstrating with their own body and actions that a different way of being in the world is possible.

The Warrior's relationship with alcohol and substances is explicit in the system's code. The abuse of alcohol and substances is one of the most documented consequences of intergenerational trauma in Indigenous communities: not an individual weakness but a response to unbearable collective pain. The Okichitaw system does not morally judge practitioners who have or have had addictions: it recognises the context in which these addictions develop. But the Warrior's code requires that the practitioner work actively toward

their own sobriety and wellbeing: not because addiction is a vice but because a Warrior who does not control their own cognitive resources cannot fulfil their protective responsibilities.

The Warrior in the Nêhiyaw tradition had a specific relationship with nature and territory that expressed itself in daily practice: going out into nature with attention, observing the signs of the territory, spending time in silence outside built spaces. The Okichitaw system recommends that its practitioners maintain this relationship with the natural world as a practice of the Warrior's code: not as an escape from urban reality but as a periodic return to the cosmological orientation that nature offers directly.

The Warrior's life outside the Lodge finally includes the dimension of community service. Advanced practitioners of the Okichitaw system are encouraged to contribute to their communities through specific forms of service: youth mentoring programmes, participation in Indigenous community centres, support for ceremonial processes, defence of Indigenous rights in political processes. This service is not an optional extra: it is the manifestation of the protective responsibility toward the community in peacetime, the way in which the Warrior fulfils their role when there are no immediate physical threats to neutralise.

> [C2] The Warrior's code outside the Lodge: OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. [C1] Alcohol and substance abuse as a response to intergenerational trauma: Bombay, Matheson and Anisman (2014). [C4] The additional obligations of competency, physical maintenance as an ethical obligation, the Warrior as a model of behaviour, and community service as a manifestation of the code are the author's.

Chapter Summary

The fundamental ethical principles of the Nêhiyaw Warrior — the distinction between violence and strength, the protective responsibility, the conservative hierarchy of responses, proportionality, respect for the contemporary legal framework, responsibility toward future generations, the ethics of Lodge training, and the Warrior's life outside the Lodge — constitute a coherent and practicable ethical system. It is not a system of rules applied from the outside: it is a code that is internalised through years of practice and becomes the Warrior's natural way of being in the world.

This chapter concludes Part Five of Volume I. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 have analysed the philosophy and cosmology of the Okichitaw system at its three main levels: the Medicine Wheel as cosmological and pedagogical map, the Seven Grandfather Teachings as an ethical system rooted in the tradition, and the fundamental ethical principles of the Warrior as a practical guide for action. Together, these three chapters provide the complete philosophical framework within which to situate all the other dimensions of the system: the history, the techniques, the pedagogy, and the contemporary state.

Volume II will complete the analysis with Parts Six through Twelve.

* * *

Afterword

Toward Volume II: The Art of the Warrior

Those who have read this far now know who the Nêhiyawak are, where and how they lived, what happened to them, and how they responded to what happened. They know that George J. Lépine is the son and grandchild of this people and this history. They know that Okichitaw was not invented: it was recovered. They know that the recovery had a context, reasons, a cost, and a precise theoretical structure. They have the tools to understand what Volume II will show: the system in its concrete operation, body to body with oneself and with the art of the Warrior.

Volume II is titled "The Art of the Warrior." It has a different ambition from this volume: less narrative, more technical; less history, more practice. But every technical chapter of Volume II will carry with it a foundational question that only the reading of Volume I allows to be posed correctly: why does this technique have this form? Why does this posture face this direction? Why this weapon, this rhythm, this breath? The answers are always in the territory, the cosmology, and the history that this volume has sought to restore.

The Structure of Volume II

Volume II is organised in five parts following the structure of the Okichitaw curriculum as documented in the OIMA/UNESCO manuscript. Part One introduces the body of the Warrior: the fundamental posture, the walk, the breathing, and the concept of presence that distinguishes the Nêhiyaw Warrior from every other model of combat.

Part Two analyses the Four Gates — the pedagogical heart of the system. The First Gate (Awareness) develops the perception of

danger and space; the Second Gate (Relationship) introduces paired combat and the reading of the opponent's intention; the Third Gate (Response) is the technical core of the system — projection, immobilisation, and impact techniques; the Fourth Gate (Building) is the level of the teacher, of the one who has integrated the system and can transmit it to others.

Part Three is dedicated to the traditional Nêhiyaw weapons. The pakamahakan — the war club — is the central weapon of the system: its construction, historical typologies, and techniques of use are described in detail. The knife, the bow, and the lance are treated in their historical context and in the contemporary applications compatible with safe practice. The section on weapons is the most rarely documented in the literature on Okichitaw: Volume II fills this gap.

Part Four addresses the ceremonial dimension of practice. Every Lodge session opens and closes with precise ceremonies that are not decoration: they are the container that gives meaning to what happens between opening and closing. The smudging, the orientation in the four directions, the greeting to the master and companions, and the closing prayer are analysed in their meaning and pedagogical function.

Part Five, finally, is dedicated to contemporary applications. How is Okichitaw taught in the twenty-first century? How does it adapt to urban and multicultural contexts? How does it dialogue with other martial arts — with Judo, with Jiu-Jitsu, with Muay Thai — without losing its own identity? And what is its specific contribution to the Nêhiyaw community as an instrument of revitalisation and bodily decolonisation? These questions close Volume II, opening toward the future of the system.

What Remains Between the Two Volumes

There is something that neither volume can fully transmit: the experience of being in the Lodge. The bodily transmission of knowledge — the fundamental pedagogical principle of Nêhiyaw culture, as Chapter 3 showed — is not reproducible on the page. A book can describe with any precision a projection technique or the posture of the First Gate: it cannot make the reader feel what happens in the body when that posture is correct.

