

**Baagak Aadisookewin:
Legends of History and Memory**

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Abstract

Sacred story and story have historically been essential to the proper functioning of Anishinaabe society. These represent the ways humans should live and act in the world in harmony with others, the land, and the spirit world. The transmission of these essential codes of conduct through sacred story is what has sustained identity and culture throughout history. As Indigenous languages were stolen from Indigenous people through the residential school system, so too were stories. This loss contributes to deep dysfunction in Indigenous societies as these stories supply foundational premises in which Indigenous identities rely upon. My thesis argues that Aadisookaan and traditional stories such as *Baagak* can foster the recovery of Indigenous identity and help heal the wounds of colonization and facilitate reconciliation. To make this argument I include an historical examination of existing research on *Baagak* derived from written accounts from the early 1900's to the present day and analyze these narratives in their own spaces and places, asserting they provide important understandings to what constitutes Anishinaabe identity, community, and culture. I will also articulate how these stories continue to inspire and create meaning today, providing an ongoing sense of identity and belonging between many Anishinaabeg and the rest of the natural world.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge my gratitude to my father Harry Bone for his support and guidance throughout this process. My parents have always been the steady rock in my life with their support and unconditional love. My father received his teachings from Rueben Blackbird, who in turn received his teachings from George Bone, who was half-brother of Giizhigoowining. My father graduated from the University of Brandon in 1976, with a degree in political science, and he was chief of Keeseekoowenin for eight years, working within justice, sport, education and governance at different times. Most recently my father was honored by the University of Manitoba with an honorary PhD from the Faculty of Law in 2013 for his life work. He is the reason I am pursuing this study; he has been a constant source of inspiration and guidance to me. I would also like to acknowledge my great-grandmother, Mary Bone, who was born in 1880 and never spoke a word of English, who impressed on my father the importance of language and story, which he passed on to me.

I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair for his patience, motivation and advice in my studies. I am fortunate to undertake a significant part of my life under his expertise on Ojibway literature. He is the reason I found life in reading and writing about Anishinaabe and Indigenous stories. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor to pursue a Ph.D study with. He continues to be a role model to me exemplifying K'zaagin - love throughout his life's work. As well, I also would like to thank PhD student Darren Courchene for his encouragement and support as I try to follow his footprints in this process. I observe his research methods into traditional story through his work with the Treaty Relations

Commission of Manitoba, which has published four volumes of Elders' teachings, and his work academically. Darren's friendship is like extended family support that has been greatly appreciated.

Besides my advisor, I would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee: Dr. Jocelyn Thorpe and Dr. Peter Kulchyski for their insightful comments and encouragement. I am also indebted to my instructors and supporting staff at Red River College and at the University of Winnipeg's joint Aboriginal Self-Governance program for their knowledge and encouragement to look deeper into Aboriginal issues: Karen Favel, David Beaudin, Ida Bear, Annie Boulanger, Anita Keith, Marilyn Dystra, Joanne Summers, Jacqueline Romanow, Tobasonakwut(aban) Kinew, Salish Shukla, Lorena Fontaine, Joan Grace, Julie Pelletier, Ryan Eyford, Paul Redekop, Mark Ruml, Larry Morrissette, and Brian Rice. I'd like to thank my instructors at the University of Manitoba, Peter Kulchyski, Edward Vallandra, Kathi Kinew, and Emma LaRocque, as well as Chantel Fiola, Aimee Craft, Cody O'Niel, Trevor Phillips, and the late Renate Eigenbrod.

I would like to thank Keith Berens, Valerie Disbrow and Roderick Ross of Berens River for supporting my research. A. Irving Hallowell wrote that the men of the Berens family were from the Moose clan going back to Yellow Legs (Ozaawashkogaad), William's great grandfather. Family tradition places Yellow Legs' origins from the Lake Superior area. Yellow Legs is remembered as a great leader of the Midewiwin or Grand Medicine society who had received the medicines from the Memengwesiwag (small rock dwellers in rock cliffs who possessed great powers). Yellowlegs' sons, Zhaawanaash (one who flies with the south wind) and Bear, brought this magic stone and performed the

last Midewiwin ceremonies at the mouth of the Berens River, which Berens attended as a small boy. Bear's brother Zhaawanaash was baptized in 1877 and took the name of Roderick Ross, a respected HBC factor. Roderick Ross's namesake is still carried on today, and he has been important in my research. In accordance with OCAP principles, communities have the Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession of this research and a say in how their descendants and community are spoken about.

I would also like to thank Spiritual Mentors and Anishinaabemowin linguists Ron Mandamin, Isaac Murdoch, and Jason Parenteau for their friendships and wisdom and role they played in my research. Their passion and determination to contribute to Anishinaabemowin Language resources continues to be inspirational.

For Nimaamaa(aban)

Florence M. Bone – Misko-Binesiikwe

1946 - 2015

Glossary

Aadisookewin – legends of history and memory

Aadisookaan – keepers of legends and history and memory

Anishinaabe – human being

Onishinaan – lower

Onishinaan ini aban – lowing of man onto earth

Anishinaabewin – Human way of living

Anishinaabe Izhichigewin – Human Way of doing things in a certain way

Anishinaabe Inaatiziiwin – human behavior

Anishinaabe Onakonigewin – Human law

Baakwakwat - war club

Apakwaanaajii - bat

Baagak - Winter Spirit, flying skeleton

Wataygaaboo - the one that seemed to be gleaming, or appeared to be glowing.

Omakaki - frog

Onakonigewin – Laws and protocols

Makadewin or Bakadekewin – Fasting

Nana-bawaachigewin – Dream Quest

Manidookewiwin – Spiritual ceremony

Giigino' amaagewin – learning and teaching

Dibaajimo – tell him/her a story

Dibaajimotaadiwin – Telling of a story

Injaak / Ojaak – Soul

Ishkwaa bimaadiziwin – end of life

Nibowin – death

Wiijishin – help me

Bagidenijiwin – releasing the departed

Nenaaniikwe – Periodically approaching

Memengwesiwig - the Little People

Pagwajii - the wild places

Pagwajiiwig - all the wild beings that live in the forest

Pagano Giizhig / Pagonegiizhik – Hole in the day/sky

Missabe – Giant people

Miizhaagamoo - Sasquatch

Giizhig - the sky

Manitou Inakonigewin - spirit law

Akitiganing Inakonigewin - law of the garden

amonsitaagan' - they didn't know who he was

amonsay - this creature that has no name,

amonsitogin - they don't know what it is

cheebay - skeleton

awenen giin - who are you

mushkiki - a medicine

abijitooon iwe - use this

asema - tobacco

Manitokan – gift giving is institutionalized around an image set-up where one could pick up something from the gifts scattered around the Manitohkan and then they would leave another gift or some tobacco.

Mishibishu - Water Panther

Mino-Bimaadiziwin - that good and beautiful life

Introduction

Laying back, Beaver looked up, thinking deep inside his memory. He waited for a moment, remembering the stories and songs he would need to teach others to get the world started again. He smiled.¹

This thesis argues that an understanding of the importance of *Aadisookaan* – sacred story articulates instructions for living life in accordance with *Anishinaabe* principles—living in harmony with all creation, with the human, natural, and spirit worlds. The specific *Aadisookaan*, the sacred story of *Baagak*, inspires imagining a peaceful, spiritual, linguistic co-existence in a country calling for reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians.

The *Baagak* story continues to have meaning today. It is alive, it is medicine. It is an ancient story located in time and space and for specific purposes from the past and into today. The narrative builds, sustains, and grows *Anishinaabeg* communities across *Anishinaabeg* country. It can also appeal to other communities as well. For example, it can partially respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action, which have influenced positive political and public opinion for meaningful change in Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. The *Baagak* story has personal significance to me as well. It has been crucial to my research and illustrated to me the importance of dreams in Anishinaabe life. I connect this not only to the death of my mother but to how stories perform integral cultural and critical frameworks to understanding Anishinaabeg epistemology and intellectual history.

¹ Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, *Manitowapow: Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Highwater Press, 2011), p. 365.

The book *Centering Anishinaabe Studies: Understanding the World through Stories* invites readers to consider whether the emerging field of Anishinaabe Studies can center itself on stories. Eva Marie Garrouette and Kathleen Delores Westcott state:

Mythic thought is the way traditional people think today and the way others thought in the past. It is a reasonable way of ordering the world that presupposes that any activity can happen again. Thus, the telling of a cosmic myth continues creation. The retelling of the myth animates the story and makes it all happen again – on another sphere of existence, but not so far away that such power could not break through into our own plane of being. Myths are true in that sense. They pulse in the telling of them. The language is vibrant in a sacred way.²

I chose the topic of *Baagak* as a result of reading about this spirit in *Drawing out Law* by Anishinaabe legal expert John Borrows. My reading not only impressed upon me the importance of this story to Indigenous identity, but it also had a strong effect on me personally as I had had an encounter with this spirit and I was convinced it was connected to my own experience as an Indigenous person. This significant personal experience that inspired me in my research will be explained in greater detail in Chapter One. This study of *Baagak Aadisookewin* will contribute to the needed understanding of Indigenous Knowledges; this one story encapsulates much of the *Anishinaabe* worldview and can serve as mechanism for conveying essential lessons on how to live sustainably. I think it is important to stress the importance of spirit in language by a short story.

² Eva Garrouette and Kathleen Delores Westcott, “The Story is a Living Being: Companionship with stories in Anishinaabeg Studies,” in *Centering Anishnaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press), 2013. P. 61.

Tobasonakwut(aban) Kinew was a tireless advocate of the importance of an Anishinaabe worldview embed in the Anishinaabe language, and a big influence in my own studies. He often said the biggest crime was not the physical abuse during the residential school period, but the loss of a way of experiencing the spiritual world and the language that allows one to experience it. He instilled this message in his own son. I attended the first Anishinaabemotaadidaa Immersion Camp last summer, organized by Wab Kinew through his father's fund.³ He told everyone the first day, the reason you should be wanting to learn your language is because spirit will take care of you when you need it most. This rung absolutely true to me as this camp was my first step back into adjusting to life after losing my mom after she fought a long battle. We talked about *Baagak* at camp. To me, *Baagak* is essential to my grieving and healing process, my own search for *Giigino' amaagewin* – learning and teaching. I wanted to be an Ojibway linguist and focus on language revitalization when I started out in university. My parents steered me to understand the language at a deeper level than revitalization efforts.

Baagak is an example of *Aadisookaan* and *Dibaajimowin*. Creation stories and *Aadisookaanag* are defined as living spirits. Two words are used to describe and sometimes classify these narratives. *Aadizookaanag* are generally considered “traditional” or “Sacred” narratives that embody values, philosophies, and laws important to life. They are also *Manidoog* (Manitous), living beings who work with *Anishinaabeg* in the interests of demonstrating principles necessary for *mino-bimaadiziwin*, that good and beautiful life. *Dibaajimowin*, another word used to describe narratives, is generally translated to mean “histories” and “news.” These live, change, and grow though

³ The University of Winnipeg and the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre hosted the Anishinaabemootaadidaa Immersion Camp from July 20-26, 2015.

continuous retellings. Creation stories are therefore both *Aadisookaanag* and *DibaaJimowin*. They are like maps, or perhaps instructions, that teach us how to navigate the past, present, and future.⁴ Every time I share my research about *Baagak Aadisookaan*,⁵ I feel the reaction from the audience. I'm beginning to understand it's more than a great story. In fact, the word story diminishes the significance of its meaning. *Baagak* is a spiritual sacred story about spirits that come alive with every telling, as if to hear how they are being spoken about.⁶ This all brings me to the *Anishinaabe Aadisookaan* — sacred story of *Baagak*. This being will be examined to reveal the relevance of this sacred story, and story in general, to Indigenous identity. In this thesis, I collect versions of the story of *Baagak*—from 1822 up until 2016, and in various locations—from Quebec to Northwest Saskatchewan. The most extensive written accounts are from authors George Nelson, Robert Brightman, and Jennifer Brown in *Orders of the Dreamed*; Basil Johnson in *The Manitous*; John Borrows in *Drawing out Law*; and Jennifer Brown and Susan Gray in *Memoirs and Myths of an Ojibway Leader*. These various manifestations will be examined in Chapter Two, along with three major themes, including *Baagak's* dual gender, the awesomeness of the encounter with *Baagak*, and the mysterious nature of this Spirit Helper.⁷

I turn first to the existing stories and articles about *Baagak*. Although there is some scholarship about this Spirit Helper, there remains much confusion regarding who *Baagak* is. Some consider *Baagak* a bad omen or evil spirit, for instance. From the past to

⁴ Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, Heidi Kiiwetepinesiiik Stark in “Bagiige Making an Offering,” in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, xxvii, xviii.

⁵ Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin defines *Aadisookaan* as, “keepers of legends and history and memory.”

⁶ Melissa K. Nelson in “The Hydromythology of the Anishinaabeg in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, 214.

⁷ In the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba book *Untuwe Pi Kin He – Who We Are, Treaty Elder Teachings Vol. 1* defines *Aadisookaan* as spirit helpers. P. 117.

the present, how individuals experience *Baagak* vary and continue to astound, suggesting that stories of *Baagak* continue to resonate and carry relevance today. Through my interview process, I have uncovered five new versions of this narrative of *Baagak* from *Anishinaabeg* Knowledge Keepers and Elders with whom I am familiar. One of the most important versions is the story I received from Ron Mandamin, who told me this *Anishinaabe Aadisookewin*, first in English and then in *Anishinaabemowin*. Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin performed the *Manidookewiwin* – ceremonies and songs integral to the telling of *Baagak's Aadisookaan* (sacred story).

Pipe Ceremonies to acknowledge the Spirit of Baagak are nothing new. Early accounts have been documented in George Nelson's notes back 1822 in the book *Orders of the Dreamed*. In the section "Sacrificing and Feasts for Pah-kack," Nelson observes:

He who makes the feast, or his assistant, most commonly lights, or fills rather, the pipes of all who smoke, but when it is light it is first presented to that quarter where these are supposed to reside (I believe in the N.W or West) then to the cardinal points – then to the bladder of Grease which is put in a dish fit to contain it and covered with down.⁸

In making my case for the role of story in awakening Anishinaabe spirit and community, I will investigate one particular story, the story of Baagak, in its various manifestations. *Baagak* is defined as Winter spirits, skeletons, and an *Anishinaabe Aadisookaan*. As I will show, *Aadisookaan* are defined as spirit helpers here in Manitoba and this being is believed to be an active, generous, and provocative agent of Creation so

⁸ Jennifer S.H. Brown and Robert Brightman. "The Orders of the Dreamed": George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth 1823, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press 1988). P. 53,54.

a better term for *Baagak* will be a “Spirit Helper.”⁹ I will show that the story of *Baagak* teaches important lessons about Indigenous relationality – found in practices of *Anishinaabeg* governance, ethics, and between Anishinaabeg and the land, human and non-human beings, and the spirit world.

My thesis aims to present the most comprehensive study of this story and, in doing so, explain how *Baagak* the “spirit helper” still has relevance in today’s sacred times.¹⁰ *Baagak*’s story explains the creation of the three levels of law that are encoded in Anishinaabe society: human law, the natural laws – *Agiitigaaning Inaakoniwewin* (the Law of the Garden), and *Manitou Inakonigewin* – Spirit Law. Aimee Craft writes about *Inaakonigewin* (law) in her book, *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty*, defining Inaakonigewin Law as the culture of trade treaties, founded on Anishinaabe legal principles that foster respect and adherence to Anishinaabe protocols.¹¹ The *Baagak* story functions to foster such respect for and adherence to Anishinaabe law. It also explains that these laws are being forgotten by the people and warns of the consequences of ignoring these laws: the lost connection with the human, natural, and spirit worlds that is symbolized in the metamorphosis of the human *Baagak* into a skeleton, which leads to a loss of self-identity.

My research will make a significant contribution to Native Studies as the primary source accounts of *Baagak* provide the most complete account of who *Baagak* is and what his story means in relation to Indigenous identity and culture. The story of *Baagak*

⁹ In the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba book *Untuwe Pi Kin He – Who We Are*, Treaty Elder Teachings Vol. 1 defines Baagak (but spelt Baakag) as Winter Spirits, skeletons. P. 118.

¹⁰ Isaac Murdoch is from Serpent River, Ontario, also recognized as a spiritual mentor and tireless advocate for protecting the land, animals, fish and water. He refers to the environmental crisis faced today as “Sacred Times.”

¹¹ Aimee Craft, *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishinaabe Understanding of Treaty One*. (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd. 2013). P. 30.

is commonly understood to be one that is told only in the winter. However, Knowledge Keeper Ron Mandamin believes otherwise: “*Baagak* is an all-season Manitou because he looks after the wild places; he is the guardian of the forest.” He is not only a winter spirit, he is a spirit helper, and his message is one to be told year round. *Baagak* provides a lesson in right and sustainable living, a lesson that fosters identity. An examination of narratives of *Baagak* I hope will empower young people and provide a means to overcoming feelings of dysfunction and identity loss in Indigenous societies. They say these stories are mushkiki – medicine, and to me they certainly are as they helped me.

