

Researching Indigenous language education from a non-Indigenous perspective



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Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Brock University, 17 November, 2021

with thanks to Andrew Lee for the invitation



McGill

Faculty of
Education

Department of
Integrated Studies in Education

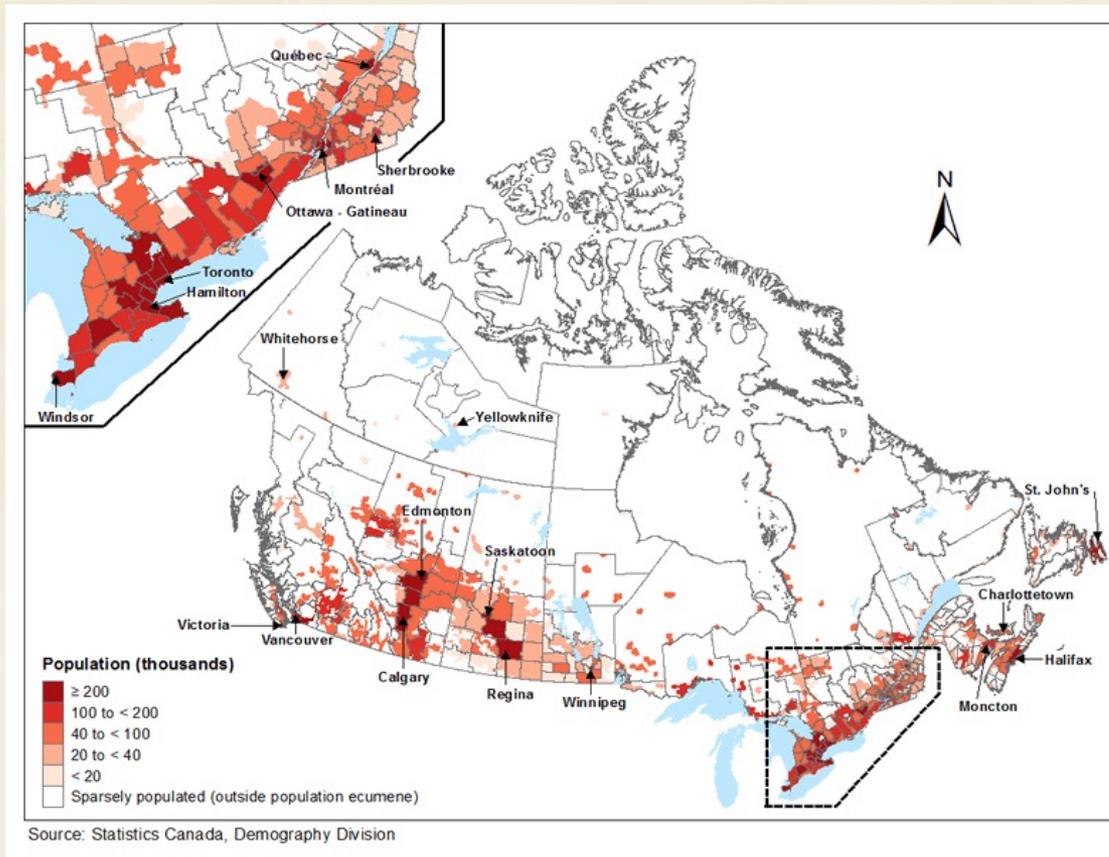
Brock
University



Overview

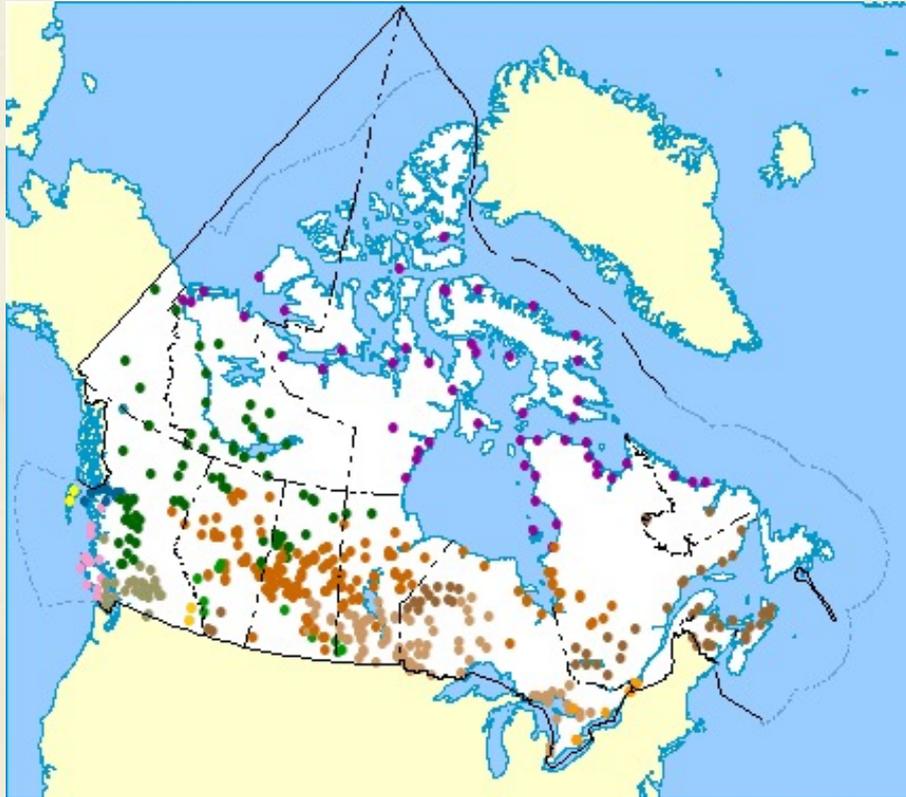
1. The Canadian nation—a little history and geography
2. Canada as a white-settler society
3. Language, education and multicultural policy in Canada
4. Indigenous peoples in Canada—introduction
5. The residential school legacy
6. Decolonizing [Indigenous language] education: Ways and means
7. An example from Mi'gmaq territory

Canada: 37.6 million people over nearly 10 million km²



9.985 million km²; 37.59 million people (2019)

Indigenous peoples in Canada



- About 3000 “reserves” (600 “bands” or nations)
- 60+ languages
- 11 major language families
- Only three are considered viable into the 22nd century: Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut; the rest are endangered

NB: colours indicate *lang. families*; dots indicate *communities* (“reserves”)



The Hudson's Bay Company

- “the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay”: lands draining into Hudson's Bay
- Why? FUR
- How? WATERWAYS (the only possible ways at that time)
- Who?
 - Scots merchant adventurers fronted the MONEY
 - First Nations peoples did the LOGISTICS
 - French *voyageurs* out to make a profit were the first line of contact between Europeans/ “Natives”

How much land drains into Hudson's Bay?