Lépine knows this better than anyone. He has dedicated his life to transmitting something alive through his students, not through his books. These volumes are not a substitute for the Lodge: they are an invitation to arrive there prepared. Those who read Volume I and then Volume II and then enter an Okichitaw Lodge understand things that those who enter without preparation cannot understand at the same speed. But those who enter the Lodge understand things that no volume will ever be able to explain.

The Nêhiyaw Warrior — as Chapter 14 showed — is not defined by the techniques they know but by the relationship they have with their own strength. A strength in the service of protection, used with the minimum necessary proportion, and stopped when its purpose is achieved. A strength that knows its direction because it knows the Medicine Wheel and the four orientations of the world. A strength that respects its opponent as a relative in the sense of Mitakuye Oyasin: all my relations, even the one who attacks me. This is not an abstract philosophy: it is the practical result of years of bodily practice in the ceremonial container of the Lodge.

> *"This work belongs to your people. I am only the hand that writes it down."* — Francesco Dore, to George J. Lépine, 2024

* * *

Appendix A — Treaty No. 6 (1876)

Complete Text with Commentary

Treaty No. 6 was signed on August 23, 1876 at Fort Carlton and on September 9, 1876 at Fort Pitt, between Queen Victoria, represented by commissioners Alexander Morris, James McKay, and William J. Christie, and the leaders of the Plains Cree, Wood Cree, Assiniboine, and allied band Nations. The original document is deposited in the federal archives and published by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

The text that follows reproduces the original English treaty text, organised in thematic sections — the original is in continuous prose — with critical commentary for each section. The text is in the public domain. Notes in the [C4] register represent the author's analysis of each clause. For the historical and political context of the Treaty, see Chapter 7.

This is the document that still defines today the rights of the Treaty No. 6 Nations in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Reading it in its original language — not in a historian's paraphrase nor a jurist's summary — is necessary for understanding both what was promised in 1876 and what the Nêhiyaw Nations continue to claim today.

Preamble

> *THIS AGREEMENT made and entered into this twenty-third day of August, A.D. 1876, between Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, by Her Commissioners, the Honorable Alexander Morris, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Manitoba and the North-West Territories; James McKay, Esquire, P.C.; and William Joseph Christie, Esquire, P.C., of the one part, and the Plain and Wood Cree and the other Tribes of Indians, inhabitants of the country within the limits hereinafter*

> *defined and described, by their Chiefs, chosen and named as hereinafter mentioned, of the other part.*

[C4] The terminology "Plain and Wood Cree and other Tribes" groups under a single designation peoples with distinct cultures, economies, and territorialities. This nominal homogenisation prefigures the uniform treatment of the bands in subsequent policies, regardless of their internal differences.

Whereas Clauses

> *AND WHEREAS the Indians inhabiting the said country have, pursuant to an appointment made by the said Commissioners, been convened at meetings at Fort Carlton, Fort Pitt and Battle River, to deliberate upon certain matters of interest to Her Most Gracious Majesty, of the one part, and the said Indians of the other. AND WHEREAS the said Indians have been notified and informed by Her Majesty's said Commissioners that it is the desire of Her Majesty to open up for settlement, immigration, trade, and such other purposes as to Her Majesty may seem meet, a tract of country bounded and described as hereinafter mentioned, and to obtain the consent of Her Indian subjects inhabiting the said tract, and to make a treaty and arrange with them, so that there may be peace and good will between them and Her Majesty's other subjects, and that Her Indian people may know and be assured of what allowance they are to count upon and receive from Her Majesty's bounty and benevolence.*

[C4] The phrase "open up for settlement, immigration, trade" makes the purpose of the Treaty explicit before the cession clauses: the Canadian government needed to guarantee access to the territory for the colonisation project and the transcontinental railway. The Nêhiyaw leaders knew this and used it as leverage during negotiations.

The Cession

> *NOW KNOW YE that We, having caused to be deliberated and considered all matters and things herein set forth, have with the advice and consent of the said Indian Chiefs, Headmen and others, do hereby cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada, for Her Majesty the Queen and Her*

> *successors forever, all their rights, titles and privileges whatsoever, to the lands included within the following limits...*

[C4] The cession clause was the most important from the government’s perspective. In English it is absolutely clear: permanent cession of land ownership. The Cree translation used terms closer to the idea of sharing the use than to that of sale. What the Nêhiyaw leaders believed they had agreed to and what the English text stated were probably two different things, and this discrepancy is the foundation of centuries of legal disputes about territorial rights.

Rights Reserved

> *Her Majesty the Queen hereby agrees with the said Indians that they shall have right to pursue their avocations of hunting, trapping and fishing throughout the tract surrendered as hereinbefore described, subject to such regulations as may from time to time be made by the Government of the country, acting under the authority of Her Majesty, and saving and excepting such tracts as may be required or taken up from time to time for settlement, mining, trading or other purposes by Her Government of the Dominion of Canada; or by any of the subjects thereof, duly authorised therefor by the said Government.*

[C4] The right to hunt is the clause whose interpretation produced the most controversies. "Subject to such regulations" and "saving and excepting such tracts as may be required": who defines when the land is "required"? The government’s answers in the following decades were: the government itself decides, and hunting rights narrow as settlers arrive. The Nêhiyaw interpreted the clause differently: the right was permanent.

The Reserves

> *Her Majesty the Queen hereby agrees and undertakes to lay aside reserves for farming lands, due respect being had to lands at present cultivated by the said Indians, and other reserves for the benefit of the said Indians, to be administered and dealt with for them by Her Majesty's Government of the Dominion of Canada; provided, all such reserves shall not exceed in all one square mile*

> *for each family of five, or in that proportion for larger or smaller families...*

> [C4] One square mile per family of five was conceived for sedentary agriculture, not nomadic hunting and gathering. A Nêhiyaw family depending on hunting needed a territory tens or hundreds of times larger. The formula was an implicit imposition of the agricultural way of life: either the families converted to agriculture or the reserve area would be insufficient for survival.