Chapter one will explain in detail my personal experience with *Baagak*, which inspired me in my research. My very personal connection to this story, through my own encounter with the spirit of *Baagak*, played a pivotal role in my deciding to pursue this research topic. This sets the stage for some of the contextual specificities I cite as important to understanding meanings of *Baagak*.

Chapter Two will provide an historical survey of the written research into the *Baagak* story from the 1800’s through to the present day and the different ways *Baagak* is experienced and the varying views people have of him as both a bad omen—associated with fear and death—and as a gift from the Creator—bringing a helpful warning to take caution. I will historically examine the scholarly research on narratives of *Baagak* and hold first-hand interviews with *Anishinaabe* and Cree people who have encountered the spirit of *Baagak*, and provide a narrative re-telling by Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin and then combine these versions with my own interpretation of the story.

Chapter Three will be a discussion of the story and how it supports my thesis that the story of *Baagak* functions to establish identity by promoting certain beliefs and values

(moral and ethical law), by showing the interconnection of human, natural, and spiritual law. The emphasis is on an Indigenous belief system that sustained the individual, society, culture, and identity. The various versions of the *Baagak* story were told to reinforce and encourage people to follow appropriate social behaviours. *Anishinaabe Onakonigewin* is defined as human behaviors. This *Baagak* narrative, and narratives in general, are an effective means to reclaim the sense of identity. I conclude that Baagak is instrumental to the safeguarding of order and good governance in Indigenous society and to the maintenance of identity and culture.

1.0 Behzhig: Amaniso

1.1 How My Research Chose Me

Manitoba has always been a place of activity, change, and struggle – movements that illustrate the harshness and beauty of life. From time immemorial, ancestors of Aboriginal communities now known as Anishinaabe, Asiniboine, Cree, Dene, Inuit, Metis, Oji-Cree, and Souix inhabited, migrated to, and settled throughout these lands. (2-3)

- Warren Cariou and Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, *Manitowapow: Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water*

My methodology utilizes first-hand interviews with Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and Indigenous people who have had encounters with *Baagak*. The fieldwork component of researching *Baagak* spanned a year from the time I decided on my research topic in October 2014 until I presented my findings in the Native Studies Colloquium in November of 2015. I began with memories of my own experience of seeing *Baagak*, and confirming with others who heard the scream of this being in my own community of *Keeseekoowenin*. I asked elders as far north as *Pimichikimak* – Cross Lake and Norway House and went to Ontario, where I met with Spiritual Mentors Ron Mandamin in *Iskatewizaagegan* – Shoal Lake (who performed the *Manidookewiwin* – spiritual ceremony that accompanies the *Baagak* teaching) and Isaac Murdoch of Serpent River, near Sault St. Marie. Documented narratives span even further west as far as Lac La Ronge Saskatchewan and as far north west into the James Bay Cree territory in Quebec, as *Baagak* is known to both Cree and *Anishinaabe* peoples. The most important element of this research methodology chapter is the story behind the alignment of a sighting, a dream, and where I was in my own life as I began searching for *Baagak* stories and what this spirit represents.

I also write in an autobiographical and auto-ethnographical style, a form of self-reflection and writing that explores my personal experiences and connects this autobiographical story to wider cultural-political-and social meanings and understandings.¹² In the next few chapters I will investigate the stories of *Baagak* and how these inspire spiritual, physical, and intellectual encounters, why these stories have emerged, and why they serve critical roles in *Anishinaabeg* culture and identity. My hope is to give a more comprehensive account of *Baagak* – what I believe is a much more complete narrative than has previously been documented – and thereby uncover some of the significance of this Spirit Helper.

My project/journey began the day I asked Dr. Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair if he would consider taking me on as a graduate student after I completed my Indigenous Governance Degree at the University of Winnipeg. Although I did not have a clear direction or specific topic I wanted to pursue, I did know language and story were what I wanted to address, and that included dreams and spirit encounters. As I said to Dr. Sinclair: “I want to study my language, our stories, and the teachings within them.” He looked over my writing, we spoke for a while about what I wanted to do, and then he said: “Let’s start with story.”

1.2 Bawaajige – Dreams

A strength that I knew I would bring to my research is what Shawn Wilson would describe as “knowledge that came from lifelong participant observation with Indigenous

¹² “Autoethnography” as defined by Collins Online Dictionary. Last modified 16 February 2016, <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/10957/Autoethnography>

scholars and Elders.”¹³ My greatest gift is growing up with fluent parents as this allowed me to process details in my mind and ask questions at my leisure to gain a deeper understanding. I have often been encouraged not only by my parents but also by my Uncle Wally Swain to earn the privilege to speak of such things. Wilson explains that Indigenous scholars believe guidance can come from above, in particular through dreams. My thesis incorporates my own dream question and the dreams of Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin. My early “participatory action research”¹⁴ in Indigenous ceremony and language—IK—prepared the way for my interest in *Aadisookaan* (keepers of legends, history and memory).

My research and personal life go hand in hand because during this time my mother was very sick. I put out my tobacco and asked the Spirit of *Baagak* to help me—*Wijjishin Baagak*. I placed my offering at the same poplar tree at which I would pray for my mom. My elder Tobasonakwut(aban) Kinew shared with me about this place we are at when we, or someone we love, suffer from a critical illness; those that are in that luminous place. The Creator is more likely to take pity on us when we are at this place.¹⁵ Shortly after I made my tobacco offering *Niikaanis* (spiritual relative), Lucy Ducharme advised me to speak to Ron Mandamin of Treaty Three territory; I had just asked friend and widely recognized Spiritual Mentor’s Jason Parenteau and Elder Charlie Nelson if they could help me.

Mandamin had a dream about *Baagak* two weeks before I got in touch with him. I

¹³ Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony, Indigenous Research Methods*. (Black Point, N.S.: Fernwood Pub. 2008). P. 128.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵ Tobasonakwut Kinew. *Pathways to Indigenous Knowledge Course*. Indigenous Studies, University of Winnipeg, 2012.

planned to go to Shoal Lake, but circumstances did not allow for a trip. We did meet later as Mandamin's work brought him to Winnipeg for a culture think tank at the Assembly of First Nations gathering in Winnipeg to elect a new national leader. As Mandamin was making his way to Winnipeg, he said he was thinking about *Baagak* and could swear he saw him cross the road before he got into Manitoba. In *Anishinaabemowin*, this is called an *amaniso*—becoming aware of an omen.¹⁶ He interpreted this as a good sign, that the spirit of Baagak was awakened, and that he could possibly entrust me with these teachings. I believe that my offering tobacco and asking the spirits for help influenced Mandamin's experience of *Baagak* in advance of our meeting, and in this way, the research topic also chose me. My conversation with Mandamin was more than what Wilson refers to as small talk; it was a part of the process of getting on the same wavelength with him, which is essential to an Indigenous research methodology.¹⁷ I later realized, a process Wilson describes as “eureka” moments,¹⁸ that the *Memengwesiwag* (little people) and *Missabe* (giant people) are important beings, interceptors, in the *Baagak* story, according to Mandamin's teachings.

We met at a restaurant in Winnipeg; I selected a quiet table at the back of the room. We chatted a bit about the process of electing a new National Chief and got settled with some drinks, and he ordered food. After the waitress left, I thanked him for coming and gave him my tobacco. As I talked I noticed Mandamin opening the tobacco. After I was done, he asked me, “Why do you want to hear about *Baagak*?” I told him that a long time ago while driving around near the reserve one night in spring, I, along with everyone

¹⁶ Patricia Ningewance, *Speaking Gookum's Language*, 225.

¹⁷ Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 99

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

in the car, saw a figure cross our path that matched John Borrows' mother's description of seeing Pauguk, in the spring: "One day on the prairie, a blur of motion flashed across my path. I followed its arc until I saw it come to rest on a jagged outcropping of stone behind some trees. . . [and then] it was off again, rising though the air. Its bleached whiteness stood out against the blue sky. Almost chalk-like in color."¹⁹ I told him that after having this direct experience of *Baagak*, I read about the spirit in Ojibway Literature, and this started me on a path to explore *Baagak* more.

I also told Mandamin about the location of my experience, Keeseekoowenin First Nation in western Manitoba. I also told him about the time many years ago, I got lost in Riding Mountain National Park, pursuing clues after a Sasquatch sighting was reported and footprints were seen next morning. We laughed as I explained how the experience during the night made me wonder about the importance of nature, animal life, and creation during this time. I also told Mandamin how my father told me about his grandmother's experience when she was young, how she went down one morning to get water from the river, and when she was filling her bucket, she looked up and saw a *Memengwesi* – little man, down at the river, too. Though he did not say anything, it was his actions that conveyed a message. She saw this little man, with long white hair down to the ground, was smoking a pipe and had water. An Elder in her community told her that this experience meant that she would live a long life and that the teachings of the pipe and water are important. My great grandmother went on to live to be 107 years old and had a clear mind until she passed on.²⁰ Lastly, I was trying make sense of I had a

¹⁹ John Borrows (Kegedonce), *Drawing Out Law: A Spirit's Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 81.

²⁰ See photo in Appendices 1.

very vivid dream that still comes to mind often, mostly when I travel east through Ontario: I was flying at a high speed in an eastward direction, over *Anishinaabe* country, beginning with the story of *Baagak*. It was the sort of spiritual question you field to someone with extreme trust. Mandamin is widely recognized as a spiritual mentor.²¹ After I told Mandamin the nature of my experience and my intended research and something of my background, he told me to turn on the recorder while he related the story of *Baagak*, first in English. He then started the story of *Baagak* without delay and told his story smoothly without missing a beat; his oral history story-telling methodology flowed as if it was a fresh memory. I pursued guidance for the stories of *Baagak* to research after I unexpectedly came across a knowledge keeper who carried the sacred story – *Aadisookaan* of *Baagak*. He told me in advance of meeting him:

I always had a fantasy to make a movie on a story of human creation, it is such a fascinating look to ideologies of human evolution that is not quite recognized by many. Your curiosity in Pagauk has lit an old flame inside with the Manitou, especially with what is happening to the natural world. This is something the Spirit Pagauk was entrusted to help humans not to forget the promise to keeping what was left behind for the future. There is a lot to share. I hope we can cross paths so I can entrust these stories to you so they are remembered. I have always wanted to write the stories and have someone illustrate or animate them for children and youth.²²

²¹ Spiritual mentor is a term used by Blair Stonechild, and how I am reference knowledge keepers.

²² Ron Mandamin, Conversation over Facebook, 9 December 2014.

1.3 Wiika Na Gi-Noondawa Baagak? Did you ever hear Baagak?

Part of my research was conducted in Berens River where my wife was a nurse, working a two weeks on-and-off schedule. As we became a part of this community during this time, I developed what Peter Kulchyski describes as a longitudinal relationship with the people in the community, in particular with Keith Berens, community health director. I told him I hoped to host a *Aadisookaan-DibaaJimowin* Series or Research Seminar with knowledge keepers, elders and spiritual mentors someday at the University of Manitoba. Keith was polite, but his brother Norman said more bluntly, “These are our stories,” thereby expressing his distrust of researchers. This statement had an influence on how I proceeded with my research and motivated me to be ethically responsible and always certain of the participants’ approval. During this time, my own mother described her near death experience to me, my spiritual mentor Mandamin told me about a dream, and I began to understand the teachings of *Pagano Giizhig* in my own life, personal experiences which informed my research.

The conversations I shared with Keith Berens inspired me to do further research into the history of the Berens River Ojibwe, specifically as it relates to my research on story; therefore, William Berens was a central focus for me. William Berens was Chief of Berens River from 1917 until 1947, and he collaborated with American anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell from 1930-1940,²³ transmitting aspects of Ojibwe culture and worldview to Hallowell through story. In his recording of Berens’ stories and teachings in detailed notes, Hallowell was meticulous in letting the Ojibwe speak for themselves.²⁴

²³ Jennifer Brown and Susan Gray, *Memories, Myths, and Dreams of an Ojibwe Leader: William Berens as told by Irving Hallowell*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009). xi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xx.

Berens` influence as a teacher through story became far-reaching with the publication of Susan Grey and Jennifer Brown`s *Memories, Myths and Dreams of an Ojibwe Leader William Berens as told to A. Irving Hallowell* in 2009. Hallowell is remembered by the Ojibwe as Midewigimaa (Mide master) because he was so interested in learning Midewiwin teachings.²⁵

Part III, “Dibaajimowinan, Stories and Dreams for Living,” in *Memories, Myths and Dreams of an Ojibwe Leader William Berens as told to A. Irving Hallowell*, begins with an emphasis on the importance of story as a teaching method used by Berens and Hallowell to give a “concrete expression to aspects of Ojibwe culture and worldview that he was helping Hallowell to understand.”²⁶ Grey and Brown note Berens the storyteller taught Hallowell about teachings, which he then passed on to his students. Hallowell also recognized the importance of dreams in the lives of the Ojibwe. He states “more than half of the stories involve a dream experience that either constitutes the core of the narrative or marks a key turning point.”²⁷ Dreams were important in the lives and lived experiences of the Berens River Ojibwe in the 1930s. The very same could be said of my own research, which is based on a dream; Mandamin`s dream of *Baagak* in advance of my asking him about this story confirmed for me the value and necessity of my research. Mandamin in fact is a carrier of this *Aadisookewin* of *Baagak*, which is “rich in meaning and dense in content,” a mechanism to convey Indigenous Knowledges to others, and with his permission, I would be putting this knowledge in written form.

I knew I had something special to work with; it still feels like a gift to me. I

²⁵ Ibid., xxii.

²⁶ Ibid., 81.

²⁷ Ibid., 82.

juggled being a student, caring for my mom who was in and out of the hospital over the course of a year, and travelling with my own little family to Berens River as my wife was working as a nurse in the community. During the time I time spent going back and forth to Berens River, my mother became sick again and was checked into the Intensive Care Unit at Victoria Hospital in Winnipeg. I did not go with my wife back to Berens River at this time; my dad and I took turns taking care of my son and my mom while my wife was working. My sister Priscilla Bone also helped and would babysit when I needed to go to classes. My wife told me Keith Berens asked, “Where is your little family this time?” I was in the habit of visiting with nursing station staff over coffee and working on my *Anishinaabemowin*. She told him our situation, and he sent her home with some tea that he knew to improve health when people are sick. My mom benefited from both the care at Victoria Hospital and from this mushkiki—the medicine tea Berens sent my wife home with.

After my mom got out of hospital, we went back up north to Berens River for another two-week period. These stints overlapped with research I had just conducted with Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin. I thanked Keith, and I gave him some tobacco and a hunting knife. Then I asked him, “*Wiika na noondawa Baagak*—Did you ever hear Pauguk?” He nodded that he had. I said, “*Dibaajimowin na Baagak* baamaa—Can you tell me the story later?” Again, he nodded in agreement. We met after the workweek on a Saturday, right after a big winter storm. We talked, I shared my recording with Berens and said this is all going to be a book someday, including his story. More than 85 years earlier, anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell was there interviewing Keith’s grandfather. Berens’ story telling of his Pauguck experience significantly occurred a day after a winter

storm. Berens began his story in *Anishinaabemowin/Saulteaux*:

Aniin, Mukatay Wasin Mikinak ndizinikaaz (Keith Berens)

I heard this *Baagak*, when it was storming, in a blizzard. My grandpa and me were sitting by the stove while he was talking, telling us legends of the past, what he knew. Then all of a sudden, I heard on the [woodstove] pipes, singing. I told my grandpa, “Grandpa maa, listen, listen to that singing.” He looked at me, and he said, “Aw, *Baagak*, you’re hearing *Baagak* out there in that blizzard.” So he looks at me, and he then says, “*Maajaan*, go outside. You will see a child hanging, that’s all you’ll see. But as you go out, when you look at him, he will ask you to play with him, but I warn you, “Do not laugh at what he does; if you laugh, that means that he has won.” That’s what he said, “*Gego baapi-ken* (Don’t laugh)”; “no matter what he does out there. Eventually he will become an adult; first he is a child, then he’s going to be an adult. He will do anything to make you laugh, just like a trickster, which means that he won if you laugh at him.” He told me, if you beat him, if you don’t laugh at what he does, that means you beat him in that area.” “In the future,” he said, “if you do that (not laugh, that is, not be distracted) then nobody in this world will be able to beat you because you beat *Baagak* in that area.” But for myself, I was a young kid, about 12 or 13 when I heard this *Baagak*. It’s only once in a lifetime that you hear *Baagak*; but maybe he will come back. I don’t know; that’s hard to say.