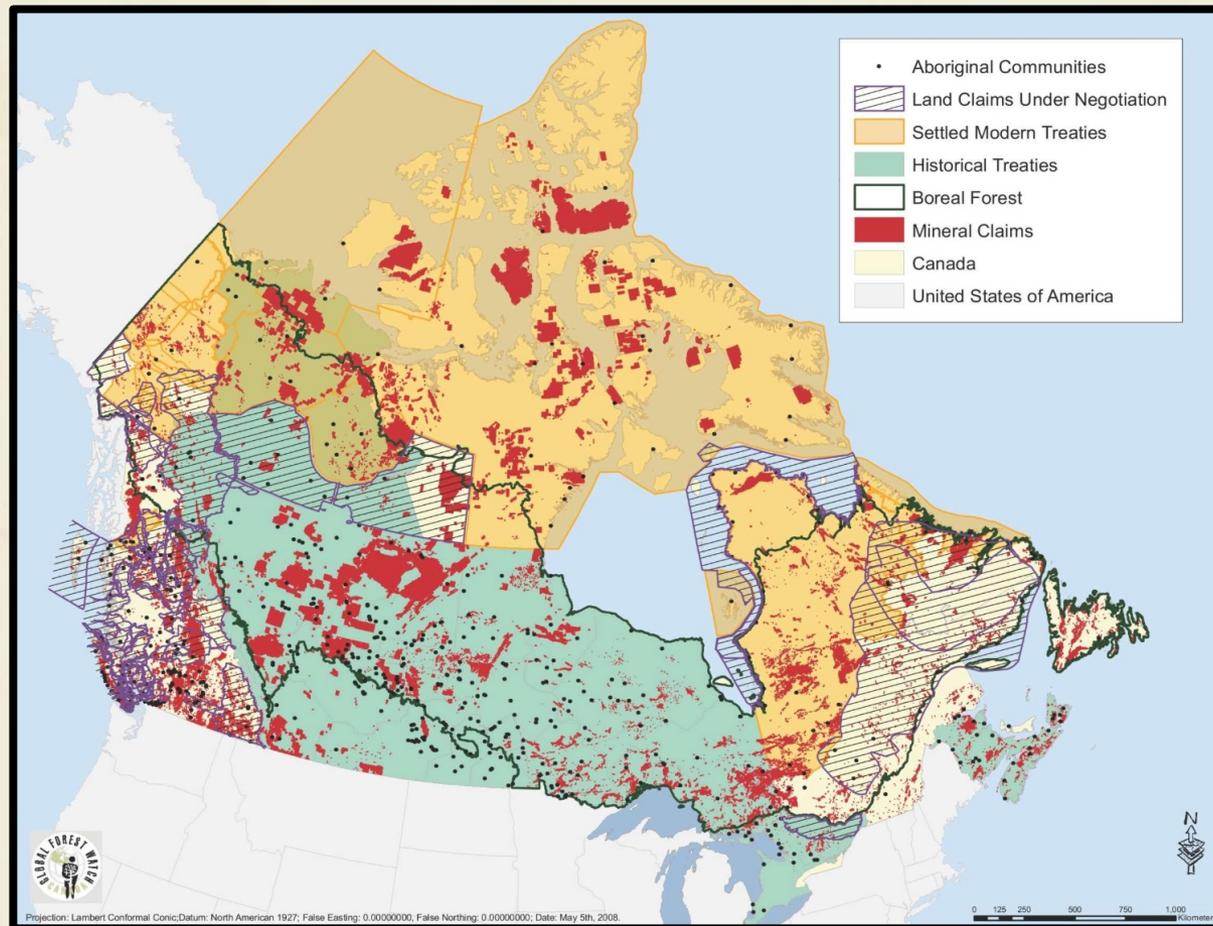


How much land drains into
Hudson's Bay?

3.8 million km²



Settler colonial formations are *territorially acquisitive in perpetuity*





Membership in the Canadian nation: Ethnicity and language*

Historically, FOUR and only four groups:

English, French, “Aboriginal” (now usually “Indigenous”; many “tribes”), and “Multicultural” (also VERY diverse)

But only TWO groups have enshrined language rights, English and French

Canada as a typical White-Settler society:

- Europeans arrive, conquer local people
- The white newcomers separate from their European homeland (political autonomy) and set up governing apparatus
- The local (Indigenous) population is controlled. How? Depends on NUMBERS. In Canada: the reserve system, because small.
- A new, rigid hierarchy develops. Indigenous people=bottom.

* See Eve Haque’s 2012 *Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework*, [here](#) and [here](#)



From colonization to Confederation

- 1759: British conquest of French in Quebec (outpost skirmish of 7 Years' War in Europe)
- 1840: First British North America Act
- 1867: BNA act and Canadian Confederation: Upper and Lower Canada (i.e., Ontario & Quebec); Nova Scotia, New Brunswick
- 1869: Hudson's Bay Co. forced to sell to British gov't
- Manitoba & N.W.T. 1870; B.C. 1871; P.E.I. 1873; Yukon 1898; Alberta & Saskatchewan 1905; Newfoundland & Labrador 1949; Nunavut 1999
- Indigenous peoples: no political recognition



Language education in Canada (briefly)

- Canada: Officially English-French bilingual since 1969
- Education in Canada: A provincial matter; provincial Ministries of Education are (ferociously) independent
- English is the main language in most jurisdictions*
- In Quebec, 80% (of 8.5 million) are “Francophone”
- “Other” official language usually required in school
- Popularity of French immersion programs (since late 1960s): in English-speaking areas, many children learn all their school subjects through French. **WHY?**

Exceptions: **Quebec (French is the only official language); New Brunswick & Yukon (English-French bilingual); Nunavut (English, French, Inuktitut); NWT (English, French & 9 Indigenous languages)*



Official multiculturalism in Canada: Policy objectives

- Support for all cultures (conditional — if they say they *want* support; if affordable)
- Support for the arts, museums, etc.
- Canadian society must be portrayed as ethnically diverse — no one “Other Ethnic Group” is allowed to get special attention
- All are free to integrate by learning English or French — immigrants have the choice
- Note that Indigenous peoples are *not* included in the definition of “multicultural”

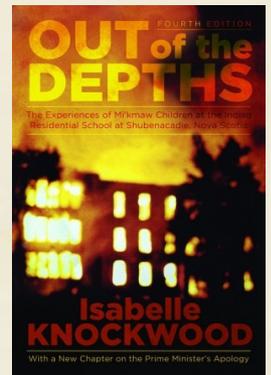


Sidebar on nomenclature: Department of *who*?