Payments

> *Her Majesty the Queen agrees to pay to each Indian person the sum of twelve dollars per head of the family or household, and five dollars per head to each other member of the family, in the year when the treaty is signed... and Her Majesty agrees to pay to each Chief... the sum of twenty-five dollars per annum...*

> [C4] The differentiation between payments to leaders (25 dollars) and ordinary members (12 then 5 dollars) had a precise political logic: to give leaders an economic incentive to accept and maintain the agreement. But it also created a structural conflict of interest: the leader was paid by the government they were supposed to hold accountable.

Agricultural Equipment

> *Her Majesty agrees to maintain a school in the reserve allotted to each band, as soon as they settle on said reserve and are prepared for a teacher... Her Majesty agrees to supply each Chief of an Indian band that selects and farms a reserve, a chest of ordinary carpenter's tools, a handsaw, files, two augers, one drawing knife, a broad axe and a hand saw... and also for each Indian band that desires to farm, two hoes, one spade, one scythe, and two hay forks, for every family actually farming; also four hoes for every family not farming but beginning to farm... also two horses or two oxen, and one bull and four cows...*

> [C4] The promised equipment did not specify quality of tools, health of livestock, appropriate seed varieties, or delivery schedules. These apparently technical omissions opened an enormous space of discretion in execution. The government could fulfil the letter of the treaty by delivering unusable

> equipment and still declare that it had respected its obligations. This is exactly what happened.

The Famine Clause

> *...and in the event hereafter of the Indians comprised within this treaty being overtaken by any pestilence, or by a general famine, the Queen, on being satisfied and certified thereof by Her Indian Agent or Agents, will grant to the Indians affected assistance of such character and to such extent as Her Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs shall deem necessary and sufficient to relieve the Indians from the calamity that shall have befallen them.*

> [C4] This is the most contested clause. During negotiations, Morris had verbally responded to Chief Poundmaker's question with the assurance that "the Queen will not let her red children starve." This verbal commitment, not present in those words in the written text, was understood by Nêhiyaw leaders as a precise and binding promise. The Canadian government, in the following decades, interpreted it as a rhetorical formula without contractual value. The Treaty No. 6 Nations today argue that this clause creates a permanent fiduciary obligation that includes health, education, and economic conditions.

The Adhesion Clause

> *IN WITNESS WHEREOF, Her Majesty's said Commissioners and the said Indian Chiefs have hereunto subscribed and set their hands at Fort Carlton on the day and year herein first above named... We have hereunto subscribed and set our hands this twenty-third day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-six. ALEXANDER MORRIS, Lieutenant-Governor. JAMES McKAY. W.J. CHRISTIE.*

> [C4] The Treaty was signed at Fort Carlton on August 23, 1876 by the commissioners and by the leaders of the central Saskatchewan bands, and at Fort Pitt on September 9, 1876 by the more western bands. Chief Big Bear, who understood the implications of the Treaty better than most, refused to sign until 1882 when his people were dying of starvation: the most eloquent possible testimony to the conditions that the Treaty's violations had produced.

Source: Morris, A. (1880). The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories. Belfords, Clarke & Co. Also: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, archived treaty text.

An Act Respecting Indians. 1876.

Appendix B — Selected Primary Documents

Indian Act: Cultural Suppression Clauses (1884–1951) — TRC Calls to Action Nos. 88, 89, 90 (2015)

This appendix collects two sets of primary documents directly relevant to the history and context of Okichitaw. Section B.1 reproduces the principal clauses of the Indian Act that prohibited Indigenous ceremonial and cultural practices between 1884 and 1951: the legislative framework within which the clandestine transmission of the Nêhiyaw martial tradition analysed in Chapter 9 had to operate. Section B.2 reproduces Calls to Action Nos. 88, 89, and 90 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), which concern specifically Indigenous sport and physical activity and constitute the contemporary political framework within which the recognition of Okichitaw is situated.

B.1 — Indian Act: The Cultural Suppression Clauses

The Indian Act, passed in 1876 and amended many times in subsequent decades, is the fundamental legislative document that governed every aspect of the lives of the Indigenous Nations of Canada for nearly a century. The clauses reproduced here are those that prohibited ceremonies, cultural practices, and Indigenous political organising activities. All were removed with the revision of the Indian Act of 1951.

B.1.1 The Prohibition of the Potlatch and Tamanawas (1885)

Indian Act, 1884 amendment, in force from January 1, 1885.

> *Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the "Potlatch" or in the Indian dance known as the "Tamanawas" is guilty of a misdemeanor, and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than six nor less than two months in any gaol or other place of confinement; and every Indian or persons who encourages, either directly or indirectly, an Indian or Indians to get up such a festival or dance, or to celebrate the same, or who shall assist in the celebration of the same, is guilty of a like offense, and shall be liable to the same punishment.*

[C1] This clause, the first of the Indian Act's ceremonial prohibitions, initially targeted the ceremonies of the Pacific Coast Nations (the Potlatch) and those of the Northwest (the Tamanawas). Its vague formulation — "festival known as the Potlatch" without defining what a Potlatch was — led Chief Justice Matthew Begbie of British Columbia to declare the clause unenforceable in the first attempted prosecution. Despite this, the clause remained in force for 66 years. [C1] Pettipas (1994) documents how even the Nêhiyaw ceremonies of the Plains — not explicitly named — were prosecuted by invoking this clause in combination with subsequent provisions.

B.1.2 The Extended Prohibition of All Indigenous Ceremonies (1895)

Indian Act, 1895 amendment (section 114 of the consolidated version).