Berens paused, then continued and said, “I ended up getting scared. I didn’t go

out. I don't know what would have happened if I went out there in that blizzard with *Baagak*." Berens paused again and then sat back in his chair and said,

Baagak is one of the strongest legends that ever lived, and people who encounter this *Baagak* will have the same powers as *Baagak*, but a lot of them won't pass that test. I didn't pass that test which was given to me when my grandpa looked at me and said, "*Kiin-wa-ish*, It's up to you, if you want to go out or not." And that was my encounter with *Baagak* at that time when I was growing up. After that, I never heard *Baagak* again. Up to this day, I haven't heard this *Baagak*. Maybe I will hear him again in the future; I don't know. It's up to him if he wants to show himself to me again in the future, but time will tell. I will encounter that when that situation comes up, when *Baagak* shows himself again. It's up to him; it's not up to me. It's up to *Wiin Gizhi Manitou*, the Creator, who sends these spirits to you to as a gift. But a lot of people do not understand that. *Aahaa miigwetch* (thank you)."

After the interview with Keith Berens last winter, his brother arrived and was just going on about what we chatting about, it was obvious to me both brothers have excellent knowledge of what has been written by their community and people by writers such as A. Irving Hallowell, and later Jennifer Brown who finished Hallowell's notes. Norman Berens told me about the Memengwesiwag, referring to them as the Rock People. "They got no nose bone, that's why they're shy. People seen them, and their canoes; they were paddling up creek, in a rock canoe, but it didn't glide the way humans would in a canoe. It just got stuck in the water until they paddled again. They are still around; people see

them around.” In my research with Keith Berens, he told me additional information I did not find in the book. Berens told me it was Turtle who was the one who brought the people the circular rock filled with medicines; he told me about a rock that is still here, a circular rock that can open and in it are all the medicines, even the ones needed in the future. Everyone tried to physically open it, and, finally, one did. All he did was pray and it opened. On one side were the medicines, on the other, *Omagakii* – Frog (frogs look after the medicines). Berens concluded that it was Turtle who moved that rock again, out onto an island somewhere.

It was now the summer of 2015; my wife’s time working in Berens River ended. I settled back into academics and caring for my mother. After my mom got out of ICU and was transferred back to the main floor where the other patients were, she told me she had died and come back. She told me she saw water. My mom’s near death experience reminded me of Mandamin’s Creation story teachings, especially about the role of water in life and that we come from the stars. During this period, my mom gave me a lot of reassurance about the process and place we go to after we pass. I had asked Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin if he could come meet my mom; my hope was that maybe the spirits could tell him what was wrong with my mom as conventional medicine was not working. This is when my belief in the Creator really took care me during the most difficult period of my life and when my commitment to working with IK in my academic career was affirmed. Ron told me he had a dream about my mom in which there were three people waiting for her to return to Spirit. On the last evening of my mother’s life, at about 9:00 p.m., she told me she was letting go. She told me not to cry because she had lived a good life; we talked for hours then she told me to call my dad and sister to say

goodbye, shortly after 2:00 a.m. We all silently hoped she would pull through again, but her breathing slowed in the morning. I saw a hole in the clouds and thought of a teaching—Pagonegiizhik—I knew it was time. *Pagonegiizhik* is mentioned in *Manitowapow* by Tobasonakwut Kinew in “Let them Burn the Sky.” He refers to the constellation teaching as the path our loved ones travel when they return to spirit. Kinew explains, they travel from star to star, until someone makes that offering of tobacco. Then the spirit of deceased rests on that star, waiting for that ceremony to take place.”²⁸ I return to the importance of Pagano Giizhig in Chapter Three. I told my mom not to look back and go home. Shortly after 11:00 a.m., on June 27th, 2015, she took her last breath while I held her hand.

1.4 Manidookewiwin – Spiritual Ceremony

More time passed, and the 2015-16 school year began; my turn to present in the colloquium series was approaching, and I was getting ready to share my research. At this point, I only had the English component ready. I made plans to travel out to Iskatewizaagegan – Shoal Lake to complete the research and witness a *Baagak* ceremony that Mandamin was going to conduct at my request. Fall is the time of year this ceremony is done. I arrived in Shoal Lake and offered tobacco to a Knowledge Keeper and also provided an honorarium/gift. As Mandamin was preparing to do the ceremony, he sat back and lit a smudge. He then asked, “What is it that you seek today?” I told him in *Anishinaabemowin*, “*Ni noonde ginistodaan Aadisookaan Baagak, ni-wii-noonde mino-anoki-min shigo awiya ginistodaan Baagak*—I want to understand the sacred teaching of

²⁸ Tobasonakwut Kinew, “Let Them Burn the Sky” in *Manitowapow*, 147.

Baagak, and I want to do good work so others can understand *Baagak*.” I could not express the rest of my reasons in *Anishinaabemowin*, so I had to resort to English to explain my purpose in seeking this teaching of *Baagak*. Along the lines that I want to share the story because I believe these oral histories are very effective mechanisms for conveying IK and language, both of which are crucial to Indigenous identity and so to our survival as Indigenous people. In this way, I intend to make a contribution to my discipline of Native Studies, for to date there is no comprehensive study of this teaching. I also stated I wanted to witness the *Baagak* ceremony and give thanks for all my blessings, for the food my little family and I will eat over the winter. Mandamin acknowledged my request and proceeded.

I brought my sacred items and listened and observed the ceremony closely. I was instructed to open my offering of fat, *Baagak*'s favorite treat. I had brought bear grease. As Mandamin smoked his lit pipe and began to pray, I thought about my own research questions that drove me to find out more about the *Manitou Baagak*. I thought of what my dad always taught me about the directions of the pipe as Mandamin pointed his pipe in the 7 cardinal directions. Deep down I knew this Spirit, which Mandamin was invoking in this ceremony, was not a bad omen; based on my own experience, I was certain that the story John Borrows tells in his chapter, “Pauguk” in *Drawing out Law* was partial and there was more to this spirit. My experience with *Baagak* was that it does not represent evil or death as a negative experience but rather a spirit that brings goodness, a positive message about death as a part of life and a passing into another form of life. I learned this through my journey with *Baagak* during my mother's last days, when her spirit started her own journey home through the *Pagonegiizhik* constellation.

Over the course of this research, I have come to see what *Baagak* has done for me; *Baagak* prepared me for my own mother's passing. This is one of the many positive attributes of this Spirit, who has much to teach us about living in this world. Realizing this after hearing Mandamin describe his dream and tell the story of *Baagak*. I became content, reassured that I was on the right path, doing research of value in affirming the validity of dream and spirit and an Indigenous methodology. I've come to learn that this *Baagak* teaching is described as *Odibaajimoodaadiwin* – rites of passage storytelling, as explained to me by Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin.

After Mandamin finished smoking his pipe, he conducted the rest of the *Baagak* ceremony, starting with four drumbeats followed by a slow, low rhythm. Mandamin spoke in *Anishinaabemowin* and then proceeded into song, followed again by a slower rhythm and more speaking. He followed this pattern of speaking in *Anishinaabemowin* and singing three more times before he proceeded into the English component (shortened because we already completed that a year earlier). As Mandamin continued praying, spirit told me through him that I needed to do more to earn the favor of *Baagak* and in order to complete my work on myself which is tied to my research. This spring I will have to fast on a high hill with water flowing down, almost like a volcano; there I will earn the favor of *Baagak*, who wants me to see him how he used to be before he was outcast from heaven. My journey is just starting. To do the work, Mandamin said I needed to pick up the instruments used (drum, feather), paint a specific image on the hand drum to be used in the songs. He gifted me a feather and a case, which he instructed me to dress with a green and yellow cloth, which I have done. Always speak from what you have just experienced, the rest is going to come in time. He said, "*Baagak* is the Guardian of the

Forest, of the wild places”; he is the story we are pledged to collaborate on. He then said that after learning about Baagak and researching and recording his story, we will be working on the stories of *Mishibizhiw*, the water panther (who lives in that river that comes down from where you will be fasting in the spring) and *Miish`akomoo* – Sasquatch, a being in between the *Missabe* – Giant People and the *Memegwesi* – Little People. “They have stories they want to share.” Mandamin warned there will be challenges ahead, but there is more to be earned, experienced, and understood. This future research is all very exciting to me, of course.

After the ceremony, I went out into the bush and placed my offering there. I felt more prepared to present my research as well as thankful for my blessings. The presentation, while difficult, went well. The day after I presented the first snow fell. To me things felt right and I took a lot of satisfaction that I was able to share this ancient teaching with people present just at the right time of year. The coming together of a spiritual mentor’s dream and my own offering of tobacco restored complete confidence in my academic journey, and *Anishinaabe* ways such as offerings and dreams. Mandamin’s dream in the midst of everything going on in my life inspired my research to completion.

It is important to understand the morals and ethics that are accompanied within our stories and legends. The purpose of sharing stories is the transmission of knowledge, history, traditions, customs and language. This ensures the continuity of self-identity, awareness and a continued education of our world view and culture, providing opportunities to allow growth through experience. Stories have morals and ethics intertwined within them, allowing the listener to use their creative thought in how they process information and how they recognize data within the stories shared. It is an avenue

to transmit information in a way that is mutual, enjoyable and understandable so that the listener comprehends what is being shared by the speaker. It is important to transmit your understanding and knowledge of these stories that you know in the way it was taught to you, or how you learned it. I was instructed to never change any story by of adding or omitting information, it loses its power and importance.

2.0 Niizh: Dibaajimotaadiwin - Telling of a Story

2.1 Investigating Baagak from the 1800s to the Present

How did we put away Pehehsoo
and Pahkak?
When did we stop laughing at Wehsakecha?
When did we cross ourselves
to pray to Joseph and Virgin Mary?
How did we stop speaking Cree
How did we stop being free? (216)

- Emma LaRocque, "My Hometown
Northern Canada South Africa"

There are a number of ways the Spirit *Baagak* is spoken and written about. There are a lot of different stories and there are also various spellings including Pauguk, Pa-guck, Paakuk, Pahkahk, and so on that reflect the range of dialects throughout the vast area in which the stories are told. It is a well-known story and has been told for centuries, and documented for almost 200-years. Scholarship about *Baagak* stories can be divided into three periods. The earliest scholarship about *Baagak* stories comes from 1822, when Metis Hudson Bay employee George Nelson wrote accounts of *Baagak* after observing ceremonies in Lac La Ronge. The next reference to *Baagak* stories comes from anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell in 1932 when he documented stories from Berens Rivers. Other scholars from the same period include Selwyn Dewdney and Norval Morrisseau in 1965, Elaine and Louis Bird. In her 1992 poem "My Hometown Northern Canada South Africa," Emma LaRocque summarizes the destructive effects of colonialism and expresses the spiritual trauma felt because of the displacement of IK, the wisdom of stories, and language. The more recent research about *Baagak* stories comes from storyteller Basil Johnson who wrote stories about *Baagak* in 2008. Other recent scholarship comes from John Borrows and my own contributions though the research I

conducted. The current day, starting in 2000, is when Indigenous authors began to write accounts from their own perspective. All of these times included methodologies, practices, and interpretations of these stories that are distinctly different and influential.

The earliest and lengthiest accounts of *Baagak* were recorded by George Nelson, a Metis Hudson Bay employee, back in 1822. In Nelson's notes in Jennifer Brown and Robert Brightman's, *Orders of the Dreamed: George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823*, he titles several sections while making observations about Pah-kack (Skeleton) throughout the book: Pah-kack attacks poor Indian; Pah-kack feasts at Lac La Ronge; and, Pah-kack honored in Gift Exchange Dance. However, as Nelson himself notes in his journal about ceremonies and feasts: "I cannot say more than any common observer – I have been invited and Partaken of many of them, but I never thought of enquiring into their origin, the causes &c, of them."²⁹ It is significant that Nelson noticed that "[t]here is a very strong relationship between Cree myths and Cree society. The stories of the mythical beings reinforced socially beneficial behavior."³⁰ However, he does not delve deeply into this important insight. For instance, the stories and ceremonies surrounding Pakahk, the skeleton being, reinforce the idea of the sharing of food and all material goods for the benefit of the society. Further, the positive contribution he makes by recording ceremonies and stories is negated by a very negative bias that undermines the value of the story. While Nelson was observing a Pakahk Ceremony, he wrote:

²⁹ Jennifer S.H. Brown and Robert Brightman. "The Orders of the Dreamed": George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth 1823 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press 1988), 100.

³⁰ Ibid., 195.

“Poor unfortunate creatures!” I often explained to myself – “Ye are desirous, nay anxious to perform your duties to your maker, but know not know. If you only knew how he abominates this ceremony which you perform with so much devotion, how soon would you cast off all your superstitions, and rather live without any religion at all, and risk all upon chance, than perform sacrifices, for aught I know, to demons!”³¹

Nelson goes on about not wishing to waste his remaining paper on what he feels the intended audience, European people, will have no interest in. He continues to describe what he does not understand: “I was struck with a certain horror and thought that half of the devils in hell had entered the throats of these men.” This passage provides an apt example of stereotypes and the thinking of the day in regards to Anishinaabe/Cree culture. The challenge is in trying to revive Indigenous Knowledges through language and story, because this kind of negative thinking largely still persists.

In their analysis of the text, Brown and Brightman create a “*Dramatis Personae*”, or “*Cast of Characters*” for readers to have a brief background into beings found in Nelson’s texts. About Pay-kack they write:

Nelson recorded considerable detail on ambiguous beings which, although associated with death, starvation, illness, and other misfortune, were understood to grant great hunting and curing power to those possessing them as guardian spirits . . . Shared elements are their ability to fly; their appetite for burned grease sacrifices which they appropriate through the

³¹Ibid., 54,55.

smoke, their skeletal emaciated appearance, their origins as human victims of starvation or disease, and the signaling of their presence by weird laughter, moans, or rattling bones.³²

The editors recognize that Nelson utilizes an “ambiguous” approach when describing *Baagak* as a being having both negative and positive attributes.

Nelson’s research provides foundational secondary accounts explaining that Pakahk is the helping spirit of the hunters to both Plains and Woods Cree.³³ Nelson describes a Manitokan Dance, a “Gift Exchange Dance,” held at the Little Pine Reserve in the fall to honor Pakahk. “We went many times to this celebration as children, and were included in the ceremony of gift giving and receiving. The ceremony began at the central teepee with a dance which included the passing of bladders full of grease, a favorite treat of Pakahk.”³⁴ Nelson describes a process of community participation as people go from teepee to teepee exchanging in gifts and dancing. Nelson observed the ceremony as one that reinforced the ethics of sharing. In some places, gift giving is institutionalized around an image set up where one could bring a gift and receive a gift. The image is called a Manitohkan; people would pick up something from the gifts scattered around the Manitohkan, and then they would leave another gift or some tobacco, just as they would when collecting medicines. Nelson explains as follows:

On Lac la Ronge, I was once travelling by canoe with Dan McKenzie, and as we passed by a steep cliff he asked to stop and get some medicine. We drew up a cliff at a place where there was a hole scooped out of red rock.

³² Ibid., 111

³³ Ibid., 195

³⁴ Ibid., 195

While Dan dug out more of the red rock he said, “Now you should sing.”

When he had as much medicine as he wanted, he left some tobacco in the hole in exchange. I was told that it might be possible to be bewitched and become a Pakahk, roaming the land.³⁵

The offering of gifts was a gesture to honor Pakahk in a hunting society. In long winters, a successful hunt was critical and the reciprocal gestures of hunters offering gifts and tobacco was common practice. *Baagak* exists in other ceremonies too. Katherine Pettipas, in *Severing the Tie that Binds: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies*, claims that the “give away dance held in the fall or early winter, was pledged by one who had received the spiritual prerogative from the spirit Pakahkos. . . [s]uccessful hunts and long life were believed to be within the power of Pakahkos, and offerings to this spirit reflected Cree concerns regarding their well-being during the ensuing winter months.”³⁶ Nelson notes that this ceremony could last upwards to four days; however, that depended on the number of people and gifts involved.