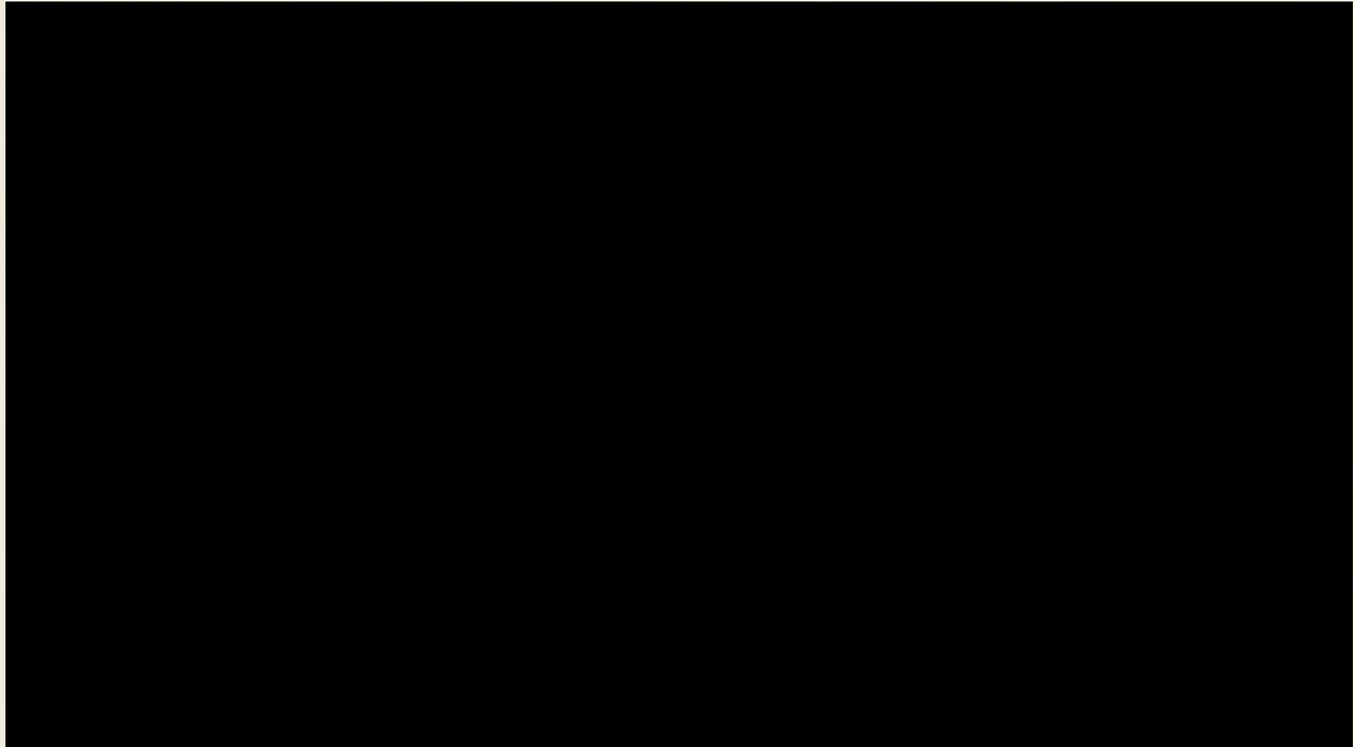
- “American Indians”; “Tribes”: only in the USA
- **“Indians”**; **“Native peoples”**: outmoded, BUT:
- 1755: British Indian Department
- 1867: Ministry of the Interior (first Canadian dep’t)
- 1876: Indian Act (still in effect; amended 1951/1985)
- 1880: Department of Indian Affairs (“DIA”)
- 1982: Canada’s Constitution Act section 35(2)—
“Aboriginal peoples of Canada include First Nations, Inuit & Métis”
- 2013: Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada
- 2016: **Indigenous** & Northern Affairs Canada
- 2017: Crown-Indigenous Relations / Indigenous Services

The residential school era (1880s-1990s)

- “Kill the Indian in the child”: Indigenous languages and lifeways forbidden (official government policy)
- Propaganda film, 1958, schooling remote Canadians—shows a residential school, here (minute 5:35 on)
- CBC archives: Losing native languages
- The government Apology, 2008
- Knockwood on Shubenacadie (4th ed 2015)
- Truth and reconciliation: the TRC’s 2015 report and calls to action



Truth & Reconciliation (TRC): Stories from Residential School Survivors



Teaching Canadian children about residential schools

DO YOU KNOW
WHAT A
RESIDENTIAL
SCHOOL IS?