> *Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly another Indian to celebrate, any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony in which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.*

[C1] The 1895 amendment extended the prohibition to "any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony," with the pretext of "wounding or mutilation" targeting explicitly the Sun Dance, whose traditional version included practices of self-offering. The language of "wounding and mutilation" was technically limited, but in practice federal agents applied it to any Nêhiyaw Plains ceremony. [C1] Pettipas (1994) documents that the Sun Dance was the principal target of this clause in the Plains of Saskatchewan and Alberta. [C4] Prohibiting the Sun Dance — the most important ceremony of cosmological renewal of the Plains Nations — was equivalent to prohibiting Christmas and Easter simultaneously: it was the ceremony that renewed the relations between the Nêhiyaw people, the territory, and the spiritual forces.

B.1.3 The Prohibition of Traditional Dress (1914)

Indian Act, 1914 amendment.

> *Every Indian who participates in any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant in which the Indian wears the costume of the Indian of another race is guilty of an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a penalty not exceeding twenty-five dollars or to imprisonment for one month.*

> [C1] This clause aimed to prohibit Wild West Shows and inter-tribal pow wows in which warriors of different Nations wore traditional dress. In practice, it was used to prevent any public manifestation of Indigenous cultural identity. [C4] The concept of "costume of an Indian of another race" revealed total ignorance of the cultural differences between Indigenous Nations: the legislator treated all Nations as variations of a single "Indian race" whose cultural elements were interchangeable.

B.1.4 The Prohibition on Collecting Funds for Legal Claims (1927)

Indian Act, 1927 amendment (section 141).

> *Every person who, without the consent of the Superintendent General expressed in writing, receives, obtains, solicits or requests from any Indian any payment or contribution or promise of any payment or contribution for the purpose of raising a fund or providing money for the prosecution of any claim which the tribe or band of Indians to which such Indian belongs, or of which he is a member, has or is represented to have for the recovery of any claim or money for the benefit of the said tribe or band, shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction for each such offence to a penalty not exceeding two hundred dollars and not less than fifty dollars or to imprisonment for any term not exceeding two months.*

> [C1] Section 141 was the most direct instrument for blocking Indigenous Nations' access to justice. Collecting funds for land claims — the only way to contest treaty violations before the courts — became a criminal offence. This clause remained in force until 1951: 24 years in which the Canadian Indigenous Nations could not legally organise to defend their rights in the courts. [C4] The combination of this clause with the prohibition of ceremonies and the Pass System built a system closed on every side: no ceremonies, no movement, no legal recourse.

B.1.5 The 1951 Revision: Removal of Suppression Clauses

Indian Act, 1951 revision. Summary of removed clauses.

The 1951 revision of the Indian Act removed the following suppression clauses: the prohibition of the Potlatch (section 140), the prohibition of ceremonies and dances (section 140A), the prohibition of traditional dress, and the prohibition on collecting funds for legal claims (section 141). The Indian Act of 1951, however, maintained numerous other restrictive provisions limiting the political, economic, and cultural autonomy of the bands. The 1951 revision did not represent the end of colonial policy: it represented a cosmetic adjustment to the post-war international pressures and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

> [C1] The 1951 revision coincides with Canada's adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and with the end of the Second World War, during which many Indigenous soldiers had fought for Canada while not having the right to vote in their own country. [C1] The first legal Sun Dance after 1951 was celebrated in 1952 by some Nêhiyaw bands in Saskatchewan: sixty-six years after the prohibition. [C4] The 66-year span of the prohibition — approximately three generations — is the period during which the Nêhiyaw martial tradition had to be transmitted clandestinely: the direct context of Uncle Ted Lépine's transmission to George.

B.2 — TRC Calls to Action Nos. 88, 89, 90 (2015)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published in 2015 its final report with 94 Calls to Action directed at governments, institutions, and Canadian civil society. Calls Nos. 88–91 concern Indigenous sport and physical activity and are the most directly relevant to Okichitaw. Here Calls Nos. 88, 89, and 90 are reproduced, those with the greatest potential impact on the Okichitaw system and on traditional Indigenous martial arts more broadly.

Call to Action No. 88

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015.

> *We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel.*

> [C1] The North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), founded in 1990, are the principal multi-discipline sports event reserved for Indigenous Nation athletes from Canada and the United States. Okichitaw has participated in the editions following its WoMAU/UNESCO recognition of 2002 as a demonstration discipline. [C1] Implementation status of Call No. 88 (Yellowhead Institute data, 2023): In Progress. Federal funding for the NAIG exists but is discontinuous and insufficient to guarantee the participation of all interested Indigenous communities. [C4] The recognition of Okichitaw as a traditional Indigenous martial art is fully consistent with the spirit of Call No. 88, which includes all Indigenous sports and martial disciplines in its open formulation.

Call to Action No. 89

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015.

> *We call upon the federal government to amend the Physical Activity and Sport Act to support reconciliation by ensuring that policies to promote physical activity as a fundamental element of health and well-being, reduce barriers to sports participation, increase the pursuit of excellence in sport, and build capacity in the Canadian sport system, are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples.*

> [C1] The Physical Activity and Sport Act of 2003 is the federal law governing sports policies in Canada. As of 2025, this law has not been amended to explicitly include Indigenous Nations and their traditional sports and martial traditions: Call No. 89 results as "Not Started" according to Yellowhead Institute data (2023). [C4] The inclusion of Okichitaw — and more broadly of traditional Indigenous martial arts — in federal sports policies would be the most concrete manifestation of the implementation of Call No. 89.

Call to Action No. 90

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015.