In *Dangerous Spirits: The Windigo in Myth and History*, Shawn Smallman shares a story about a troubled Anglican missionary that was set up in 1870, in the Athabasca region of Alberta, on sacred grounds. The stubborn Reverend Charles Weaver went against the advice of his local Metis help, Nathan Carlson. Smallman explains that when the Reverend was building his missionary post,

Weaver found a carved representation of an Indigenous spirit, which he kept for himself. Carlson argued this sacred object was likely part of the

³⁵ Ibid., 196

³⁶ Katherine Pettipas. *Severing the Tie that Binds: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press 1994) 54-55.

skeleton ceremony, intended to ward off starvation . . . still, as a spirit associated with hunger, the Flying Skeleton could help people threatened by starvation.³⁷

Smallman explains the Algonquin people respected but feared this skeleton being Pa-gauk— especially on dark and windy nights, when he flew above the trees —and they would not speak above a whisper in their wigwams.³⁸ This account indicates the location of the Mission post must have been at a pristine location where offerings were made. Nelson further explains that Cree people shared the same belief about Baagak as being able to ward off starvation. Nelson also explains that *Baagak*, understood properly, is both a representation of death and a source of protection against death—a guardian spirit.³⁹

There is no reference to *Baagak* in the early writings of Ojibway authors William Warren or George Copway. In most of the early accounts, there is seldom more than a few lines or paragraphs about *Baagak*. For example, in Laura Peers' book, *Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780 to 1870*, the sole reference to *Baagak* is the following:

The trade dance was still being held by the Ojibwa and the Cree in the region at this time, for a set of equipment used in the dance – tiny bows, arrows, guns, knives, and hatchets with offerings of tobacco tied to them – was collected in the Winnipeg area in the 1870s. The trade dance was dedicated to Pakuk, a supernatural figure associated with winter and

³⁷ Shawn Smallman, *Dangerous Spirits: The Winidigo in Myth and History* (Surrey: Heritage House Publishing Co. Ltd. 2014) 126.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁹ Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 111.

starvation, to bring snow so that the game might easily be tracked and furbearers easily trapped during the winter.⁴⁰

Again, *Baagak's* ambiguous nature is evident; he is related to winter and death but is also the bringer of snow that makes it possible to have a successful hunt, thereby protecting against starvation and ensuring the survival of the society.

In another brief but contrasting account written about *Baagak*, he is represented as a dangerous spirit and is again associated with death: “[t]here are two manittos who are conspicuous of the Land of the departed; one of whom is chibiabos. . . . The other manitto was called Pauguk, who was represented as a hunter of men, bearing with him an invisible bow and arrow.”⁴¹ While both accounts share bow and arrow content, they differ dramatically as one portrays *Baagak* as a being to be respected as a bringer of snow, while the latter portrays *Baagak* as a being to be feared as a hunter of man.

Nelson also describes how one may be transformed into a Pakahkos: if one freezes to death in the winter, one will become a Pakahkos (the diminutive of Pakahk), a small creature about four feet high with long icy fingers and a little rifle. The possibility of turning into such a being is used to motivate children to keep the fire going in the winter.⁴² Again, his spirit serves a protective function in the society. Nelson further explains that people say, “There’s Pakackos,” when the trees pop in the very cold weather. However, Nelson also explains Pakahk is used to describe someone’s ghost as well. He writes of “Benjamin Frobisher, who died of exposure when escaping his

⁴⁰ Laura Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780 to 1870*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 184. Footnotes indicate these items are still on display at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa.

⁴¹ Ellen Russell Emerson. “Indian myths or legends, traditions, and symbols of the Aborigines of America compared with those of other countries including Hindostan, Egypt, Persia, Assyria, and China.” (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, Inc., 1965), 185.

⁴² Brown and Brightman. *Orders of the Dreamed*, 195-96.

imprisonment in 1819, and whose haunting of his old Lac la Ronge residence in skeleton or Pakahk form.⁴³

The 19th century images and representations of *Baagak* are filled with glimpses into the worldview of Cree and Ojibwe hunters and the reciprocal nature of hunting societies. While many narratives recall frightening experiences, *Baagak* was a respected figure in Cree and Ojibwe and critically linked to survival, installing codes of conduct in children and to foster respect with their natural environment and food resources. The period of the 1900's represents a new direction in the research on *Baagak*. For example, Irving Hallowell collaborated with Ojibway leader William Berens to bring an Ojibway perspective to *Baagak* and the experience in the lives of those affected. Hallowell did not simply record observations, he engaged with the Ojibway community through Berens and conducted interviews to get their perspective on the meaning of the story and dreams in their lives. Brown and Gray note that since Berens was in his sixties and seventies, Hallowell was fortunate to be working with him because in his youth, he would not have been so open about dreams in which he was offered gifts or blessings. Discussions of dream quests and the personages who offer powers to the dreamer often emphasize that recipients were forbidden to speak of these experiences to do so would mean sanctions and the loss of the benefits occurred.⁴⁴ *Anishinaabe* artist Norval Morrisseau worked with Selwyn Dewdney to produce the book *Legends of my People: The Great Ojibway* that was published in 1965. Dewdney and Morrisseau seem to have had a relationship similar to Berens and Hallowell in which Dewdney allowing the Ojibwe worldview come alive on the pages.

⁴³ Ibid.,18.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

Omushkego Cree Story-Teller Louis Bird has arguably given us the most comprehensive account of the flying skeleton that has been told—*The Spirit Lives in the Mind: Omushkego Stories, Lives, and Dreams*—having generously devoted much of his life to documenting the stories, language, and lessons of his people. Bird collaborated with Susan Elaine Gray to produce this book that recounts Indigenous peoples’ experiences of *Baagak*. In 2005, Bird also worked with contributors at the University of Winnipeg and published *Telling our Stories: Omushkego Legends and Histories from Hudson Bay*. In addition to these works are less detailed accounts from Sandy Lake Cree, a Lake St. Martin community report, and a community history about White Fish Lake, Ontario.

Both Morrisseau and Bird speak of the ancientness of the Paakuk legend which gives readers a sense of historical significance. Morrisseau comments that “Paakuk has roamed the skies and flown over since the dawn of history because of the wrong he did by committing the first sorcery murder among the Ojibway.”⁴⁵ Bird dedicates about six pages to stories about this Spirit in his book, titling the section, “Pakaaskokan, An Ancient Legend and Mystery.” He describes “Pakaaskokan” as taking “two forms; one as a human skeleton, the other as a voice heard up in the sky.” He elaborates stating the one that takes a human form was “sometimes able to communicate with humans – sometimes it required a little bit of assistance humans.”⁴⁶ According to Bird, the story of Pakaaskowan, or Mr. Skeleton, is one told to reinforce beneficial social behavior. Bird also suggests that the story conveys the human feeling of fear experienced at changes in

⁴⁵ Norval Morrisseau, *Legends of my People: The Great Ojibway* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, Toronto, 1977), 85.

⁴⁶ Louis Bird, *The Spirit Lives in the Mind: Omushkego Stories, Lives, and Dreams*. (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press). 51.

the weather and at the arrival of winter. He describes how this legend was told as a fascinating story for youngsters, warning them not to eat or drink the first snow, which would disturb the spirit, and cause them to get sore bones later on in life.⁴⁷

Both Morrisseau and Bird speak about how seeing *Baagak* can also be a blessing. “To see *Baagak*, without fear, is to be blessed with a long life,” Morrisseau says. He continues,

At James Bay Ontario, an old Indian lady told me that her grandmother heard a mournful yell in the tree tops. It was Paakuk, asking to be set loose. When the lady’s grandmother saw Paakuk stuck between two trees, he asked her to pry him loose, offering in return a ripe old age. She climbed the tree and freed him; she lived to be one hundred and two years old.⁴⁸

Bird describes a similar story about two young men hunting. As they take shelter from a sudden fall storm, they hear someone screaming in the wind. One of the young men remembers the Pakaaskowan story and its message: if you hear screams in the wind, one must go and check to see if the spirit is trapped, and if it is, one must release it.

Therefore, the young men check and sure enough, there is Pakaaskowan, stuck in the top of a tree asking for help. So the one of the men says, “Before we release you, we’d like to ask you something.” The older man asks how long he will live on this earth, and the Pakaaskowan answers, “Since you were such a courageous person and were willing to come and help me and release me, you shall live to be very old and have white hair.” The other man was not so lucky because of his initial reluctance to help, so when he asked

⁴⁷ Ibid., 54

⁴⁸ Morrisseau, *Legends of my People*, 102.

about his future, Pakaaskowan told him he would die soon. Bird explains time passed, and the men later asked their grandparents about this experience and if this Pakaaskowan can actually predict the future. They were told, “Yes, it’s true, usually very true.” It turned out, that Pakaaskowan was right again in this instance as the one boy lived to be very old, and the other died before the next winter.⁴⁹ Right conduct is being promoted because one is rewarded for helping Pakaaskowan and the other is not. Belief in the power of Pakaaskowan to guide human affairs was strong.

To say that the church attempted to undermine such Indigenous spiritual beliefs as those conveyed in the story of Paakuk by appropriating them into Christianity would be an understatement. However, as Morrisseau writes, belief in Paakuk persists: “Ojibway believe that Paakuk will never stop flying until the end of the world.” But, his story is now understood in Christian terms: “Ojibway Christians believe that is Cain who flies forever and that God gave him that punishment for killing Abel.”⁵⁰ The original story of Paakuk’s murder of his brother out of jealousy is distorted, and in many regions lost altogether. Morrisseau further adds, “Superstition still lingers among the Ojibway. However much each depends on the Christian faith, there is still fear of the unknown. This will not always be so, but perhaps for another two generations or so.”⁵¹ Bird also speaks about the influence Christianity has had on Indigenous beliefs about the spiritual world of their ancestors, explaining how Christianity assumed the Cree belief system and Christianized it. Further, Bird also shows how the Cree’s respect for their spiritual leaders was exploited by the church in their missionary goal to convert them. Bird pinpoints this

⁴⁹ Bird, *Spirit lives in the Mind*, 57.

⁵⁰ Morrisseau, *Legends of my People*, 86.

⁵¹ IBID

moment in time when traditional stories were absorbed into biblical stories as the first win for the Priest, and Christianity over Indigenous spirituality.⁵²

In her 1992 poem "My Hometown Northern Canada South Africa," LaRocque summarizes the destructive effects of colonialism through a recollection of her childhood memories; she expresses the spiritual hurt and confusion Indigenous peoples faced and describes the collective disruption felt in Indigenous communities due to loss of land, language, and lifestyle. LaRocque expresses her love and fond memories of her mother and aunts in flowing verses that celebrate her culture. She also recalls the unsettling feeling of knowing that they were not like the negative stereotype or derogatory terms that were used during that period. She equates the spiritual void that comes from language, culture, and IK being replaced by another set of beliefs with a loss of freedom:

How did we put away Pehehsoo
and Pahkak?

When did we stop laughing at Wehsakecha?

When did we cross ourselves
to pray to Joseph and Virgin Mary?

How did we stop speaking Cree

How did we stop being free?⁵³

This passage of the poem expresses the spiritual trauma felt because of the loss of IK, the wisdom of stories, and language; when Pehehsoo, Pahkak, and Wehsakecha are

⁵² Louis Bird, *Spirit Lives in the Mind*, 55.

⁵³ Emma LaRocque, "My Hometown Northern Alberta South Africa" in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, eds. Joyce A. Green. (Black Point, N.S.: Fernwood, 2007), 219.

excluded from an Indigenous person's experience, being replaced by Christian ritual, something essential is lost; identity and agency are negatively affected.

Louis Bird further suggests Pakaaskowan origins come from our dreams, that we inherit them. He tells a story about a disagreement between Elders. One says Pakaaskowan is a mystery that has always been there; the other says he has to have been created by them, and has remained a mystery for years and years, through Elders and Elders. According to one story, a shaking tent ceremony was conducted to determine the significance of a sighting of Pakaaskowan. The skeleton spirit did enter the shaking tent, but as Bird relates the story, the spirit said, "I am not conjured, I am being, I am me." From this story, it is understood that Pakaaskowan has always existed and his meaning cannot be explained. Bird says the mystery remains though others have questioned if he is in some form, part of the Creator.⁵⁴

In Morrisseau's version, "Paakuk is known to fly very fast. One second his mournful cry is heard in the skies in the east, the next second in the east west, the next second in the west."⁵⁵ In Bird's version, Pakaaskowan voice also travels from the northwest to the southeast, very fast. He explains when heard, "it usually weakened the person's mind. . . the fear hung around for some time after that."⁵⁶ This is a consistency throughout vast territories; there is awesomeness to this spirit as indicated by the fear one experiences on hearing the spirit's voice.

In Manitoba, research was conducted in Lake St. Martin by interviewing Elders. According to Elizabeth Bruce when asked if she heard of Pauguk, she said, "Paguck, yes

⁵⁴ "Pakaaskowan" Omushkego Oral History Project, accessed December 28, 2014, <http://ourvoices.ca>

⁵⁵ Morrisseau, *Legends of my People*, 84.

⁵⁶ Bird, *The Spirit Lives in the Mind*, 53.

he cries out, especially in winter storms.” Joyce Grouch recalls, “Paguck, they used to say, flew around in winter storms. He is a boney skeleton-like creature crying, screaming, or laughing. It used to fly back and forth from house to house. The old people used to say to throw out some bacon or fat. Paguck will smell it and fly off somewhere else.”⁵⁷

According to Nora King, cited in *Whitefish Lake Ojibway Memories*, in Whitefish Lake Ontario, the belief was that, “if you saw Pagak, the skeleton that flies through the air, it is a sign that someone you know is going to die.”⁵⁸ Another Lake St. Martin community member Cassie Einarsson said, “Paguck came mainly in winter storms, if you ever heard its cry, there would be a death in the family. They say Paguck comes from people’s spirit who frozen to death, and that is why they roam around in storms.”⁵⁹ These accounts illustrate that *Baagak* holds a place of fear over a wide Ojibway region.

In another account, Ruth Beardy recalls her and her grandfather’s encounter with Paguck; when asked about Paguck, she at first expressed uncertainty, but then went on to tell her story. She said she heard someone coming, making noises from somewhere in the air. She said she already knew who it was because her grandfather had told her about this kind of spirit; he named them Paguck. She explained her grandfather then cut a piece of fat, and he said,

While I was sitting there all of a sudden I heard as if someone dropped something there on the other side of the fire. I saw him, someone, standing there looking at me tilting his head side to side watching my cooking.

Because my stick is long I’m watching him. It is Paguck. He looked empty

⁵⁷ Lake St. Martin Community Report ,(1975). 39-92.

⁵⁸ E. Higgin, *Whitefish Lake Ojibway Memories*. (Colbalt: Highway Book Shop, 1982), 75.

⁵⁹ Lake St. Martin Community Report, 39-92.

– just like someone with no muscle or fat – almost like a skeleton – his small little eyes. While he was looking at me, I took the stick with the fat and put it in his way. I don't know – he yelled – he sounded – he yelled lots. His yells faded as he ran away.⁶⁰

This is a very descriptive encounter from Manitoba which shares similarity to another encounter thousands of kilometers away in Quebec. Bird also tells a story about a man who encountered this skeleton spirit at a creek; he described it as “kind of a human, in human form, but just skin and bones.”⁶¹ The man said it was already decaying very badly and was so horrible he could not even look at it. He said, “Where the face should have been, it was only a hollow stuff there.” The man described this being looked as if brown skin pressure wrapped around a skeleton. He says, “and the smell was awful.” Again, the spirit of Paguck is mysterious and strange, difficult to interpret. However, the smell Pauguk often was understood to foretell sickness. And to hear it, sent fear through a person. Bird says that people became faint, were handicapped in judgement on account of the fear. These are frightening encounters emphasizing the awesomeness element to Baagak.

In another account, Morrisseau speaks about a ball of fire that appears which he connects to the appearance of Paakuk. Morrisseau writes, “One night a ball of fire was seen coming toward the village . . . This sign was to foretell a great epidemic of smallpox that pretty nearly wiped out all the Ojibway there.”⁶² Bird also speaks about mysteries and Elders seeing things like discs and balls of fire at night. Bird also explains

⁶⁰ Lake St. Martin Community Report, 39-92.

⁶¹ Lake St. Martin Community Report, 39-92.

⁶² Morrisseau, *Legends of my People*, 85.

sees a connection between Mr. Skeleton and the ball of fire. This emphasizes the mysterious nature of the spirit and shared belief across a vast area. The biggest difference I found between 20th century and the 19th century representations of Baagak is the former are made predominantly through observations. The latter are through relationships and dialogue. Both Bird and Morrissette express church influence and impacts to stories like *Baagak* and their belief systems. 21st century representations allow more voice to *Anishinaabe* belief systems as exemplified by the work of both Basil Johnson and John Borrows. I did not uncover any Cree narratives in my research during this time period as it seems like *Baagak* is being forgotten, again. Both Borrows's and Johnson's narratives of *Baagak* are a window into the place of fear in the Ojibwe belief system, as *Baagak* is viewed as a bad omen to their territories.

Basil Johnson is an *Anishinaabe* author from *Neyaashiiniigmiing* (Cape Croker) First Nation in Ontario. He wrote extensively (his first publications date back to 1971), and he is likely the most widely read *Anishinaabe* and Indigenous author of the past 40 years. His work represents another important shift in research methods on oral story, as he is the first Indigenous author to examine this story of *Baagak* from an *Anishinaabe* perspective. He brings a new sensitivity and an insight into the moral significance of this story. Johnson wrote his books without collaborating with an academic counterpart. Many of his stories employ a story telling, or fiction-based narrative, including his chapter "Pauguk" in the book, *The Manitous*. John Borrows is another *Anishinaabe* writer who has done research on Baagak; he is widely regarded as the leading Indigenous Law expert in Canada, and he is also from the same community as Johnson. Borrows in fact considers Johnson as his Elder and an inspiration in his own writing. Johnson and

Borrows both write accounts about the being Pauguk that share themes, almost mirror-like, to provide readers a lens to understand this spirit.