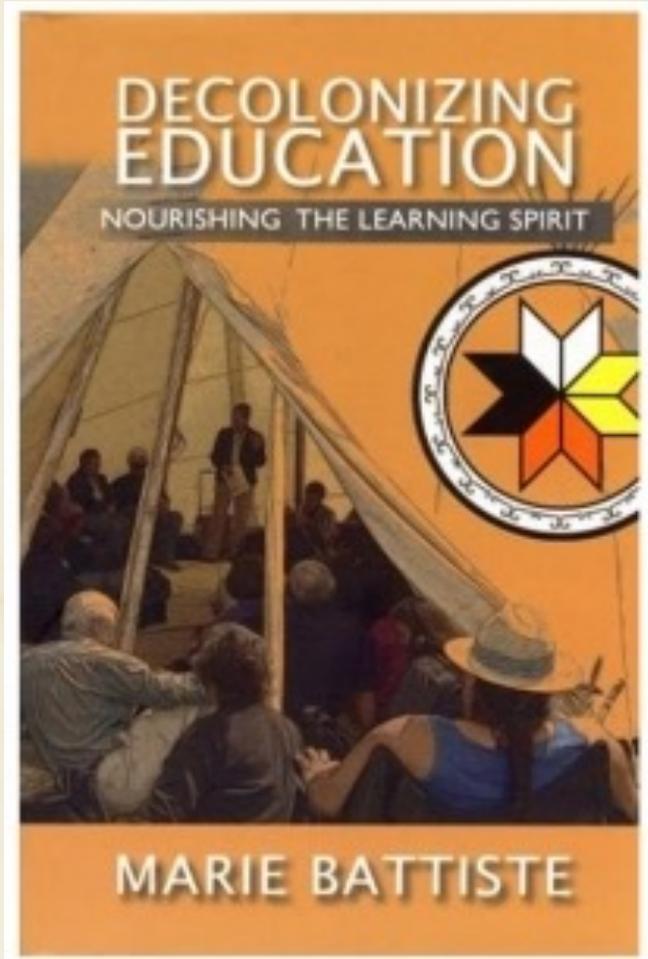
Family stories, intergenerational cycles & orange shirts: An Onkwehón:we perspective on the National Day for Truth & Reconciliation (by Wahéhshon Shiann Whitebean)

BILD/LIDA blog post,
3 October 2021:

<http://bild-lida.ca/blog/uncategorized/family-stories-intergenerational-cycles-orange-shirts-an-onkwehonwe-perspective-on-the-national-day-for-truth-reconciliation-by-wahehshon-shiann-whitebean/>



Decolonizing Education,
Battiste 2013



From Battiste, 2013...

Consider that for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan — their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system. Imagine the consequence of a powerful ideology that positions one group as superior and gives away First Nations peoples' lands and resources and invites churches and other administrative agents to inhabit their homeland, while negating their very existence and finally removing them from the Canadian landscape to lands no one wants. Imagine how uncertain a person is whose success is only achieved by a complete makeover of themselves, by their need to learn English and by the polished rules and habits that go with that identity.



...the goal was *assimilation*

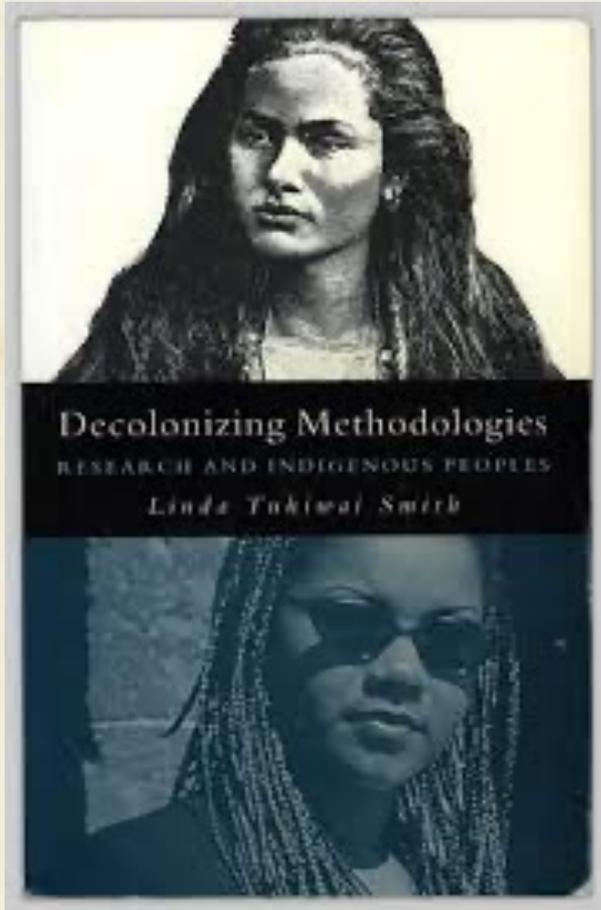
They are thrust into a society that does not want them to show too much success or too much Indian identity, losing their connections to their land, family and community when they have to move away as there is no work in their homeland.

Assimilation.

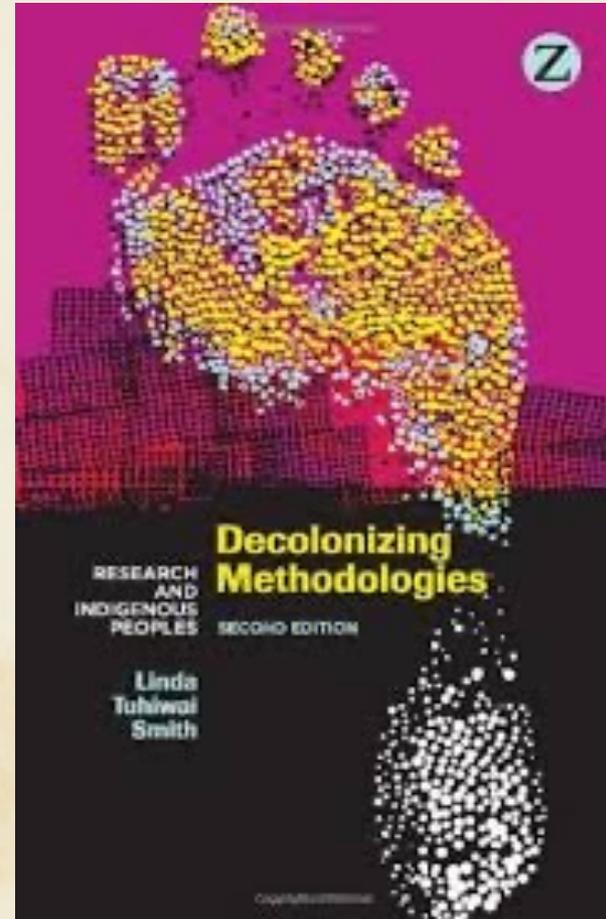
This context is important to postcolonial education, as I offer ways we can continue to reflect upon this experience in a proactive way.

This experience continues to challenge our consciousness and our quest for healing.