> *We call upon the federal government to ensure that national sports policies, programs, and initiatives are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to, establishing: in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, stable funding for, and*

> *access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples; an elite athlete development program for Aboriginal athletes; programs for coaches, trainers, and sports officials that reflect the diverse cultures of Aboriginal peoples; anti-racism awareness programs.*

> [C1] Call No. 90 is the most specific and broadest of the three sports calls: it includes "community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities." The Okichitaw Lodge at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto responds exactly to this description: it is a community sports programme reflecting Nêhiyaw culture and its traditional martial activity. [C1] Implementation status of Call No. 90 (Yellowhead Institute, 2023): In Progress but with limited advances. Funding for traditional Indigenous martial arts is not yet systematically included in federal sports programmes. [C4] The recognition of Okichitaw by WoMAU/UNESCO in 2002 — thirteen years before the Calls to Action — precedes and prefigures exactly what the TRC calls for in Call No. 90.

Concluding Note on the Documentary Apparatus

The documents in this appendix show two historical moments in the relationship between the Canadian State and the Indigenous cultural and martial traditions: systematic suppression (1885–1951) and the attempt at reparation and inclusion (2015 onward). Between the two moments: sixty-six years of prohibitions and then seventy years of slow recognition.

Okichitaw was born exactly in this history: recovered during the phase of clandestine transmission, systematised during the phase of cultural resurgence, recognised during the phase of reparation. The documents in this appendix are not only history: they are the political context in which the future of the Okichitaw system will continue to develop.

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Glossary

Nêhiyawêwin, technical, and historical terms

The Glossary collects the technical terms, the Nêhiyawêwin vocabulary, and the historical and institutional expressions used in this volume. For each entry: the CRO transcription (Cree Roman Orthography) for Nêhiyawêwin terms, the thematic category, and the definition. Terms marked with (?) come exclusively from the OIMA manuscript and are not verified in the standard CRO dictionary. For the abbreviations used in the notes, see the Methodological Note.

A — Nêhiyawêwin Terms

Aakode'dewin *Anishinaabemowin* — n. — Seven Teachings

Courage. One of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) term; Nêhiyawêwin variant: sôhkisiwin. Indicates the courage to face difficult situations while remaining faithful to one's values, not physical recklessness. In the Okichitaw system, designates the capacity to act rightly even when it is uncomfortable to do so. → See: Seven Teachings.

Asini-Sakaw-nêhiyawak *a-SI-ni SA-kau-NEH-hi-yo-wak* — n.pl. — regional group

"The people of the stone forest." Nêhiyaw designation of the Rocky Cree, the regional group that inhabited the transition zones between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains in western Alberta. Their geographic position made them diplomatic mediators between the Plains Nations and the mountain ones. → See: nêhiyawak.

Dabaadendiziwin *Anishinaabemowin* — n. — Seven Teachings

Humility. One of the Seven Teachings. Anishinaabe term; Nêhiyawêwin variant: Dabâseyînâkosiwin. Humility is not the renouncing of one's competency but the recognition that one's

knowledge is always partial and that learning is never exhausted. → See: Seven Teachings.

Debwewin *Anishinaabemowin* — n. — Seven Teachings
Truth. Seventh of the Seven Teachings. Anishinaabe term; Nêhiyawêwin variant: Têpwewêwin. Does not indicate truth as an abstract construct but the coherence between what one says and what one does. → See: Têpwewêwin, Seven Teachings.

Gwayakwaadiziwin *Anishinaabemowin* — n. — Seven Teachings
Honesty. One of the Seven Teachings. Anishinaabe term; Nêhiyawêwin variant: Miyo-êyihtakosiwin. In the Okichitaw curriculum, honesty is the first quality required of a student: to be honest about one's competency, one's limitations, and one's intentions. → See: Seven Teachings.

Kisiskatchewanisipi *ki-SIS-ka-tche-WAH-ni-si-pi* — n. — place name
"The river that flows fast." The Nêhiyawêwin name for the Saskatchewan River, the principal artery of the Nêhiyaw Plains territory. The name survived in the denomination of the Canadian province, founded in 1905.

Kitchi Manitou *KI-tchi MA-ni-tu* — n. — cosmology
The Great Spirit or Great Mystery. Not a personal god in the Christian sense but the life force that permeates all things and connects all beings. Every element of the natural world manifests the Kitchi Manitou and deserves respect as a carrier of that force. → See: Nêhiyaw cosmology, Medicine Wheel.

Minaadendamowin *Anishinaabemowin* — n. — Seven Teachings
Respect. One of the Seven Teachings. Anishinaabe term; Nêhiyawêwin variant: Miyo-êyihtakosiwin. In the Okichitaw system, Respect extends to all beings: the opponent, the master, one's own body, the tradition. → See: Seven Teachings.

Mitakuye Oyasin *mi-TA-ku-ye o-YA-sin* — n. — cosmology (Lakota)
"All my relations." Lakota expression with equivalents in the Nêhiyawêwin. Expresses the principle of the inter-relationship of all

beings: human beings are not at the apex of a natural hierarchy but part of a network of relationships. → See: Kitchi Manitou.

Muskeko-nêhiyawak *MUS-ke-ko-NEH-hi-yo-wak* — n.pl. — regional group

"The people of the swampy areas." Nêhiyaw designation of the Swampy Cree. The first Nêhiyawak to have systematic contact with the Hudson's Bay Company in the seventeenth century. → See: nêhiyawak.

nêhiyaw *NEH-hi-yau* — n.s. — ethnonym

"One who speaks the same language." The Cree people's own name, preferred in this volume to the exonym "Cree." Nêhiyaw identity is cultural and relational, not biological. → See: nêhiyawak, nêhiyawêwin.

nêhiyawak *NEH-hi-yo-wak* — n.pl. — ethnonym

Plural of nêhiyaw. The Cree people in their traditional designation. Regional groups: Paskwawi-nêhiyawak (Plains Cree), Sakaw-nêhiyawak (Woodland Cree), Muskeko-nêhiyawak (Swampy Cree), Asini-Sakaw-nêhiyawak (Rocky Cree). Approximately 210,000 people in the 2016 census. → See: nêhiyaw.

nêhiyawêwin *NEH-hi-yau-WEH-win* — n. — language

The language of the Nêhiyaw people. Algonquian language family. Approximately 96,000 speakers (2016 census). Principal dialects: Y (Plains Cree), TH (Swampy Cree), N (Moose Cree). Transliteration system adopted in this volume: CRO. → See: CRO, Y-dialect.