Baagak's origins are introduced in Johnson's 2011 book, *Think Indian*. He explains, "all the Manitou's of the sky had their origin in space except for one. Pauguk was a man who coveted his brother's wife and, in order to gain her, killed his own brother by drowning him."⁶³ Borrows' chapter "Pauguk" is similar to Johnson's "Pauguk" account in *the Manitous* as there is also a love triangle between brothers involving a young woman. Murder, lust, envy, greed, betrayal are among his many crimes.⁶⁴ In both accounts, the Pauguk character leaves the community only to return months later, still obsessing about his brother's wife. Pauguk plans his brother's murder, executes his plan, then tries to comfort his grieving brother's wife by telling her they can now be together. The distraught wife runs away from him and later commits suicide. Pauguk, in his own distressed state, brings upon his own death. This teaching shared by both Pauguk narratives emphasizes appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

However, Borrows' has a different interpretation of the story's meaning than Johnston, as he views it through an *Anishinaabe* legal lens when telling the story. Through this perspective, he connects Pauguk to a cluster of deaths in his community, further explaining, "Pauguk represented death itself, his voice a haunting reminder of the corruptibility and fragility of life."⁶⁵ Borrows elaborates on the customary beliefs of *Baagak* and his influence in governing human law and moral codes. Another way to view the story may be to see *Baagak* as a reminder to us to honor life knowing it is precious

⁶³ Basil Johnson, *Think Indian: Languages are Beyond Price* (Wairton, Ont.: Kegedonce Press, 2011), 13.

⁶⁴ Basil Johnson, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 195-219.

⁶⁵ John Borrows, *Drawing Out Law*, 86.

precisely because it is corruptible and fragile and to live the *mino-bimaadiziwin* – good life. As such, *Baagak*'s story serves an important function for governance and community relationships, for articulating *Anishinaabe* law. The methodology of the story, told in third person perspective, is fictional. And in the preface, Borrows' encourages his readers to understand how Pauguk and other spirits are alive in their lives, affecting their behaviors.⁶⁶

In his chapter "Pauguk," in *Drawing out Law*, he recalls that, when he was a young boy, he often heard the story of Pauguk during the long nights at his grandparents' place. According to these stories,

[Pauguk was the] flying skeleton destined to dwell between earth and sky, banished from the land of the dead for his actions while living. Lust, greed, betrayal and murder were among his many crimes. His lonely, lingering presence was a lesson to those who followed his course. Whenever sounds were heard that couldn't be explained, his Mishomis would say, '[t]hat was Pauguk.' Paagak roams the skies, crying out."⁶⁷

Borrows also describes a silence that accompanies his presence, which, when seen, looks like a long white shadow. Paagak calls out for help, asking humans to set him free, promising never to bother the humans again. Both Borrows's and Johnson's accounts hold *Baagak* as a bad omen, a sign of death - inciting fear.⁶⁸ However, this interpretation fails to take into accounts of *Baagak* as a positive spirit; my personal experience of

⁶⁶ Ibid., x.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 86.

Baagak as a helping spirit contradicts this. I believe that what I saw was not a bad omen but a cue to take caution in my choices and actions.

2.2 Giigino' amaagewin – Learning and Teaching

In the oldest written account (1823), ethnographer George Nelson recorded considerable details on ambiguous beings, including *Baagak*, which, although associated with death, starvation, illness, and other misfortune, were understood to grant good fortune in hunting and curing power to those possessing them as guardian spirits. He described the stories of these beings and their shared elements: their ability to fly, their appetite for burned grease sacrifices which they appropriate through the smoke, their skeletal emaciated appearance, their origins as human victims of starvation or disease, and the signaling of their presence by weird laughter, moans, or rattling bones.

While in most accounts from the 1900s, *Baagak* is predominately represented as a bad omen, foretelling sickness and death, other accounts that go into more depth have uncovered stories that also portray him as a positive spirit. A. Irving Hallowell (1932-40) commented on the ambiguous nature of *Baagak*, describing how in Berens River, Manitoba, encounters with his spirit are regarded as both a blessing, a gift from creator for a long life, and as a warning to take caution.

In later versions, both Morrisseau (1965) and Bird (2007) speak of the ancientness of the *Baagak* legend, which they claim is one told to reinforce beneficial social behavior. Both Morrisseau and Bird relate stories in which seeing *Baagak* brings blessing. Bird places possible origins of *Baagak* in dreams, fears, and imaginings. Morrisseau and Bird have both left a significant contribution to traditional knowledge for the next generations

of academics to reference and build their own research around.

The contemporary versions of *Baagak* function more as cautionary tales, focusing more on the negative aspect of *Baagak* in order to encourage moral conduct. Basil Johnson (1995) brings a new sensitivity and an insight into the moral significance of this story in his retelling of the story. *Baagak* the flying skeleton is destined to dwell between earth and sky, banished from the land of the dead for his actions while living, for his crimes of lust, greed, betrayal, and murder. In Johnson's version, *Baagak's* story encourages proper social conduct. *Baagak* is the lonely, lingering presence that provides a lesson to those who would follow his course of bad conduct.

John Borrows (2010) in his telling of Pauguk, states it is an imaginative recreation of his *Baagak* chapter from his area that follows similar teachings, but he describes in more detail a love triangle between brothers and a young woman and focuses more on the moral significance of the characters' actions and behaviors. Through the story, he explains moral codes of conduct, reminding the present generations of lessons from our past, which are still relevant today. And like Johnson, Borrows' reinforces the idea that *Baagak* represents death itself, his voice a haunting reminder of the corruptibility and fragility of life. Both Johnson's and Borrows' narratives of the *Baagak* story write to inspire younger generations, installing respect for the value of this spirit being to our existence as Indigenous people to many readers, something both have done for me. Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair talks about ossifying of culture and today it is time to go beyond.⁶⁹ Today, many judge those who follow traditions from a very fundamental right

⁶⁹ Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, 85.

and wrong Catholic approach. There is a location within believing in a higher power people recognize: there are many different roads to the Maker. Many call him God, or Allah, or Great Spirit, etc. – James Redsky, a master of the Medewiwin traditions and elder in the Presbyterian Church, lived by principles from both faiths and these did not conflict with his Mide beliefs.⁷⁰ This is a topic that I discuss further in my conclusion.

Mandamin's narrative reveals other ways of understanding the *Baagak* story, ways that contribute to further knowledge production about the teachings implicit in *Baagak's* story. According to Mandamin's account, *Baagak's* story describes the entrance of evil into the human world as a result of *Baagak's* lust, hatred, and jealousy of his brother-in-law's and brother's good fortune, which leads to his murder of them. These murders represent the original wrongdoing that introduces the burden of guilt and shame that humans are now destined to carry forever. The guilt and sadness *Baagak* feels make him sick, his illness is a physical sign of his spiritual wrongdoing. The medicine man and the *Memegwesiwag* – Little People, determine his guilt will be carried by humans for all time, but that acts of kindness can change him and humans.

After *Baagak* dies, the *Pagwajiiwag* – the wild beings, make him a Protector of *Pagwajii* – the wild places, to be an example of the efficacy of kindness. By making him a helper spirit, they are using *Baagak* to correct his violation of law, which his murders represent, to save humans by his example of kindness. As protector and helper of humans, *Baagak* represents the interconnection of human, natural, and spiritual law.

There are many intersections and overlaps of the teachings within the storytelling methodology of these various versions of *Baagak's* story; however, essentially, the

⁷⁰ Editor notes about James Redsky in *Manitowapow*, 104.

narrative deals with Indigenous ideas about good and evil, guilt and redemption.

Baagak's resentment and envy of his brother-in-law's and his brother's happiness in love is a result of a duality of emotions, right and wrong, and by implication, it shows goodness to reside in the ability to be fulfilled in another's happiness. The consequence of his malevolent behavior, *Baagak*'s murders, is shown to be the guilt that humans will now carry eternally for his crimes. It also identifies the source of redemption to be in acts of kindness. By his becoming a helper spirit to protect humans in the wild places (these wild places are both literally the wilderness and symbolically those places in which humans get lost—in fear, despair, loss because of a lost identity), *Baagak* is working to redeem himself, and with him, to redeem humans too. In this way, *Baagak*'s story makes a very significant comment on Indigenous law—endorsing the value of restorative justice/ reconciliation/ forgiveness as opposed to punishment. Thus, *Baagak*'s story is a means to an understanding of Indigenous morality. *Baagak*'s negative emotions—self-pity and hatred—transform him into a fearful and hideous spirit, his physical appearance becoming the external manifestation of his ugly emotions.

With the prohibition of the use of Indigenous languages in residential schools and the banning of ceremonies in Indigenous communities, a window closed into the spiritual world-view, or epistemology, of Indigenous people. Consequently, the Indigenous wisdom contained in oral stories, and the way of thinking they represented, also was disrupted. The Ojibway and Cree story about the spirit Baagak, Pahkak/Pahkahk is an example of a story that is fundamentally important to an understanding of many aspects of Indigenous epistemology—ideas about natural law, a sustainable relationship with the environment, and social relationships; the loss of story is related to a loss of identity.

The most important theme to emerge from my original auto-ethnographical research is the meaning of *Baagak* as a test, a gift sent from the creator. According to Keith Berens, you only see him once, and if you do, you do not laugh at *Baagak* because this encounter is your test, an opportunity to face your fears; to succeed, you cannot be distracted but must remain attentive, focused. For Berens, *Baagak*'s story is one of the strongest and most foundational legends as it contains this important life lesson. Berens' oral account of *Baagak* presents *Baagak* as both a blessing and a challenge. My current research out of Berens River echoes what was written 80 some years ago, in which *Baagak* is also shown to be a blessing. My research from *Pimikikamak* – Cross Lake with Jennifer Thomas is also consistent with new findings in my research with Berens. The child who could not stop laughing represents a failure to respect the rules of the community; in staying out after dark, the child encounters *Baagak* as a negative force. Here the story reinforces the need for respect and obedience. From my research out of Norway House with Ida Bear, *Baagak* (or, Pahkahk) also embodies a female gender. In Mandamin's *Baagak Aadisookewin*, the Skeleton Bird Woman is the female perspective, a woman's teaching. Bear, too, sees *Baagak*'s story as a cautionary tale, a bad omen, used to scare children into good behavior. Florence and Mervin Bone emphasize the mysterious and awesomeness aspect of the encounter rather than its significance as a teaching of a proper code of conduct.

The other ambiguous spirit beings—the *Memegwesiwag*, Little People (and their role within *Anishinaabe* history, governance, and law)—and *Missabe* – Giant People and *Miish`akomoo* - Sasquatch, and the Skeleton Bird Woman are theses in themselves; however, I chose to focus on *Baagak*'s story as a vehicle for the transmission of the

Anishinaabe concept of *Inakonigewin*, (law, including human, natural, and spiritual) and on the importance of the story-teller (as vessel for the spirit of *Baagak* to communicate the teaching) to the story.

What would happen if we put *Baagak* on stand today? What would *Baagak* say? I don't think that he is flying around looking for salvation. I think he would say this is my realm. We have a lot to learn given the man-made environmental disasters that are going on in the natural world. Mandamin himself stresses that we are experiencing the death of an old world. *Baagak* is the spirit being of the *Aadisookaan* – often associated with *Nibowin* – death, and *Ishkwaa-bimaadiziwin* – end of life. *Baagak* came into my life while I was searching for the cause of sickness for my mom, but also for myself. Mandamin taught me that sharing *Baagak* research is part of *Bagidenjigewin* or *Bagidendamowin* – releasing the departed. I mentioned that today because we neglect our languages, we are losing these gifts amongst young people. *Anishinaabeg* people choose their own leaders, as I have done with Mandamin as a Spiritual Mentor. Mandamin speaks the language, follows the traditions, and has been doing so from a young age. This is just my own personal rubric I consider when I hear someone talking who considers themselves a Spiritual Mentor.

I take a lot of comfort knowing the best parts of the research have been the through the *Anishinaabe* language and in particular dreams in which *Baagak* appears; there are deeper understanding and stories out there. What about the Cree perspective? Or a female perspective.⁷¹ *Baagak* has survived despite obvious colonialism. Therefore, we must

⁷¹ Ron informed me once the Skeleton Bird Story is very different than the *Baagak* teaching.

honor those storytellers and Spiritual Mentors who are keeping the traditions and teachings alive. *In the book Journey of the Redman: A Message from the Elders*, Elder Harry Bone explains four levels to the *Anishinaabe* language to consider when talking about Indigenous Knowledges. These four levels are the day-to-day language; ceremonial language that is used in prayers; the sacred language of the spirits that is heard in Manidookewiwin, spiritual ceremony; and the language of dreams that people have.⁷² I experienced all these levels of the course of my Baagak research. This thesis aims to emphasize the worldview within the *Anishinaabe* language at a deeper level, the third and fourth levels by examining the sacred language of the spirits and dreams through my research of *Baagak* stories.

⁷² Harry Bone, *The Journey of the Spirit of the Red Man: A Message from the Elders*, (Paperback- May 22, 2012), 80.

3.0 Niswi: Aadisookaan – Keepers of Legend and History and Memory

3.1 “We are in a Spiritual Story”

In the dream people are fighting; the whole world is fighting one another. I'm wondering what could possibly save us; then in a flash I'm being taken up to the moon so quickly I don't have time to object or react. When I was there we were in Midewin, dancing, eating, crying then laughing. A woman, not human but similar is dressed in the most beautiful blue cloth. She takes me aside and showed me God, the Creator. Each created being was fashioned in that beings' image; each being or human the god made was different in appearance but shared same features. She showed me 13 different species of current humans and each had a set of skills and knowledge that she wanted united. You will die doing the work she told me. They the people on earth will kill you, but the work will come to pass and all will be good for them. I was scared, but I accepted. She took my hand and showed me Baagak. His true form, a man that is truly large like Hercules, that's how I can describe him. They talked and they showed me the earth in the distance. They asked if I was ready and I told them I was and would accept that work.

- Ron Mandamin

This dream is insight into so much of an *Anishinaabe* worldview that is at risk of being lost, and important to be understood for future generations. According to the *Anishinaabe* belief system, certain *Anishinaabe* people are gifted and serve as vessels for Spirits to do the work of healing; Mandamin is one such individual who uses story telling through oral history as a mechanism for healing. I feel Mandamin himself understands his role as a vessel through which spirits communicate. In part of a Facebook post he said, “I could care less about myself because the important thing is the message from Spirit, *Nenaaniikwe*. It is she who gave me these duties to fulfill, to do the work despite my own

hardships. It is she on whose behalf I speak.”⁷³ According to the *Anishinaabe* understanding of spirit vessels, guidance can come through a dream or ceremony. The loss of languages, and traditional knowledge within them, contributes to fewer individuals being capable of becoming such healers and messengers.

Baagak teachings are part of a better way to understand natural law and rebuild community. There is a spirit that is alive in the spiritual language of *Anishinaabe* that can communicate to us today if we listen. In his book, *The Knowledge Seeker*, Blair Stonechild notes teachers and students reported something lacking and thought that content on spirituality would contribute to more holistic learning. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) urgently calls for programs to revitalize Indigenous Heritage, including the creation of a new education system.⁷⁴ Recently in the Teaching Wigwam at the Great Lakes Gathering, an *Anishinaabe* man, a school teacher from Nipissing, Ontario, shared these exact feelings. He said it is difficult to teach in his community, it seems like nothing is working. He asked the spirit of *Missabe*, referencing the sleeping giant near his home in Thunder Bay, to wake up and help us. This is a spiritual crisis and fight for survival that we are in.

Baagak is important today for so many reasons: climate change is worldwide issue. Melissa Nelson stresses, “Today we are in dire need of good medicine stories, new myths of resilience for these unprecedented times.”⁷⁵ Stories like *Baagak* are connected to the land, they provide instruction for how to live in accordance with natural laws. The *Anishinaabe* people have a complex art of stories for conveying worldviews as founded

⁷³ Ron Mandamin, see “The Greatest Awakening the Earth will ever See” in appendices for more about Nenaaniikwe.

⁷⁴ Blair Stonechild, *The Knowledge Seeker*, (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2012). 182

⁷⁵ Melissa Nelson, *Manitowapow*, 227

on a belief in the sacred oneness of creation and the essential interconnectivity of all life. Story telling is essential to the community as it conveys the lessons and the teachings that provided guidance for living the good life – *Mino Bimaadiziwin*.

The TRC just released 94 Calls to Action; the political relevance *Baagak* carries today is that public opinion has never been more favorable towards Indigenous issues as it is today. *Baagak* addresses directly language, culture, and history; *Baagak* is resilient demonstrating strength of sacred story, despite colonialism. *Baagak* is evolving to the times when it is recorded and transcribed and a method of cultural preservation. It is my hope that eventually computer animation, virtual reality, and graphic novels will bring new life to the *Aadisookewin* - sacred story of *Baagak*.