Decolonizing Methodologies, Linda Tuhiwai Smith

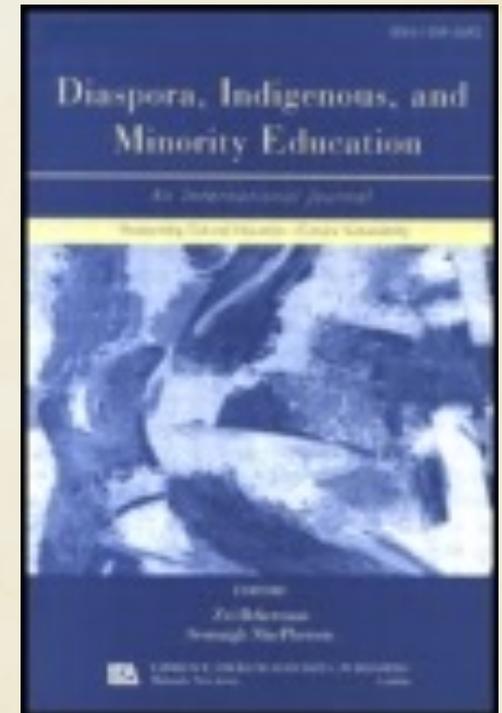
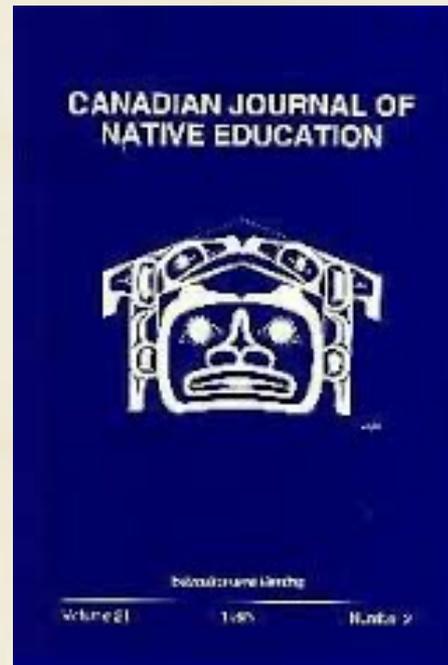
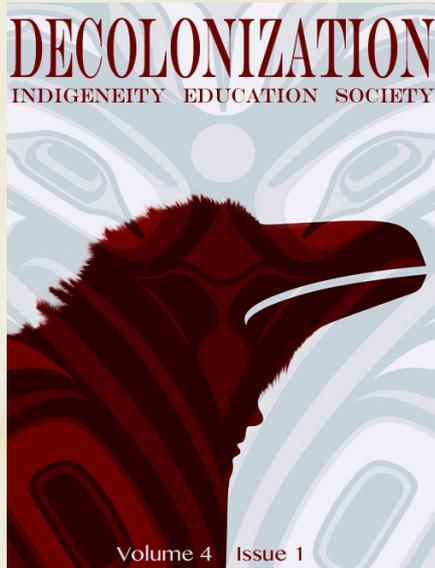


1st edition 1999

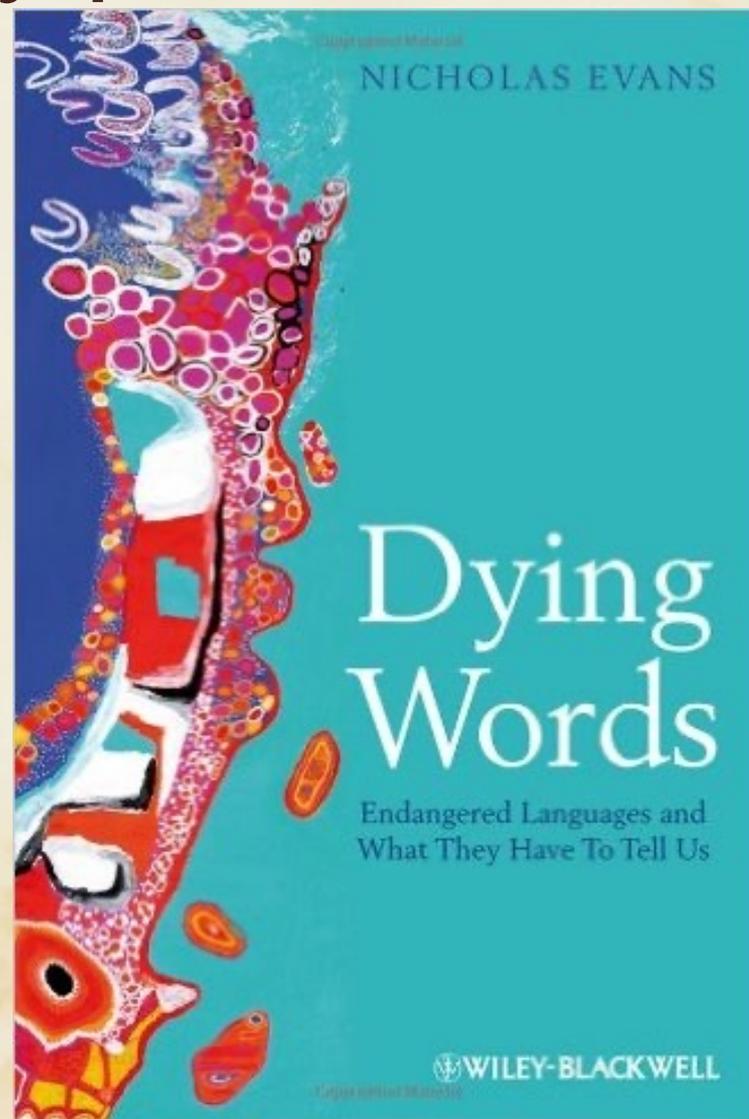
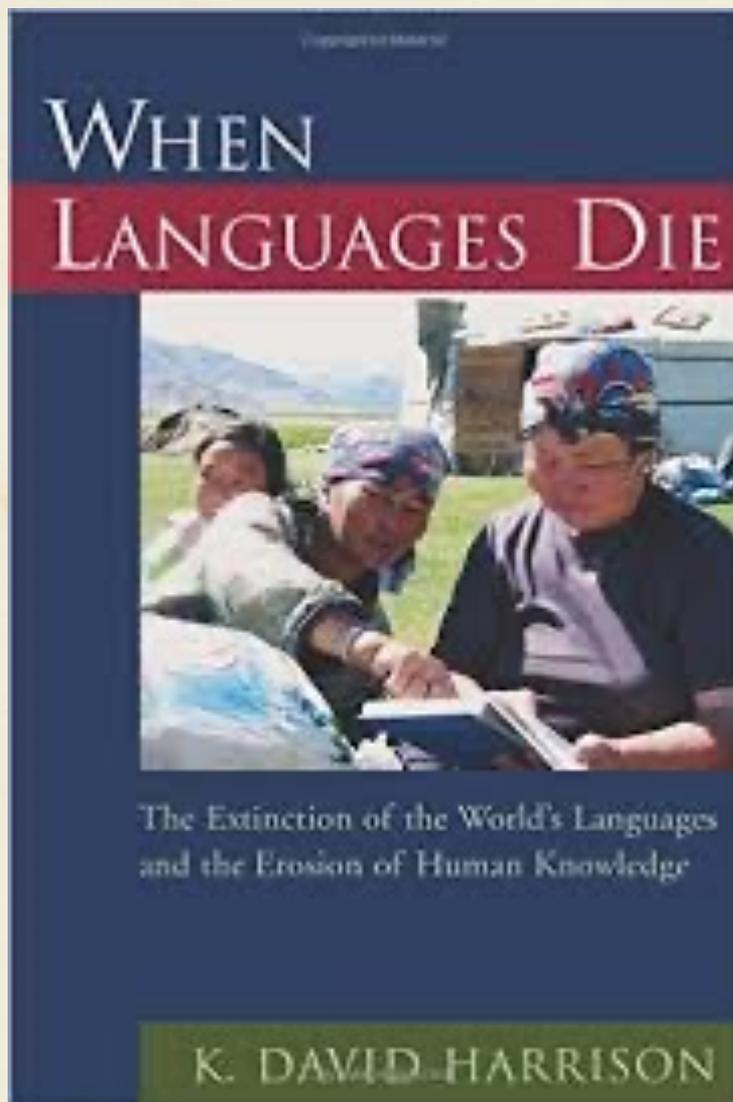