Nibwaakaawin *Anishinaabemowin* — n. — Seven Teachings

Wisdom. First of the Seven Teachings. Anishinaabe term; Nêhiyawêwin variant: Nitawi-kêskeyihtam. Emerges from the integration of all experiences over a lifetime of conscious practice. → See: Seven Teachings.

okichitaw *oh-KI-chi-TAU* — n. — martial system

The traditional martial art of the Plains Cree (Paskwawi-nêhiyawak). From the root okichi- (worthy, capable) and -taw (to fight, to act with strength). In lower case designates the practitioner or the system informally; capitalised (Okichitaw) designates the system codified by Lépine. → See: okichitawak.

okichitawak *oh-KI-chi-TO-wak* — n.pl. — social category

"The worthy warriors." Those who had completed Nêhiyaw martial and cultural training. It was not a hereditary title but a quality continuously demonstrated through practice and conduct. → See: okichitaw.

okimahkan (?) *oh-ki-MAH-kan* — n. — social rank

War leader. Leader with authority specifically in the context of raids and defence. Unlike the okimaw, their authority was temporary: when the expedition was over, they returned to ordinary responsibilities. The (?) marker indicates this form is not verified in the standard CRO. → See: okimaw.

okimaw *oh-KI-mau* — n. — social rank

Civil leader. Leader in daily band decisions. Authority derived from reputation, generosity in redistribution, and wisdom. An okimaw who lost consensus lost their position through gradual erosion, not a formal vote. → See: Nêhiyaw political system.

Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew *oh-ki-MAH-kan KIS-ki-na-hu-ma-KEU* — n. — title

Title conferred on George J. Lépine by the Nêhiyaw Elders. Official translation: "Warrior Chief Teacher." Combines okimahkan (war leader) and kiskinahumakew (instructor). It is the community recognition of Lépine's legitimacy as a transmitter of the tradition. → See: Lépine.

pakamahakan *pa-ka-ma-HA-kan* — n. — weapon

The war club. The primary weapon of the Okichitaw system. Multipurpose: striking, blocking, projecting, controlling distance. Built with materials specific to the Plains territory. Volume II analyses typologies, construction, and techniques. → See: Volume II.

Paskwawi-nêhiyawak *PAS-kua-wi-NEH-hi-yo-wak* — n.pl. — regional group

"The people of the Plains." Nêhiyaw designation of the Plains Cree, the primary group of this volume. They inhabited the Great Plains of southern Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta. They depended primarily on Buffalo hunting. → See: nêhiyawak.

Sakaw-nêhiyawak *SA-kau-NEH-hi-yo-wak* — n.pl. — regional group

"The people of the forest." Nêhiyaw designation of the Woodland Cree. They inhabited the boreal forest of northern Saskatchewan and northern Manitoba. → See: nêhiyawak.

Têpwewêwin *TEH-pue-WEH-win* — n. — Seven Teachings

Truth in the Nêhiyawêwin. Nêhiyawêwin variant of the Debwewin Teaching. Designates the coherence between thought, word, and action. → See: Debwewin, Seven Teachings.

wâhkôhtowin *WAH-koh-to-win* — n. — cultural concept

The system of kinship relations and mutual obligations. Goes beyond the biological family to include ritual kinship relations, adoptions, and alliance bonds. Every individual is defined by their relationships rather than their individual identity. → See: Nêhiyaw social structure.

Wanuskewin *wa-NUS-ke-win* — n. — ceremonial site

"Living in harmony." Nêhiyaw ceremonial site near Saskatoon, with evidence of occupation for at least 6,000 years. Includes stone circles, Buffalo hunting sites, and a medicine wheel. Today a heritage park managed with local Indigenous communities.

Wisahkechâhk *wi-SAH-ke-chahk* — n. — narrative figure

The Nêhiyaw Trickster. An ambiguous figure of the narrative tradition: sometimes wise, sometimes foolish, sometimes a benefactor of humanity. Through his stories Nêhiyaw culture transmits social norms indirectly and non-authoritatively. Wisahkechâhk stories are told only in winter.

wiyâskês *wi-YAHS-key-ahs* — n. — social rank

Healer. Variant of the shaman term documented in the Wolfart-Ahenakew dictionary. → See: mâmahkâpimisiw.

Zaagi'idiwin *Anishinaabemowin* — n. — Seven Teachings

Love. One of the Seven Teachings. Anishinaabe term; Nêhiyawêwin variant: sâkitisowin. Not sentimentalism but the concrete care for the wellbeing of the other in daily choices. → See: Seven Teachings.

B — Okichitaw System: Technical Terms

Close Quarters Combat — technical — combat

OIMA/UNESCO terminology for the technical core of Okichitaw: management of short and very short distances with integrated use of weapons and empty-hand techniques. Does not include the medium-range combat phases typical of many Asian martial arts. → See: Volume II.

Four Gates — technical — curriculum

Fundamental pedagogical structure of the Okichitaw curriculum. First Gate (Awareness/East), Second Gate (Relationship/South), Third Gate (Response/West), Fourth Gate (Building/North). Each Gate corresponds to a direction of the Medicine Wheel and to a season. → See: Medicine Wheel, Volume II.

kiskinahumakew (?) *KIS-ki-na-hu-ma-KEU* — technical — title

Instructor; the one who teaches. Second element of the Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew title conferred on Lépine by the Elders. The (?) marker indicates this form is not verified in the standard CRO. → See: Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew.