Reviving these valuable stories is a means to re-establishing a sense of community and identity and ultimately for reconciliation. I feel *Aadisookaanag* – Sacred Stories and *Dibaajimowin* story telling should be considered more seriously a part of a solution needed for healing to be achieved today. This responsibility to speak for, that is, to care for, the earth, again expresses the fundamental connection between language and the land; this is an idea that is implicit in this study that argues for the necessity of sacred story and story (and by extension, language) to Indigenous identity, which is grounded in this relationship. Marie Battiste and James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson also speak about the land as a source of the language, imaginations, and dreams of Indigenous peoples. They conclude that the languages come through our relationship to the land.⁷⁶ Through story, such as the ones told by Keith Berens, Ida Bear, Jennifer Brown, Spiritual Mentors Ron Mandamin's *Baagak*'s teachings, and Isaac Murdoch's teachings from

⁷⁶ Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*. (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd. 2000). 291.

Serpent River, we can gain a better understanding of the importance of sacred sites and the truths embedded in language and story.

It is not an exaggeration to say this is the old curriculum – everybody knew these stories for thousands of years in the original classroom: the land. This history inspires the imaginations of today with a range of beings and spirits. Wade Davis describes this as imaginative location as an ethnosphere, which he explains as “the sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, ideas, inspirations, intuitions brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness. The ethnosphere is humanities great legacy. It’s a sum total of all we can be as an (?) astonishingly inquisitive species.”⁷⁷ More than this, though, Nelson emphasizes these stories remind us we must acknowledge and revere real power, the power of the more-than-human world that some refer to as natural law.

Are the natural environment problems here in Manitoba today so different than they were 85 years ago? In the 1930s, Berens River was an increasingly complex economic and political universe. The editors Jennifer Brown and Susan Gray note that Berens seemed able to balance the two worlds.⁷⁸ Hallowell wrote that the family of William Berens epitomized the broader sweep of historical events in the Lake Winnipeg area and the consequences of the “acculturation process.”⁷⁹ Hallowell noted William Berens worked as a fisherman; it was a boom industry. The serious depletions that the fishing communities depended on did not sit well with him and he changed jobs.

⁷⁷ Nelson, *Manitowapow*, 227.

⁷⁸ Brown and Gray, *Memories, Myths, and Dreams*, p. 14.

⁷⁹ Brown and Gray, *Memories, Myths, and Dreams*, p. 11.

Commercial boats were setting up nets at the mouth of the river.⁸⁰ In Beren's River today, Valerie Disbrowe, a commercial fisherwoman in Berens River, told me that she fears "the end of fishing is near [on Lake Winnipeg]. She is seeing more fish with sores, and many don't smell right. It's from the pollutants in the water." There are more and more pressing environment concerns daily and things are getting worse. Just recently, Husky Oil leaked 200,000 to 250,000 of heavy oil and diluents in the Lake Winnipeg-bound North Saskatchewan River. This contamination to the water source forced Prince Albert to declare a state of emergency.⁸¹ Now seems more important than ever to discuss alternatives and create a change in the national energy direction this country is going. An economy built on resource extraction is not going to leave much for the next generations. It seems like all the Supreme Court victories mean nothing, so why not heed Melissa Nelson's suggestion and ask the spirits for help.⁸²

Tobasonakwut Kinew(aban) speaks about understanding the sacred landscape within yourself as an *Anishinaabe* person. Tobasonakwut(aban) introduced the term "ando pawachigen, which means seek your dream, live your dream, understand your dream, and move forward with your dream."⁸³ Heidi Stark reaffirmed the importance of ando-bawaajigeyan, "It is said that the goal or function of *Anishinaabe* life is to understand our purpose in this world."⁸⁴ Baagak is a spirit helper who put my own mother's passing into a healthy perspective for me. Kinew also explains how there is two streams of thought from elders. One group of elders says, "Don't be talking about these

⁸⁰ Ibid., 18,19.

⁸¹ paNow Staff, "State of Emergency Declared in P.A." accessed 29 July 2016 at: <http://panow.com/article/581828/state-emergency-declared-pa>

⁸² Melissa K. Nelson, *Centering Anishinaabe Studies*, 229.,

⁸³ Tobasonakwut Kinew, *Manitowapow*, 145.

⁸⁴ Heidi Stark, *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, xxv.

things because you're going to denigrate what you are talking about." Another group says, "Talk about these things because if you don't, how are the young people going to know these things?"⁸⁵ I consider Tobasonakwut (aban) an elder to me; he was my father's good friend. I recall Tobasonakwut discussing *Pagonegiizhik* in the class Pathways to Indigenous Knowledge at University of Winnipeg and it keeps coming up throughout my studies. The teaching stuck with me and the following story by Spiritual Mentor Isaac Murdoch helped me understand this research and make sense of Kinew's teaching and the historical, political, and geographical significance of my research in a much larger scale.

3.2 Anishinaabe Onakonigewin – Human Law

We recently travelled through Ontario with a group organized by Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) under Grand Chief Derek Nepinak's leadership. During the "Road to Niagara" our group journeyed to Serpent River First Nation where we met Isaac Murdoch. I have met Murdoch previously when AMC hosted his Tea and Bannock Dialogues and he invited me to his area to learn about the natural teachings about life and law, and what they mean today. Murdoch is recognized as a leading Knowledge Keeper of our traditions and is opposed to the Indian Act, legislation that governs us today, allowing abuses to happen to the environment. I had given tobacco to Isaac as a protocol to learn and record teachings to guide us in the future and for permission to use his painting of *Baagak* (as it is spelled in their territory), in my research.⁸⁶ It was fitting for Isaac to introduce an original song that was recorded so many years ago regarding treaty and relationships. As he translated what the song said and what it was about.

⁸⁵ Tobasonakwut Kinew, *Manitowapow*, 142, 143.

⁸⁶ Isaac Murdoch, *Baagak the Flying Skeleton Image* posted to Facebook, July 15, 2016.

Isaac Murdoch plays song for us at truck interpreting song:

Come on everybody let's go. The British are right here. They want the land. And they are promising us, the ship is here. The British are promising us. They are making promises. They are saying for as long as the sun hangs in the sky, for as long of the grasses grows, they are going to take care of us. The ship has sailed in. For the land, they want to give us copper kettles. They are promising us they are going to give us guns, they are going to give us silver. They are going to give us that for this land. This ship has sailed in. But we must never surrender our fish, our waters, our rocks, our animals, our land because this is our way of life.

Murdoch said,

That's what the song says. So when I hear that song I think. Even back then they understood everything. They knew what was happening, they knew the beasts, they knew from the spirits how things were going to take place and how they were going to roll out, and not to surrender what we have. I always heard the elders say, 'They never surrendered those waters – because water is a spirit.' How can you have title or claim over a spirit? There is a spirit in this land, how can you have title or sell that. You can't.

Murdoch continued,

So here we are in 2016. The two legged are on a quest to destroy the earth. Thousands of years from now, they are going to look back at this time in history. When the two legged tried to destroy everything. What are they going to say when they tell that sacred *Aadisookaan*? We are the

characters of that story. And everything that we do from this moment on will be the next part of that story. So what are we going to do? I believe that it is to go back to the land. To go back to our *Anishinaabe* way of life. To rekindle our languages and our fires, and to unite, and to try to protect the environment. That's why we are here. How do we do that? Is it with bows and arrows? Probably not. We are in a spiritual story. This is all spiritual. It's the offering. Over here is a spot where the *Anishinabek* fasted. They'd go there, and give offerings to the beings that live underneath the ground. *Zhi-ginebig* – the serpent. As we walk over there, there is a tunnel over there, that goes underneath, and it comes up into that rock. During the hardest times in our history, during famine, during warfare, during sickness, we would make offerings and give sacred petitions to those water beings, to help us. And the pictographs talk about that.

Isaac explained the power of the sacred sites as he took us to a sacred cave to the people of Serpent River. “And now you can see how the site has been occupied by the *Zhagaanash*. But these sites, they are still here, we are still here. So these sites are going to live on, as long as we live on. But these will be here long after we are gone too.”

Murdoch continued,

This place here – it has a sacred name, *gini, zhibi, ahzawa* – snakes, writing, there is a cliff there. That's the name of this place. So it's actually the home of the serpents. Home of the water beings, they live there, inside. And of course, this place here has a history of war; has a history of

children being stolen; because of residential school. But it also has a history of a very sacred place, that tried to be destroyed by the *Zhagaanash*. But guess what. We're still here, that site is still here, and the tribes are uniting. It's the offering that make a difference. The last time it was used, it was a young person that went there, and of course they got them to go inside too fast. Of course same thing, made that fire, put that black all over his face, six days went by and this boy thought, geez no one is coming here to get me, 6 days and now one came to get me he thought this is odd. And came out and went walking across over there to where the village is. Everyone's mouth just dropped (gasps), that boy said, "what's wrong?" They couldn't believe it, the mom just ran over there and started crying.

"You've been gone for over 30 years. What happened?"

"They was people inside, half *ginibig* – snake, and half *Anishinaabeg*, and they showed me how to make medicine. But I was only gone for six days."

"Gaa` – No, you were gone for over 30 years."

After the story explaining the sacredness of the site, Murdoch emphasized the importance of the powerful spirits that still live in there and what it means for the future:

So what they did, you see inside. There is a boulder there, they put it there inside. And they said it is there, so that people won't bother this place. And one day, that boulder will go back. And people will fast here once again, and so you see that there, that's put there. They were told that place

here is a sacred place. That didn't just happen like that, it's on purpose. And that the power of what they are doing here, the boats, the marina, the party next door. That's nothing compared to the power that lives in here. What about the knowledge that lives inside here, how do we get it? Another rock over here. They always say, that the *Anishinaabe* go over there to get educated, that the *Anishinaabe* came to places to get educated. Because they are getting knowledge from the spirits about this land. And about the future. They say the water beings float underneath at night, and they watch the stars. They look through a sacred hole called *Pagonegiizhik*, and they can see the future. The story I am about to tell you when we get down there is about the future. About what has happened, and about what is going to happen. And its places like this, that give me hope. Because the spirits they are in here; because they are stronger than the other stuff the *Zhagaanash* are doing.

Murdoch explained powerful teachings behind one of the pictographs to our group as for us to remember what happened there. He said the reason why that pictograph is there is because it is like a receipt of what happened here, "So that in the future, we know what to do when things go wrong, and let me tell you. Right now, it's gone wrong." Murdoch continued telling part of the Ojibway migration story about a respected elder in Manitoba and beyond. Murdoch explained:

So this is important to know this because this is a blueprint how we move forward ... Years ago, there was an elder that came here. And that elder, Peter O'Chiese, was here. And remembers the story of *Obijiwaang*, and

when the Ojibway migrated west, and talked about that story. And also talked about the pictographs that were here. And they say a long time ago in *Obijiwaang*, they had a ceremony. And the *paawaganag* – pipes, were out. One *Paawagan* – pipe, it started to make a noise, much like this. I'll show you what the sound was: it was tapping (tapping a stick on a rock).

Murdoch explained,

the pipe holder didn't know what was being said, 'oh there is noise coming out of here, but what it is...there is noises coming from here, 'So there was an old lady, she says, 'here, shove this in your ear.' And grabbed some medicine and shoved it into that man's ear. And right away, that pipe told them, that person knew what that pipe was saying. And what the pipe told them was that 'the *Zhaganash* are coming; and that they are very powerful. And in their arms, they are so powerful, that they have a serpent in each arm. And that this *Zhaganash*, they are going to come here, and they will come here for one thing. They are going to come here to steal our children.' And so they talked about that, over and over again, what does that mean, what does that mean? So through ceremony what they said was the children that get taken, we got to tie feathers in their hair. If we can tie feathers in their hair, they will find their way back home, and won't lose the knowledge. Four sacred feathers represent the four layers of knowledge, and so they came to where the rock opens up, and they painted that figure, that being that is going to steal children. And they put the two serpents in their arms. And they also painted the child, with the feather

sticking out of the child's hair, to represent that those children will find their back way home. And that those four levels of knowledge, is very sacred. And that it cannot be destroyed.

Murdoch continued emphasizing the issues we face today. He said,

Right now as we speak, children are being taken away. Right now as we speak, this person with the two serpents in his arms, is taking children. We know that. Who is that being? And they talked about it. And they told me, it's either the Canadian and the American, that is what the two serpents represent. It is either the Province and the Feds, the Church and Canada. That's what they said. Those two serpents, this person, represents two things. This person that's going to steal children. And you know what, it is actually true, it's actually happening today. There is no other spot that I would rather go to, to make offerings for our children, than here. Because I believe as *Anishinaabeg*, we can get our children back. And we're going to get them back. They are coming home. the more offering that we give, and the more prayer that we give. It's going to get better. But the elders also said something else. They said that they are never going to stop trying—this person, this figure, will always want to do that.

Murdoch continued,

And we know it's true, for the past one hundred and fifty years the Canadian government has been in the business of stealing children. Before they used to "Kill the Indian in the child." But it got worse, now they are trying to kill the Indian in the baby. And what are we going to do about it.

This is serious, when we go there, we need to give offerings. To ask those beings to help us to get our children back. That what we have always done before. And it's through those offerings, and it is through that understanding. That things will open up, and we will be able to make good trails for our young people. I was also told another thing. That the *Anishinaabeg* were not going to be defeated, I was told that the *Anishinaabeg* going to go back, and that whatever this is now, is not going to last forever. My great grandfather was a wise person. And they said that sometime in the future, maybe in my lifetime, maybe in great grandchildren's lifetime. That there is going to be a big change; and that things are going to get better for us. But maybe things are going to get worse first. They said as long as we keep our lodges. And we keep going to those lodges, we are going to survive whatever is coming. But we have to go back to them. That sacred wigwam like this, and its connected to a lodge like this above it, and through that sacred hole, *Pagano Giizhig*, we are connected to the spirit world. And as long as we can keep those lodges alive, we will always be connected. It's when we let them go, when we lose our way. The paint on the boy's face, is clear, the sacred path.⁸⁷

3.3 Discussion and Findings

⁸⁷ Friday July 8th, our group from Manitoba visited Spiritual Mentor Isaac Murdoch in Serpent River, Ontario and he explained the red paint on people's face and what it represents: Here we have this sacred onamen. The paint that Anishinaabek would use. They believe it's the serpents and the thunders birds, through their lives; their relationship with each other. That their blood goes onto the ground, and that we collect that blood. And that's what we put on our face. And it's called Onamen. The Zhagaanash will call it a clay, a red clay. But we know it as something different. And so with permission, I'd like to put a line on the boy's face. To represent the sacred path that we are on right now. To represent this journey, and to represent wabano mikaan the sacred path in the sky that goes from east to west.

The above discussion of the meaning and relevance of sacred sites and story to Indigenous identity will make my case for story being a vehicle for reviving Indigenous identity, an identity that was lost when stories were stolen, when language was forbidden during the residential school experience. The stories tell who Indigenous people are as a people. And when the stories are forgotten, people forget who they are. This is the one of the potential meanings of the *Baagak* story that many of the elders I worked with and Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin tells: humans become lost when they forget about *Baagak*, and *Baagak* too starts to fade away when he is forgotten. As many of the elders I interviewed with stated, the central image of the fading spirit of *Baagak* expresses the overarching idea of this thesis: when we lose touch with the teachings of story, the spiritual is diminished and so are we as a people. We are experiencing, in Mandamin's words, the death of an old world because of our forgetfulness; therefore, for life to continue, a spiritual change needs to happen.

That is the argument of this thesis, a spiritual change will happen through returning to the teachings in story and living according to them; that is, by adhering to the human, natural, and spiritual laws. The stories contain these laws, the governing principles, on which Indigenous identity is grounded. *Baagak*'s story, in all its various forms, is a microcosm conveying essential lessons about how to live in the world, about what it is to be human. Mandamin speaks of a world where spirit beings were present in the natural world; they guided human behavior. Humans consulted and listened to the spirits and acted according to natural law/moral law. Most lived sustainably, honoring the land, water, animals, and plants that sustained them; they understood they had a responsibility as stewards of the environment.