2nd edition 2012

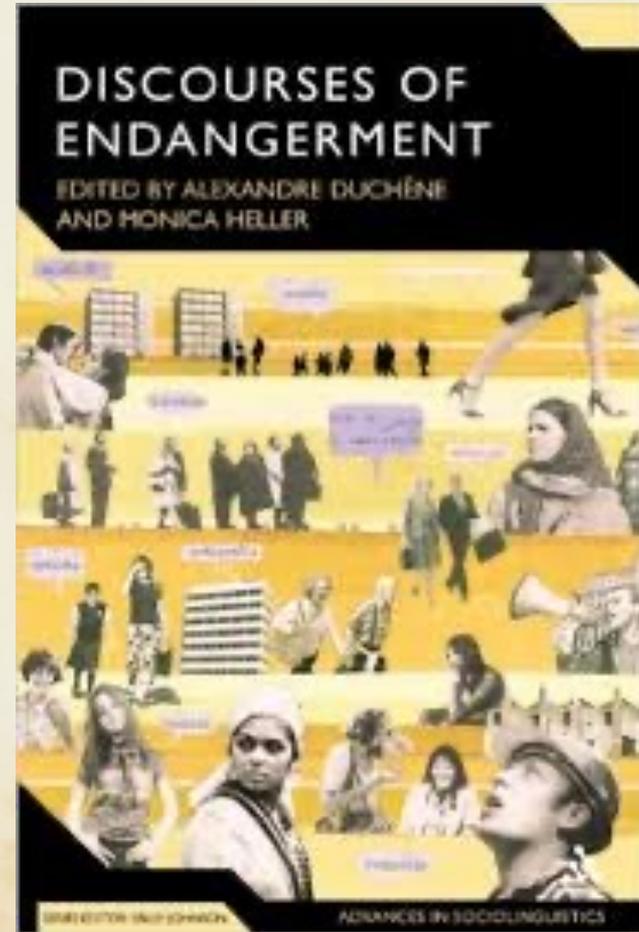
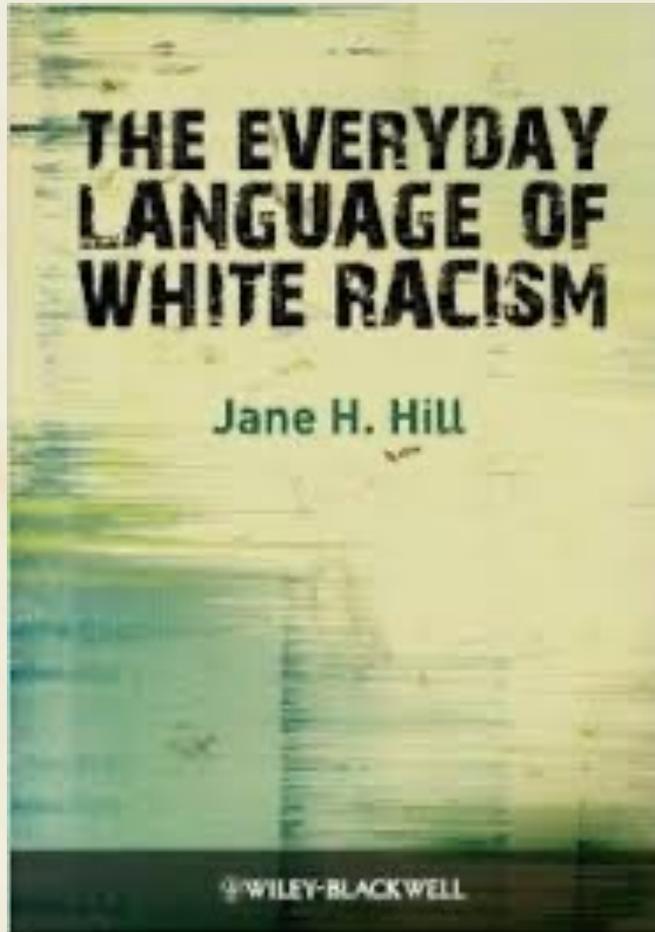
Disciplinary journals



