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ABSTRACT: Mapping Self-Determination through Survivance Narratives

What can stories, and the way they move across communities and the land tell us about nationhood?

Indigenous communities with control over land, education, health, policing, access to cultural facilities, and womxn in government consistently report few or no suicides. Enhancing positive self and cultural identity has similarly been shown to reduce child welfare apprehensions, drug addiction, and homelessness. We know that the ability to see oneself as an accepted and valued member of society is essential to developing a positive sense of self and cultural identity. As an Indigenous person on Turtle Island, living under the Canadian state, , this is no easy task as representations of Indigenous people in Canadian media overwhelmingly focus on and reinforce negative narratives of victimhood, deficit and disappearance. My research explores the relationship between narrative (re)presentation and cultural capacity by gathering, mapping, and analyzing narratives of agency, authority, and legitimacy as expressed through stories of survivance. I am looking for culturally relevant insights into how we, as Indigenous people, conceptualize and express agency, authority, and legitimacy, how those narratives can benefit our communities, and how they speak to and shape the sociopolitical and geospatial relationships that constitute Indigenous nationhood. The premise for this research is that mapping survivance narratives may illustrate Indigenous presence at a scale and scope that has not yet been fully comprehended. I believe that when survivance stories originate and spread from Indigenous people, they are more likely to demonstrate thriving cultural networks that can shift dominant discourses on Indigeneity from deficit to abundance.