The world today that exists now is threatened because of the violation of Indigenous natural law, because of a failure to listen to the teachings in Indigenous stories such as *Baagak*'s. Our hesitancy to make the necessary changes is dragging on. In 1973 Vine Deloria said, "we stand at a series of crossroads. Rather than revolutionary movements we may have possibly lapsed into a prolonged period of which we will never recover."⁸⁸ Over 40 years later *Anishinaabe* and Indigenous people everywhere are still trying to stop develop to land in Indigenous territories. When *Anishinaabe* and other Indigenous people and elders recognized that the proposed pipeline development through their territory would be destructive to the environment, they gathered at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng, Manitoba, and presented a position paper in which they reminded the Energy East consultants that we are responsible for taking care of the earth. They described how the Great Spirit gave us one universal Law—*Ogichi Tibakonigaywin*—a law that connects us all (an expression of *Inaakonigewin*). According to the position paper, these are most challenging times that we face today, and warning signs are everywhere; therefore, "[w]e cannot continue to disrupt the Natural Laws of life. If even one of us disrespects that Great Binding Law, it affects all of us, and it will come back to us. Nature's Laws are self-enforcing."⁸⁹ As Elder Harry Bone, states in *Who We Are* (2014), there are natural laws, and humans have responsibilities within them. He describes the proper relationship between humans and the natural world in the following:

The *Anishinaabeg* desire to share our connections to the *ninge'aki* (mother earth) and be governed by *onaakonigewin* (law of the creator and mother

⁸⁸ Vine Deloria, *God is Red: A Native View on Religion*. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Pub., 1994), 295.

⁸⁹ Message of the Elders to the National Energy Board and the Public at Turtle Lodge- November 28, 2015. (Turtle Lodge Sagkeeng, Manitoba).

earth). Without the land, air, and water, all forms of life on the *ninge'aki* would not exist. We are the voice for the animals, plants, and water. At first there was Gizhe-Manidoo (Creator), then *ninge'aki* (mother earth), and then the *Anishinaabeg* (Ojibway people). That is why we were last – we were given the responsibility to speak for all the animals and plants The animals were given the *manidoo-onaakonigewin* (creator's law) and *gakiikwewin* (natural law) – they do not go by anything else and they do not breach those laws. We learn and understand by watching them live by those laws.⁹⁰

Mandamin explains how returning to the truths conveyed in story can remind Indigenous people, people throughout the world of their identity and of their values, beliefs, and laws which make them who they are. I fully agree the earth needs this knowledge to understand and apply reconciliation. This responsibility to speak for, that is, to care for, the earth, again expresses the fundamental connection between language and the land; this is an idea that is implicit in this study that argues for the necessity of sacred story (and by extension, language) to Indigenous identity, which is grounded in this relationship. Baagak also lives in the dreams of *Anishinaabeg*. Battiste and Henderson also speak about the land as a source of our language, imaginations, and dreams of Indigenous peoples. They conclude that the languages come through our relationship to the land.⁹¹ Through story, including *Baagak's Aadisookaan* – sacred story,

⁹⁰ Bone, "Concluding Remarks," in *Ka'esi Wahkotumahk Aski: Our Relations with the Land, Treaty Elder's Teachings*, Vol. 2. Winnipeg, 123.

⁹¹ Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, 291.

and other truths embedded in *Anishinaabe* language, the wounds of colonization may be healed.

Conclusion

Certain people and experiences in my life inspired me to take on this research project; to locate myself to the importance of the story today for the reader. *Anishinaabeg* societies have traditionally depended on the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge—the spiritual beliefs and practices, the moral lessons and principles that define and express culture and identity—through *Aadisookewin*, sacred story and ceremony, and *Dibaaajimowin*—story. Historically, *Aadisookewin*, sacred storytelling has been integral to individual well-being, providing moral guidance, and to social cohesion, binding members to the community. Stories, therefore, provide a crucial foundation for the continuance of many Indigenous communities. This thesis argues that story is an ideal mechanism through which to rebuild Indigeneity (a term I use interchangeably with Indigenous identity) and understand natural laws. My research attempts to show how an individual’s personal experience depends whether on hearing or reading this ancient teaching affects his or her interpretation of *Baagak* as a good or bad spirit when encountered. To answer the casual reader’s curiosity “Is Baagak a Windigo?” no, but similar to Basil Johnson’s analysis of Modern Weendigoes taking on new life through corporations and other levers of capitalism, *Baagak* is a lens to view our own behaviors with other people and the environment – to understand Indigenous understandings of natural laws.⁹²

⁹² Johnson, *The Manitous*, 235.

My thesis research about *Baagak* was influenced by a Spiritual Mentor's dream. Leanne Simpson observed a dream pattern researching re-creation stories as resurgence. She states, "John Borrows, using Basil Johnson's Anishinaubae Thesaurus describes the term "*Pauwauwaein*," a revelation, an awakening, a vision that gives matter to things that were previously obscure." She elaborates further, "within our *Aadisookaan*, many, many, stories begin with a welcoming of the spirits through a dream."⁹³ The *Anishinaabe* story of *Baagak* is important because it explains how when our people forget our Indigenous knowledges and teachings, we lose touch with who we really are; this is happening to Indigenous communities throughout the world. For example, Pueblo educator Dr. Gregory Cajete described a schizophrenic state as the problem young people have understanding the ancient teachings about the traditions and ecology as a consequence of colonialism.⁹⁴ This contributes to social problems we hear about today in our communities, a loss of identity. Youth are trying to make their way in a changing world and cannot help but feel the pain of seeing the land ravaged. While it is not a silver bullet to correcting social ills, the wisdom of story and language is proven, as in the Harvard project examining language immersion, it is a means of healing this split. In 1998 Spiritual Mentor and Elder Charlie Nelson spoke about sacred spaces. "We need room. Once we roamed this place wherever the land could feed us and make us strong. But now, we are just in a house and we have no tools to make a living out of what has

⁹³ Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on our Turtles Back: Stories of Nishinaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publications, 2011), 146

⁹⁴ Gregory Cajete. "Indigenous Education and ecology: Perspectives of an American Indian Educator," in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*, eds. John Grim (Cambridge, MA: Distributed by Harvard Press for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2001), 645-635.

changed for us.” Canada can grow through understanding the Indigenous Knowledges which arose from within the peoples of this land, now called Canada.

The teachings of *Baagak* function to establish identity by promoting certain beliefs and values (moral and ethical law), by showing the interconnection of human, natural, and spiritual law. The various versions of the *Baagak* story were told to reinforce and encourage people to follow appropriate social behaviors. In the 1930s A. Irving Hallowell began to write a book about “Aadizookaanag, Myths” that he never completed. His opening paragraphs describe the sacred stories of the Ojibwe as:

What people enjoy talking about and what they enjoy listening to, what commands their attention, what moves them to laughter or tears, what they accept as true or false, what they deem good conduct or bad conduct, is invariably related to the realities of the behavioral world in which they live. This behavioral world is not the neutral objective world of the physicist, the geologist, the geographer, or even the biologist. It is a world of objects and events fraught with emotional significance as well as intellectual meaning and with complex associations and values for the individual that he has acquired in the course of his socialization from the traditional cultural heritage of his group.⁹⁵

More than eighty-five years later in 2016, and with an increasing number of environmental concerns, I share a goal similar to Hallowell’s: to publish a book about Ojibwe Myths and Tales, and their relationship to what he called their Ojibwe

⁹⁵ Brown and Gray, *Memories Myths, and Dreams of an Ojibwe Leader*, 111.

worldview.⁹⁶ Hallowell visited communities starting at the mouth of the Berens River, and going east upriver to Little Grand Rapids. Paungassi, Popular Hill, Pikangiken, Norway House, Island Lakes, Popular River, and Bloodvien.⁹⁷ Initially I thought that sets a roadmap of secondary sources for my own future research intends to include some of the above mentioned communities. However, in discussion with Mandamin, he expressed interest to visit Machu Picchu in South America for research, and also the Vatican in Rome. Sacred story and story deepen our understanding of *Ojibwe* perspectives and their frameworks of observation and interpretation, particularly as formed and guided through dreams, which are important elements in over half of them.⁹⁸

There is a critical importance to work on new *Anishinaabe* language methods and resources to connect young people to their histories, and foster a positive self-identity, and there will be challenges. In the most recent budget of the new Liberal budget for 2016, there was no substantial increase in language programs, which indicates that the Federal Government is maintaining the status quo that language is not important to Indigenous people. Not so far removed from supporting Prime Minister Harper when he said there is no history of colonization in Canada. Justice Murray Sinclair was the keynote speaker at the 2016 University of Manitoba's Elder's and Traditional Peoples Gathering (2016). He acknowledged as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the responsibility to inspire children to speak and live their language is ultimately with the communities and individuals – however, the commitment from the Federal Government is just not there. We are facing an Indigenous language crisis; yet

⁹⁶ Ibid., xvi.

⁹⁷ Ibid., xv.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 8.

Indigenous languages get funded at \$44 per student in comparison to French Immersion funding, which receives \$4000 per student. Sinclair added the outcome should have been legislation. The TRC Call to Action 14 recommends an Aboriginal Language Act, and TRC Call to Action 15 recommends an Aboriginal Language Commissioner to promote use of immersion programs and educate about the richness and value, with another Call for professional development of Indigenous Students, to implement Language programs. He concluded stressing language is key in a young person's search for identity.⁹⁹

My thesis based on research from spiritual mentors and elders about *Baagak* highlights the importance in considering the process of reconciliation connected to strengthening the *Anishinaabe*, and all Indigenous languages. We need to consider in-depth how best to develop land-based immersion programs and continuing intergenerational transmission of our languages and teachings and the positive effects on our well-being as individuals, communities, and nations. These efforts are connected to a spiritual relationship to the land and include a broader interpretation of decolonization to both Indigenous people and settler populations. Challenges to facilitating a change in thinking about the importance of *Aadisookaan* for all of humanity are identified and conversed. Imagining and hoping for a better future for the children of the world to live in a sustainable way in the future is perhaps not as complicated as one might think. The present day relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada is based on the history of colonization. The persisting colonial mindset present in Canadian society makes it difficult to imagine reconciliation working out or what a different future could look like.

⁹⁹ Justice Murray Sinclair, "Language and the Land." Elder's and Traditional Peoples Gathering, University of Manitoba, (24 March 2016).

Yet, this goal of a Canada based on principles that support IK and Indigenous language use in education is not as far-fetched as it sounds. For more than 100 years, the Mikmaw and French co-existed peacefully in a linguistic and spiritual exchange in the early 1600s. This relationship was based on the Mi'kmaw Concordat between the Mi'kmaw and the French, described by James Youngblood Henderson, in the Mi'kmaw Concordat, as “a public treaty between the French and Mi'kmaq, the Holy See represented the Catholic Church that had force in international, church, and civil law. Its terms prevailed over conflicting laws that neither party could denounce or alter unilaterally.”¹⁰⁰ It is important to remember that original relations between the allied peoples for a period after contact were peaceful, harmonious, cooperative, and mutually respectful if we are to begin to truly work together to bring justice to the concept of “reconciliation” in our shared post residential school era.

It is not out of the question for Canada to take steps towards facilitating language legislation that would recognize indigenous languages as official language. The challenge afterward is to access the traditional knowledge within the language to educate Canadians about what Indigenous people have contributed to different fields such as science and medicine. This is not to romanticize a return to language because I recognize there are a lot of fluent speakers who are deeply colonized. At the same time, becoming a fluent speaker isn't exactly necessary to understand a relationship, and relationships embedded in the land. One reason why these mutually beneficial relations between the French and Mi'kmaw were possible is that each respected the other's belief system. In the section, “Merging of Spirituality,” Youngblood states that “[t]he conversion process that led to

¹⁰⁰ James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson, *The Mi'kmaw Concordat*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997), 89.

Mikmaki becoming a Catholic nation was seen by the Mi'kmaq as enfolded within their existing belief system."¹⁰¹ Therefore, he suggests, "[t]he Mawioimi synthesized their Indigenous beliefs with Catholic teaching and developed a distinctive republic or state."¹⁰² Among the dual requirements, it was expected that, "[t]o present each Mi'kmaq with a valid choice, priests of various orders who were sent to Mikmaki had to learn the Mi'kmaq language and culture."¹⁰³

Unfortunately, this time of peaceful co-existence was short lived. Youngblood explains the failure to fulfill this dual language requirement as contributing to the short-lived relationship of cooperation between the Mi'kmaw and the French. He describes how the deaths of the Chief and Captain who facilitated the relationship in the 1620s led to the disruption of the discourse between the Indigenous peoples and the Catholic priests. Consequently, the Mi'kmaw and Catholic leadership that followed in years to come were unable to overcome linguistic barriers, resulting in fragmentation of the relationship between the allied peoples.¹⁰⁴ This historical point in time is critical as it really was the fork in the road, the point at which the two cultures diverged, and they were never able to return to one path. The reader is left to ponder what Canada might have looked like today if there were trained apprentices to carry on this bi-lingual blended faith approach, which the Chief and Captain had begun.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 90.

¹⁰² Ibid., 91.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Appendix 1: Photos



Photo of clouds the day my mom left to spirit. Ron said about the photo, “bug-oh-nay anyway. Hole in the cloud, bug oh nay giizhig hole in the day.”



Photo of my family, Top Left: Florence and Harry Bone, Front row left to right, my sister Priscilla Bone, Great Grandma Mary Bone, and myself, Jason Lauder Bone.

Appendix 2: Interviews with Elders and Spiritual Mentors about Baagak

The following new Baagak narratives are based on my edited transcriptions of interviews with Elders Keith Berens, Jennifer Thomas, Ida Bear, and Florence and Mervin Bone and Spiritual Mentor Ron Mandamin.

Keith Berens

My Baagak research journey took me to Berens River where I met Keith Berens, who agreed to be interviewed about his Baagak experience. Berens' oral story telling of his Paguck experience significantly occurred a day after a winter storm. Berens began his story in Anishinaabemowin/Saulteaux by saying:

Aniin, Mukatay Wasin Mikinak ndizinikaaz, Keith Berens. I heard this Baagak, when it was storming, in a blizzard. My grandpa and me were sitting by the stove while he was talking, telling us legends of the past, what he knew. Then all of a sudden, I heard on the [woodstove] pipes, singing. I told my grandpa, "Grandpa maa, listen, listen to that singing." He looked at me, and he said, "Aw, Baagak, you're hearing Baagak out there in that blizzard." So he looks at me, and he then says, "Maajaan, go outside. You will see a child hanging, that's all you'll see. But as you go out, when you look at him, he will ask you to play with him, but I warn you, "Do not laugh at what he does; if you laugh, that means that he has won." That's what he said, "Gego baapi-ken [Don't laugh]"; "no matter what he does out there. Eventually he will become an adult; first he is a child, then he's going to be an adult. He will do anything to make you laugh, just like a trickster,

which means that he won if you laugh at him.” He told me, if you beat him, if you don’t laugh at what he does, that means you beat him in that area.” “In the future,” he said, “if you do that [not laugh, that is, not be distracted] then nobody in this world will be able to beat you because you beat Baagak in that area.” But for myself, I was a young kid, about 12 or 13 when I heard this Baagak. It’s only once in a lifetime that you hear Baagak; but maybe he will come back. I don’t know; that’s hard to say.

Berens paused, then continued and said, “I ended up getting scared. I didn’t go out. I don’t know what would have happened if I went out there in that blizzard with Baagak.” Berens paused again and then sat back in his chair and said, “Baagak is one of the strongest legends that ever lived, and people who encounter this Baagak will have the same powers as Baagak, but a lot of them won’t pass that test. I didn’t pass that test which was given to me when my grandpa looked at me and said, “Kiin wa ish, It’s up to you, if you want to go out or not.” And that was my encounter with Baagak at that time when I was growing up. After that, I never heard Baagak again. Up to this day, I haven’t heard this Baagak. Maybe I will hear him again in the future; I don’t know. It’s up to him if he wants to show himself to me again in the future, but time will tell. I will encounter that when that situation comes up, when Baagak shows himself again. It’s up to him; it’s not up to me. It’s up to Wiin Gizhi Manitou, the Creator, who sends these spirits to you to as a gift. But a lot of people do not understand that. Aahaa miigwetch [thank you].”

Jennifer Thomas

At a ceremony held at Daniel Thomas's property this past summer, I had a brief conversation with a school teacher, Jennifer Thomas, from Cross Lake, who also had an experience of Baagak. When she heard I was researching the story of Baagak, she responded by telling me the following story. She recalled that one night after some children from the community had been outside after sundown, one of the children kept laughing and laughing. Alarmed by the behavior, they called one their Elders for advice. This Elder said that the child had seen Baagak do something and that was why the child could not stop laughing. I was intrigued by her recollection because of the connection to Berens' story: the warning he had received from his grandfather, not to laugh when he saw Baagak. This reinforces the failure to respect the rules of the community—not to be out after dark. I later read Thomas my research, how her story connected with Berens and she said:

What came to mind is what our elders tell us is to respect everything in life, the seven teaching, there is an opposite of the seven teachings. Our grandparents, our Elders tell us to respect that other side – When we were playing outside, make sure you watch that sun, guide you to come back home, don't let the sun beat you home. They said 'as soon as the sun starts the tops of the trees, that when you come home' – that is how they taught discipline.