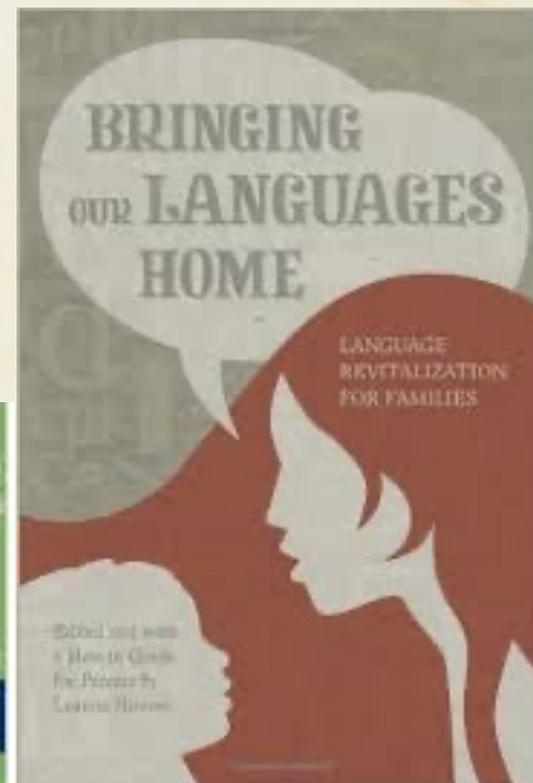
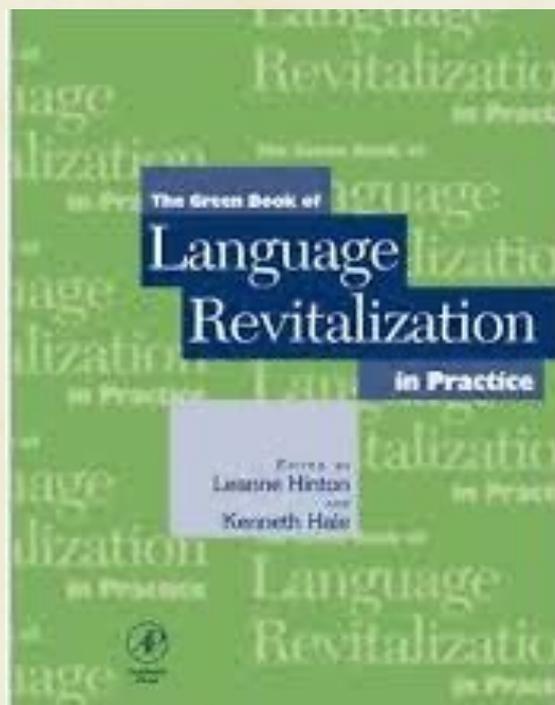
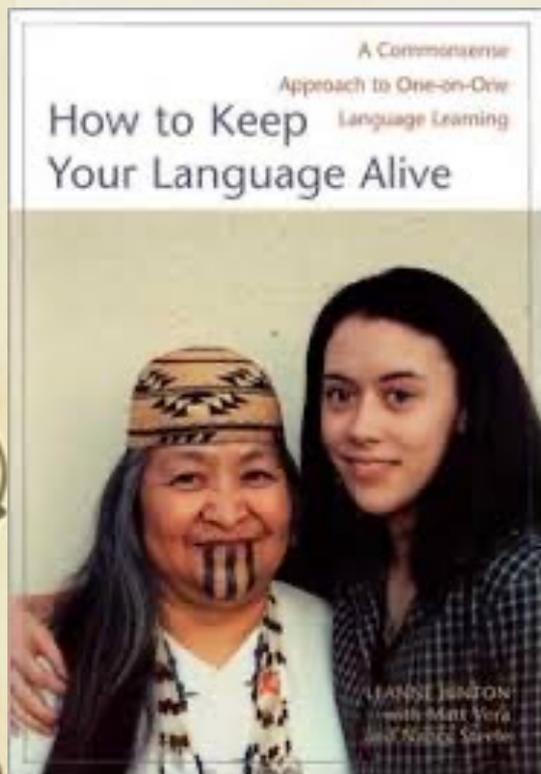
Accessible, key publications



Challenging received wisdom



How-to guides





The need to decolonize Indigenous language education

- Decrease in transmission of Indigenous mother tongue (Norris, 2006)
 - Only 12.4% of indigenous children under 4 years of age speak at indigenous language at home
 - 5% speak an Indigenous language as an additional language
 - Children must learn English or French as the medium of instruction when they attend school
 - Mainstreaming of Indigenous language speakers into education that uses English or French beginning in Kindergarten has been called a form of “linguistic genocide” (Day, 1985)



Language teaching challenges

- Learning an indigenous language from a young age is important for cultural Indigenous identity, BUT:
- “Indigenous children are not likely to learn their Indigenous language as a first language” (Statistics Canada, 2006)
- Teaching the languages as SECOND languages **well** is therefore the most promising way ahead
- But different parental preferences as to whether a child should learn an Indigenous language in school
- Indigenous communities **must** make their own decisions about how to maintain and revitalize their languages



Revitalization across the lifespan

- Language nests
 - Secwepemc and Lil'wat in BC; 20 langs in NWT
- Immersion for school-age children
 - Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Immersion School (Cape Breton, NS)
- Adult immersion
 - Mi'gmaq at Listuguj First Nation
- Master-Apprentice programs (e.g., BC)
- Language and culture hubs
 - Kahnawà:ke, Saskatchewan