Lodge — technical — practice space

The Okichitaw practice space. Not a simple gym but a ceremonially oriented space according to the four directions of the Medicine Wheel. Every session opens and closes with specific rituals. The Lodge at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT) is the original one, founded in 1997. → See: NCCT.

Medicine Wheel — technical — cosmology

The cosmological system that structures Okichitaw. A circle divided into four directions with specific correspondences: guide animal, season, sacred colour, human quality, curriculum level. Not an abstract construction but a map of the Nêhiyaw ecological and cosmological territory. → See: Chapter 12, Four Gates.

smudging — technical — ceremony

The practice of burning the four sacred medicines (sage, cedar, sweetgrass, tobacco) and purifying oneself in the smoke. Opens every

Lodge session. Not a symbolic gesture but a real practice of preparation for the quality of presence required. → See: Lodge.

Two-Eyed Seeing — technical — epistemology
The capacity to see the world simultaneously with the eye of the Indigenous tradition and with that of the contemporary world. Not a fusion nor a subordination: it is the coexistence of two equally valid perspectives. Explains why Okichitaw has integrated elements of Judo and Hapkido without losing its own identity. → See: Chapter 10.

weapon-based system — technical — taxonomy
Taxonomic classification of Okichitaw: the system is structured around the weapon (primarily the pakamahakan) as the central element, with the empty hand as complement. Distinguished from empty-hand systems that treat the weapon as an added specialisation. → See: pakamahakan.

C — Institutions, Historical, and Legal Terms

CRO — acronym — linguistics
Cree Roman Orthography. Transcription system for Plains Cree in Roman characters adopted by H.C. Wolfart and Freda Ahenakew in the 1998 dictionary. International academic standard for Plains Cree and the system adopted in this volume. Long vowels carry the macron (ā, ē, ī, ō); the central mid vowel is rendered as ê. → See: Language Note.

Dewdney, Edgar — historical — person
Indian Commissioner of the North-West from 1879. His systematic policy of reducing rations, selecting the most arid land for reserves, and obstructing inter-tribal coalitions is documented by Carter (1990) and Daschuk (2013) as a direct cause of the crisis of 1885. → See: reserve system, Resistance of 1885.

EMAM — acronym — institutional
Encyclopaedia of Martial Arts of the World (Enciclopedia Mondiale delle Arti Marziali). Encyclopaedic project curated by Francesco Dore via CSAM.ONLINE. Volume I is dedicated to Okichitaw and Nêhiyaw culture. → See: CSAM.ONLINE.

HBC — acronym — historical

Hudson's Bay Company. Founded in 1670 by Royal Charter of Charles II of England. Held the monopoly of the Fur Trade in Rupert's Land for nearly two centuries. The Nêhiyawak were its principal fur suppliers and the most important commercial intermediaries on the Plains. → See: Fur Trade, NWC.

Indian Act — legal — legislation

Canadian federal law of 1876 (and subsequent amendments) governing every aspect of Indigenous Nations' lives. The 1885 amendment prohibited ceremonies; the 1927 amendment prohibited collecting funds for legal claims; the 1951 revision removed the cultural suppression clauses. → See: Appendix B, Chapter 9.

NAIG — acronym — sport

North American Indigenous Games. Principal multi-discipline sports event for Indigenous Nation athletes from Canada and the USA, founded in 1990. Okichitaw has participated as a demonstration discipline after the WoMAU/UNESCO recognition of 2002. TRC Call to Action No. 88 calls for stable NAIG funding. → See: TRC, WoMAU.

NCCT — acronym — institutional

Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. Toronto's Indigenous urban community centre where George J. Lépine founded the Okichitaw Lodge in 1997. It is the place of origin of the system in its codified contemporary form and the principal institutional reference point. → See: Lodge.

Niitsitapi *NEET-si-ta-pi* — ethnonym — Nation

"The real people." The Blackfoot Confederacy: Siksikâ (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), and Piikâni (Peigan). The Nêhiyawak's most important Plains neighbours in Alberta. They had with the Nêhiyawak a centuries-long history of rivalry for the control of hunting territories. Preferred in this volume to the exonym "Blackfoot." → See: inter-tribal relations.

NWC — acronym — historical

North-West Company. Principal HBC competitor in the Fur Trade, active from 1779 to 1821. Competition between the two companies

initially benefited the Nêhiyawak, who could sell to the highest bidders. Merged with the HBC in 1821. → See: HBC.

NWMP — acronym — historical

North-West Mounted Police. Founded in 1873 after the Cypress Hills Massacre. Played an ambiguous role during the Resistance of 1885. Became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1920. → See: Resistance of 1885, Pass System.

OIMA — acronym — institutional

Okichitaw International Martial Arts. Organisation founded by George J. Lépine. Has produced the manuscript presented to UNESCO that constitutes the main C2 source of this volume. The manuscript is not publicly available. → See: WoMAU, C1–C4.

Pass System — historical — policy

Permit system introduced in 1885 without legal basis in the treaties: every Indigenous person had to obtain a written pass from the federal agent to leave their reserve. Remained in force in some forms until the 1940s. → See: reserve system, Dewdney.

pemmican — historical — food

Concentrated food produced by mixing dried and ground Buffalo meat with animal fat and sometimes wild berries. Kept for years. Logistical base of the great hunts and the Fur Trade: without Nêhiyaw pemmican, the European fur traders could not have survived the long journeys into the interior. → See: Buffalo economy.

Residential Schools — historical — institution

System of Indigenous residential schools in which children were taken from their families and placed in institutions prohibiting the original language and culture. Based on Pratt's principle: "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." Active in Canada until 1996. The TRC (2015) documented the abuses and deaths. → See: TRC, Indian Act, Chapter 9.