Ida Bear

Ida Bear is a lifelong educator from Norway House Cree Nation; I took a couple of her classes in the Aboriginal Self-Governance Administration program at Red River College. I was pleased she was interested in my research on Baagak because she said,

“We Crees have her, too!” adding, “I say her because my mom used to tell us stories, and she used the female gender!”¹⁰⁵ She asked me to share my research with the class, and she encouraged me to analyze story to see what they mean today. She said, “They are different regionally; I have heard the differing opinions in class.” She said she had also done some research about her. “Pakahk stories were told as a cautionary tale, warning not to go out at night. Otherwise, she will scoop you up and take you away. She could be heard in the wind.” She recalled a story about one old boastful fellow who said he was not afraid; he went out and that was the last they saw of him. All that was left of him was his hat blowing in the wind. In her research, she met people who described Baagak’s cries as sounding like seagulls, or a thousand screams from the souls. She emphasized, “These stories are told to keep order, to serve as reminders; they are glimpses into a community. They tell stories about justice, relationships, and culture.” Bear recalled another story about a trapper story:

There were two hunters, and one heard the sound of Pahkahk. He got back to camp and said, “We have to go.” They went to the next camp and joined two other trappers; there they heard the same cries to the east and then overhead as the spirits passed over. The four of them smoked their pipes all night.

Bear also mentioned that her research revealed that Pahkahk liked offerings of fat, and how she liked to hide in the dark Black Spruce trees, only to come out in the wind. Bear urged me to look into the reason why she is associated to the wind and to explore other motifs associated with the wind from other cultures to see if there is a common theme

¹⁰⁵ Ida Bear, Facebook Message, February 18, 2015.

linking these stories. She concluded that in her research, “No one has ever really seen them; they have only heard them, and they considered it a bad sign.”

Florence and Mervin Bone

I asked my father if he, or anyone from our home community of Keeseekoowenin, could tell me some Baagak stories. He said he had not personally heard Baagak but he remembered hearing his uncles Jordy (George Robert Bone) and Rueben Blackbird, both who have now passed on, talking about their experiences of Baagak. He suggested I speak with one of my former schoolteachers, Mrs. Florence Bone, wife of Mervin Bone, who also had an encounter with Baagak. My father remembered Florence telling him and my mom about their experience, which occurred about 50 years ago. Florence and Mervin had been playing cards up at Myrtle and Douglas Bone’s place, and on their way home, they heard a scream, or squeal, up in the sky. What impressed my father the most about their telling of this story was the fear they expressed at hearing Baagak. I called Florence and told her I wanted to visit and share my research to confirm this story. Florence did acknowledge that they heard the scream up in the night sky that had scared them. She said with certainty that she remembered even though it was a really long time ago. It is important to note that she did not confirm she had heard Baagak; she only acknowledged that there was a frightening sound that could not be explained.

Ron Mandamin

The following account comes from Knowledge Keeper Ron Mandamin and the Midewiwin Lodge in Shoal Lake Ontario. According to his version of this Aadisookaan,

Baagak is clearly a helper spirit, not a bad omen. As discussed in Chapter One, dreams convey messages, and my meeting with Mandamin was initiated because of his dream. Mandamin's account shares several similarities with the narratives discussed above, but Mandamin's story elaborates in more detail on Baagak's origins, the duality of his nature and introduces new beings. This is Mandamin's oral telling of the story of Baagak, which I recorded as he told it to me:

Baagak, there are three different ways that he is talked about: Baagwakwat – War Club; Apakwaanaajii– Bat; and of course – Baagak. These three beings are all the same, share the same meanings. A long time ago he was named someone else – Wataygaaboo was what they called him back then: the one that seemed to be gleaming, or appeared to be glowing. He was alone all the time, and he chose to be alone.

He had a brother and sister, then his brother met someone, a very nice looking woman, and he became jealous. That was the very first time he felt that he had that jealous feeling. Then his sister met a nice man, and he became even more jealous, Baagak; because he really wanted someone nice for himself too, and he was jealous of his brother. So what he did was try to get his sister's husband to kill their brother, but he wouldn't do it. So he ended up killing his sister's husband, because he wouldn't do that deed to get rid of him. And when that happened, his brother knew there was something going on. He was getting angry, was mad. So Baagak, Wataygaaboo, he tricked his brother, had him come go with him onto the lake, "come with me, let's go get the fish". So as they were

out there, that's when he killed his brother, threw him over, drowned him. That was how he did away with him.

Wataygaaboo was feeling satisfactory, was happy. He thought, "ok, my brother is gone, my brother-in-law is gone, now I can have the lady all to myself." But when he went back, that lady was so distraught and sad, because she loved him very much, Wataygaaboo's older brother. And as he returned there, she committed her suicide, she drowned herself to be with him, and he became sad, Baagak, became very sad. That was the very first time he felt guilt and he said to himself, "What did I do that for?" He was starting to feel overwhelmed with his actions. He didn't know how to deal himself so he became sick, very sick, and the people noticed how sick he was getting. So they called in Omagakii, a medicine man, named the frogman. And he came and did the work. And he knew what he had done, Omagakii, the spirits told him what Wataygaaboo was doing, what he did, killed his brother in law, killed his own brother, and watched his sister in law kill herself, so that made him really sick, made him crazy. He didn't know how to think, didn't know who he was, but then they needed to consult on the Memegwesiwag, the Little People.

So they called on them and they were the ones to go into their knowledge, their history, to find out what it is that they can do to help, to help him, to revive that Wataygaaboo. And there was nothing that they could find, that guilt is something that the humans will always carry, the Memegwesiwag said, "They will always have that with them, and that will be part of their demise. But they can change it, if they do kindness", so that was the key to save his life. And as he

was about die, this bird came to him, and it was a beautiful white bird, and it was a female. She said, “I will take pity on you, I will watch over you if you join us on this side, in the spirit world”. And he was afraid, but he didn’t want to live as a human anymore. So the animals talked, and they said, “there will be a time when we need someone to watch us, watch us all the time, to protect the forest, the wilderness, Pagwajii – the wild places”. So they consulted on all the Pagwajiiwag – all the wild beings, that live in the forest. And one of them was Missabe (Sasquatch), and Missabe he was telling them, “I’m not originally from here, I come from Giizhig, the sky, but, we need to leave, and they will seldom see us after this, but we need a protector, we need someone to watch over.”

So they consulted again. They all gathered, all the wild creatures, all the creatures along with that white bird, that beautiful bird women, and the Memegwesiwag and they decided, “well we are going to use this man to help correct his wrong doings of his own. He will watch the people, he will be their protector when they enter the forest, when they enter the wilderness, he will be their protector”. So they created that Manitou Inakonigewin – spirit law, and, Agiitigaaning Inakonigewin – law of the garden. And as that garden flourished, so did the world of the Manitou’s, the humans were more connected to them than ever before, so things grew, and then things started to change. Environment went through a shift; they call that reverse polarization. And it Affected a lot of people, affected a lot of living things, and it threw the people off, and they stopped thinking about that spiritual way. Cause they were so focused on trying to survive living off of the physical realm, the food and the animals they were disappearing.

They were starting to forget their spiritual ways, how to pray, and how to ask for help when they needed it.

As time went on, the more they forgot about those spiritual beings. They stopped thinking about Wataygaaboo; and he was angry. And he said, “Why are you giving me this responsibility when no one is adhering to the laws that were created”. And he became sad, and he started to die again. Well they gathered and they were trying to sway the humans back, to that spiritual place, they wouldn’t have nothing to do with it, they were already far off in their mind with their ego, “oh we don’t need them anymore because we managed to survive without them”. So he became sad, and they were starting to ignore the laws of the forest and the wild beings. And the more they ignored it, the less offerings they made, the less talk they had of those places, these beings, started to dissolve, and they started to become scary, because of their sadness, they became angry, they became spiteful. And they started to change into these creatures that became a place of fear.

So Wataygaaboo was feeling sorry for himself, and he was hoping the people would remember... and Wataygaaboo was becoming really skinny, and he became skeletal. His skin changed color because he was hiding a lot in the ground, in the earth and the rocks. Was trying to find a place where he could let go of those feelings. He just could not and he became more and more sick, and eventually he beckoned the spirit, “I don’t want to do this anymore” and he became even angrier, “I cannot do this, it’s becoming unbearable. They are forgetting they’re forgetting that they need to put their offerings out when they enter the forest that was one of the laws when you enter the forest: always put

something out there”. And the more we forgot, the more he disintegrated, the more he lost his flesh and just became skin and bones. That’s all he became, so he became that way because people forgot the laws that we are supposed to abide and he was entrusted to keep those laws alive but he couldn’t do it without the humans help. They were forgetting those ways. They thought they were not important anymore, that spiritual realm. So they were defying by their spiritual laws that they were given, and defying the laws of the land and we needed to follow them, in a way that would sustain us in the future. So as that happened, he called on that bird, called on that white bird women. “I cannot live anymore, to do this”, and she summoned another Manitou, the bat. We call it, Apakwaanaajii, and that bat came, said, “I will watch over you, I know a place you can live with us”, and it was the caves, and that is where they ushered him into. And the bats taught him how to live in darkness; they taught him how to survive in darkness.

So he started to evolve. Started to get a different snout, his skin changed color, his ears started to look different, his fingers started to web up more than usual. So he started to look scarier the more time went on, and he started to feel as though he was being punished. So he got real really angry, and as he got angry, he killed that bat king, the king of those the bats. And as he killed him, he made a vow; “I will always go to render myself as scary to the humans. Their fault for not listening, their fault of not obeying the natural law of the environment, the laws of the gods.” And that was his pact with killing that king. And as that death accorded from that king, that white bird woman came back, and she fell in love with Wataygaaboo. And she wanted to help him so bad, and she wanted to be with

him. Because she knew what he looked like in the beginning. And she felt so sorry for him. He became this being, this hideous being, lost the meaning of love, he lost confidence in the humans, and he turned against us. So she tried her best to help him, to love him, and he didn't believe her, and that was the thing that made him even madder, because he thought she was trying to trick him, his guilt again caught up to him. Like I did this, maybe she is trying to do this to me to, trick me and kill me. And so he became angrier, more hideous.

So as time went on, as people were seeing this creature, and at first they would call him 'amonsitogin' –they didn't know who he was, so amonsay - amonsitogin, this creature that has no name, or they don't know what it is, and it became a, he became a figure of our night time fears, that "not to make noise" caution, that's where that came from. "Don't make noise at night; you're going to call Baagak. Don't be loud at night, don't be loud when you're trying to sleep, or don't be making noise on the water at night". So things went on for many years, and he became more and more scarier, and there are different accounts along the way. And one of the most moving things is a place north, I don't know if it was Lac Seul or even further up north, but there was a couple that was stranded, they were stranded out on a lake and they couldn't find their way. Water was starting to freeze; ice was starting to develop on the water. And eventually they found their way, and they found their home, their cabin. So this is not too long ago, so they found their cabin, and they got in, warmed up and the noise they were making on the water, they were calling for help, they were looking for help. So as they got into their cabin, the husband and wife, they were warming up, and they

could hear somebody crying. They could hear somebody asking for help and they became scared, could hear it getting louder and louder and louder. And finally the husband, he mustered up most the strength that he could to face that fear, because it sounded scary, so he went out to the lake, went out to the edge of the water and he noticed these bones. What he thought to be a skeleton wedged in the rocks, and he was scared to help him. And he went back to the cabin and told his wife, there is a cheebay, there is a skeleton on the shore, and it's alive, it's moving, what do we do?

So the wife, she remembered that must be Baagak that must be the spirit who doesn't like humans. So she went with her husband to the shore and sure enough that was him there stuck in the rock, and he was crying, he was saying, "I need help, I need help to survive, I need to get out of here, I'm stuck, I can't move" ... so they helped him and they asked, "awenen giin? –Who are you? Why are you this way?" And he cried, and that was an account that he started to acknowledge his wrongdoings and that guilt started to subside, and he stood up and he said, "I am what they call Baagak and I've done so many wrong to my own family, I became a hideous creature". And he told them, "From this day on, I will always be a helper when you need me the most, when all else fails, call on me. I will help you", and he reminded them, "I'm this way because the humans forgot about me, the humans stopped thinking about us. The creatures in the forest, the spiritual beings, so without them thinking about us, we too die". And he flew, he flew in the sky and came back down, and he gave that man some power - a little bit of magic to help them survive because they were out looking

for food this couple. They couldn't find any, they were starving, so he gave them a special mushkiki, a medicine – “use this, abijitooon iwe, and you will find what you need in the wild, if you do it in a good way”. And it was asemaa,

So it was a reminder to people to use that tobacco again when we are going into the forest, on the lake, anywhere wild, to always put that tobacco before you enter that way you are protected and you are watched. And that used to be Missabe's job, but he left, and he's watching and observing from a different place, but he gave that responsibility to Wataygaaboo, Baagak, to do that work for Missabe, and that is to watch and protect the humans when they are entering that wild.

So that's the story of Baagak. And there are more accounts of him, from different places, and some people confuse the bird, the skeleton bird, but that is the woman. The white bird woman, that's her – she became saddened because he didn't love her back. So she became a skeleton too. So there are two of them, the skeleton bird and the skeleton itself, Baagak. So there are two of them. So that's what happened, and there are different accounts of both of them, the skeleton bird, and the skeleton itself.

Appendix 3: *The Greatest Spiritual Awakening the Earth will Ever See* by Ron

Mandamin

It was reminded to us so many times that we do not own this Earth and the things within it. Time and time again Spirit sent forth a Guide to keep us on our Path to Goodness. However, for some reason we strand away and become forgetful of the Ways that gave us strength and hope. We find ourselves here once again. All of us that walk this Earth have an un-certain future ahead of us, and that brings tears and weariness to me. I think not of myself right now, but the future of my nephews, nieces and little cousins I think about the children that are walking this World, the ones suffering and the ones that were taken and lost. What is happening to the Earth is the destruction and passing away of an old world. This passing will take many of us away, and send much of us towards a good life into the future. The things we depend on, our livelihood, our resources we need to survive are on the last thread. Even the animals, the fish and our reptile families are worried and warning us. To those who hear them cry, to those who watch them get ready, share your Love. We are going to need it, all of it. I could care less of myself, because the important thing is the message from Spirit, Nay-nah-nee-kwe. It is her who gave me these duties to fulfill. To do the work despite my own hardships. It is her that I speak on behalf. There have been so many times where I thought I could not do the work, each time she kept me alive for these moments ahead of us. I do not seek authority, but I do seek those who will listen, and I seek those who have important work to share despite the fear or repercussions. I pray and talk to Her everyday hoping the OTHERS of the WAY

will have confidence to be the person God chose you to be. Our young people, the ones who forgot the things that saved us for thousands of years, they need you and People like you, the ones who carry no conditions of Living a Good Life. Don't turn a blind eye to what is going on. Do your part. Be strong, be brave. Show kindness and un-conditional love. It is the Way and only way. Use the natural weapon of peace, our mouths to do the work. Raise your Voice, Raise your Weapons; be gentle, but aggressively kind... :)

Appendix 4: Baagak the Flying Skeleton by Isaac Murdoch, Serpent River, Ontario. July 15, 2016.



Appendix 5: Anishinaabe words to the 1764 Treaty of Niagara Song



1764 Treaty of Niagara Gamwin
 Naabikwaan Naabikwaan daa gaa maasing
 Naabikwaan Naabikwaan daa gaa maasing
 Haa Aambe ! Haa Aambe ! Ooh nishkaayok,
 Haa Aambe ! Haa Aambe ! Ooh nishkaayok

Zhaaganaash Zhaaganaash e-doode zhigonaan zhaagnanaash
 Gii-gaa kii miinaan gii-bii ga'gwejjiimiigoomin
 Gii-daakii niinaan gii giigaa gwedjiimiigoomin
 Naabikwaan Naabikwaan daa gaa maasing
 Naabikwaan Naabikwaan daa gaa maasing
 Mii zhaaganaash e-zhii waawiindaamoonang
 Mii zhaaganaash e-zhii waawiindaamoonang

Gii-gaa ga'neweniimiigonaan miinik gegoo gizis geyaa goojiing ishpiming
 Miinawaa go minik miizhashkoonhsan gezaagaakik
 Naabikwaan! Naabikwaan! daa gaa maasing
 Naabikwaan! Naabikwaan! daa gaa maasing

Gii-gaa miinigomi ozaawaa kikoo giye baashkiziganan
 Giigaa miinigoomi mii zhaaganaash e-zhe waawiindaamoonang
 Zhooniyaa! Zhooniyaa! gewii miinigoomin noonjii gii-daakiimiinaan
 Naabikwaan! Naabikwaan! daa gaa maasing
 Naabikwaan! Naabikwaan! daa gaa maasing

Miinawaa dash gaawin gego miinaasiinaan gidoo wesiinh niinaanin
 Gaa giye gii-giigooyiin miinaanin gegaa miinaasiinaan
 9AAAABNM,.



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