An example of developing adult immersion: Mi'gmaq in Listuguj

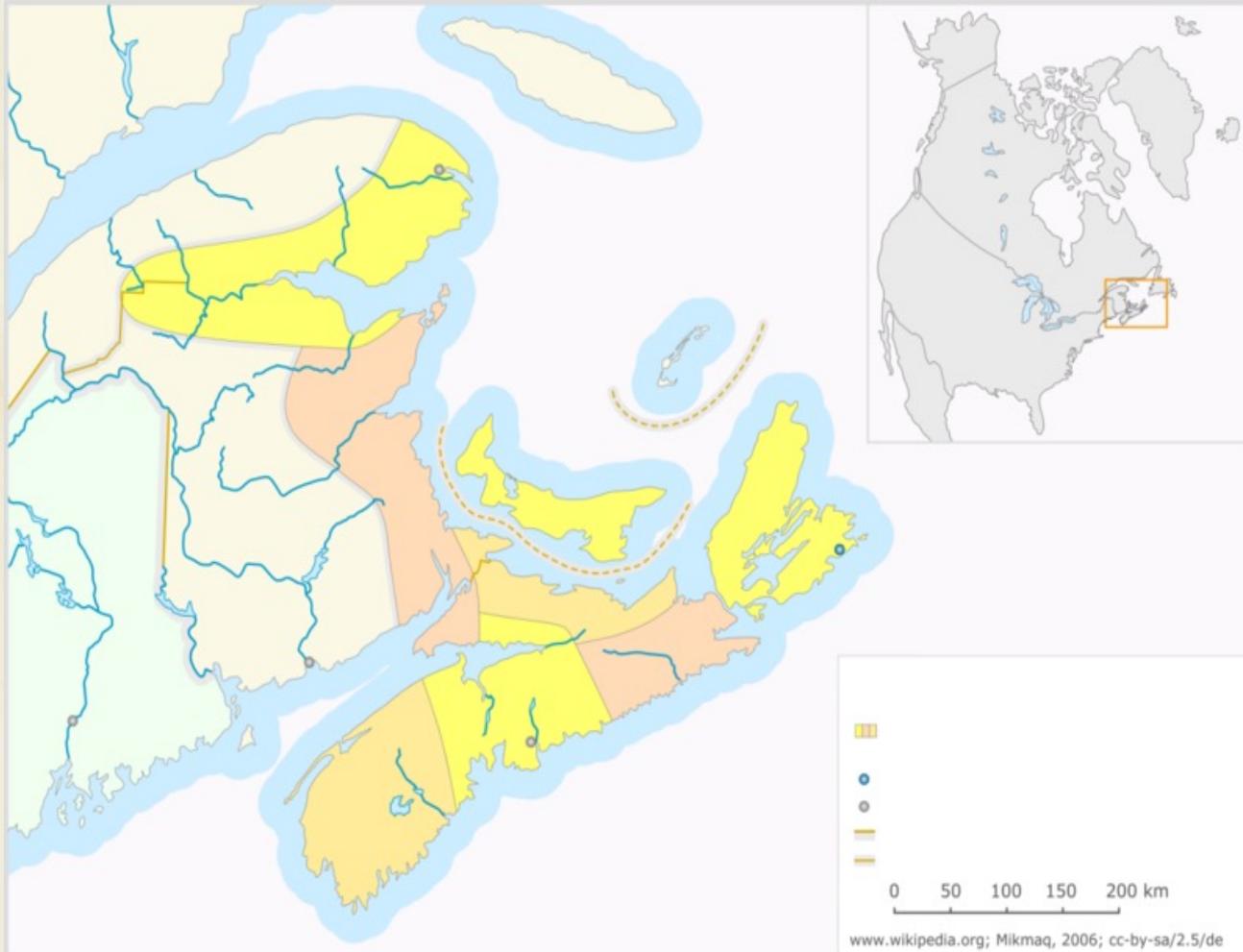
Mi'gmaq: one of the more than 50 Indigenous languages still spoken in Canada that are not considered to be viable into the next century (based on current figures of home language use, rate of intergenerational transmission)

This project originated at and is based at Listuguj; the involvement of outside researchers has been mostly for funding purposes — it's a ***Listuguj*** initiative

Listuguj in Mi'gma'gi



Traditional Mi'gmaq territory — Seven Districts





The research team: a family- community–university collaboration, 2006–2016

Janine Metallic (Listuguj; McGill)

Mary Ann Metallic (Listuguj)

Janice Vicaire (Listuguj)

Mela Sarkar (McGill)



Underlying principles for research

- All research decisions were collaborative & transparent
- The outside (McGill) researcher was an ordinary participant without special status (i.e. in the L2 classroom): a “willing hostage” (Kapoor, 2011)
- “**OCAP**”: The Listuguj Education Directorate has retained *ownership* of, *control* of, *access* to, and *possession* of all materials pertaining to the planning, data-gathering, and dissemination of results of this research project at all times



When it started: Mary Ann Metallic

We, Theresa Mitchell and myself, attended a workshop in November 2005 given to “Native Language Immersion training” participants in Fredericton, N.B. I saw the potential of teaching language using pictures. This is similar to how I learnt my language as a child by being shown the item, being told what it is and allowed to repeat the words. I was excited to return home to gather my own pictures and teach someone.



Bisgug

Why it's often called the "Picture Method"

nemitu'eg
tlisüt i
napuig'niqtug

"We see our language in pictures"



Language structure presented visually



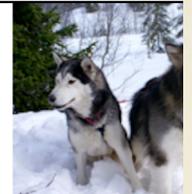
In the classroom: writing is downplayed

Animate / Inanimate

Animate
singular



Animate plural



Inanimate
singular



Inanimate
plural



Affirmative transitive verbs



Intransitive verbs



Verb tenses: present, past, future





The “Picture Method” at Listuguj

- Interest in this way of teaching Mig'maq has spread far beyond the community of Listuguj
- Other Mig'maq teachers have come to observe classes
- Speakers of other Algonquian languages (e.g., Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Cree, Ojibway) can apply these techniques directly to teaching their languages
- The use of images in L2 teaching to help learners understand structural aspects of language / provide visually striking material for vocabulary acquisition and memory work, is not new or copyrightable
- A sophisticated and **SUCCESSFUL** structural syllabus

“Finding our talk”





From 2006 to 2016

- Since early 2006, learners aged 16-60 have responded positively to this method
- 40-hour courses for adults three times a year, 2006-2015; summer courses for postsecondary students
- Many have gone from beginner to low-intermediate
- In 2011, the first Mi'gmaq kindergarten immersion program for 4-year-olds was set up and has been extended annually
- 2016 on: Adult immersion classes in place

In closing: Some good ideas from the University of Victoria



...check them out!

Many thanks to

Listuguj Education Directorate: Mary Ann
Metallic, Janice Vicaire, Theresa Mitchell, Gail
Metallic

Janine Metallic and other colleagues at McGill;
also at U. Ottawa and U. Sherbrooke; and the
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of
Canada

Siawinnu'gina'masultinej!
Let's continue to learn our Indigenous
language

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