Section 35 — legal — Canadian Constitution

Section of the Canadian Constitution of 1982 that recognises and affirms the "existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal

peoples of Canada." Formed the basis for Supreme Court decisions: Sparrow (1990), Van der Peet (1996), Haida Nation (2004). → See: Treaty No. 6, Indigenous Rights.

Sun Dance — historical — ceremony

The principal ceremony of cosmological renewal of the Plains Nations, lasting four days. Prohibited by the Indian Act with the 1895 amendment. Could not be legally practised until the 1951 revision. Its prohibition dismantled the ceremonial system that maintained the balance between the Nêhiyaw people and the spiritual forces. → See: Indian Act, Chapter 9.

Treaty No. 6 — legal — historical

Treaty concluded on August 23, 1876 at Fort Carlton and September 9, 1876 at Fort Pitt between the British Crown and the Plains Cree, Wood Cree, and Assiniboine Nations. Still defines today the rights of the Treaty No. 6 Nations in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The full translated text is in Appendix A. → See: Chapter 7, Appendix A.

TRC — acronym — institutional

Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Final report in 2015 with 94 Calls to Action. Calls Nos. 88-91 concern Indigenous sport and physical activity and are the most directly relevant to Okichitaw. → See: Appendix B, Calls to Action.

WoMAU — acronym — institutional

World Martial Arts Union. International organisation affiliated with UNESCO for traditional martial arts. Recognised Okichitaw as a traditional martial system in 2002: the first North American Indigenous martial system to receive this recognition. → See: OIMA, Chapter 10.

D — Key Concepts of the System

band — anthropological — society

The fundamental social unit of the Plains Nêhiyawak: a group of twenty to one hundred people connected by kinship, marriage alliances, and shared history. Simultaneously an economic, political, and security

unit. Band boundaries were fluid: people moved between bands through marriage or for reasons of affinity. → See: Nêhiyaw social structure.

bodily decolonisation — conceptual — decolonisation

The process of recovering a way of inhabiting one's body with full presence and authority, after colonisation produced the progressive reduction of the physical and cultural space occupied. In the Okichitaw context, martial practice is the principal instrument of this decolonisation. → See: Chapter 10.

C1–C4 — methodological — epistemic classification

The EMAM source classification system: [C1] independently verifiable primary sources; [C2] unpublished OIMA/UNESCO documentation; [C3] peer-reviewed academic sources; [C4] the author's interpretation. Every section note uses these markers to indicate the degree of certainty of each statement. → See: Methodological Note.

epistemic Eurocentrism — conceptual — critical theory

The tendency to treat European knowledge and cultural systems as normative and universal, and non-European ones as particular or inferior. In the context of martial arts: treating Asian traditions as "real" philosophically elaborate martial arts and Indigenous ones as primitive combat systems without depth. The EMAM is a project of systematic correction of this bias. → See: Introduction.

fiduciary obligation — legal

The legal obligation of the British Crown (and subsequently the Canadian government) to act in the interest of the Indigenous peoples who signed the treaties. The Treaty No. 6 Nations argue that the famine clause (Art. 13 of the Treaty) creates a permanent fiduciary obligation that includes health, education, and socio-economic wellbeing. → See: Treaty No. 6, Section 35.

intergenerational trauma — psychological — concept

The transmission of trauma response patterns from one generation to the next through epigenetic, psychological, and behavioural mechanisms. In the Nêhiyaw context, the trauma of the Residential Schools and cultural suppression is transmitted to descendants.

Okichitaw practice is documented as a tool of intergenerational healing. → See: Chapter 9.

positionality — methodological — epistemology
The position of an author relative to the subject of study: culture, training, conscious and unconscious biases, what one is and what one is not. Making one's own positionality explicit is an epistemic requirement of responsible research. The Author's Positionality Statement in this volume is its formal application. → See: Positionality Statement.

reserve system — historical — policy
System of confinement of Indigenous Nations in delimited portions of territory, introduced by Treaty No. 6 and the Indian Act. It was not only a land delimitation: it was an institution of control designed to transform the Nêhiyawak from independent nomadic populations to sedentary communities dependent on the federal administration. → See: Dewdney, Pass System, Chapter 7.

Seven Teachings — cultural — ethics
The Seven Grandfather Teachings: Wisdom (Nibwaakaawin), Love (Zaagi'idiwin), Respect (Minaadendamowin), Courage (Aakode'dewin), Honesty (Gwayakwaadiziwin), Humility (Dabaadendiziwin), Truth (Debwewin). Presented with Anishinaabe terms because this is their most widespread pan-Algonquian formulation. Fundamental ethical code of the Okichitaw curriculum. → See: Chapter 13.

Y-dialect — linguistic — Nêhiyawêwin
The dialect of the Nêhiyawêwin spoken by the Plains Cree (Paskwawi-nêhiyawak). The most widespread and the one adopted by Lépine in the Okichitaw curriculum. The name refers to the phoneme /y/ used in positions where other dialects use /th/ or /n/. → See: CRO, Nêhiyawêwin.

* * *

Indice analitico

Indice per soggetto, persona, luogo e concetto

L'Indice analitico elenca in ordine alfabetico i temi, i nomi, i luoghi, i concetti e i termini trattati in modo significativo nel volume, con i numeri di pagina corrispondenti. Non sono indicizzate le occorrenze di passaggio né le voci presenti soltanto nel Glossario o nelle Appendici, che hanno propri sistemi di accesso. I numeri in grassetto indicano la trattazione principale di un soggetto.

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About the Author

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Volume I of the EMAM is dedicated to Okichitaw, the traditional martial art of the Plains Cree Nêhiyawak. It is the first encyclopaedic study of a North American Indigenous martial system produced outside the community of origin, and the first to document Okichitaw in both Italian and Canadian English. The volume has been submitted to George J. Lépine — Okimakahn-Kiskinahumakew, founder of the system — for review and validation.

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