

Jessica Hallenbeck
Starkey-Robinson Award for Research on Canada

Dr. Jessica Hallenbeck's doctoral thesis, which she successfully defended on November 29, 2019, explores the interconnections between Indigenous women's family relations, histories of dispossession, water, and fish in and around the Salish Sea. It emerged out of a long-term, deep and immensely creative collaboration with Coast Salish and Sahtu Dene storyteller and playwright, Rosemary Georgeson. It is a pathbreaking model of what collaborative scholarship can look like for a non-Indigenous scholar wishing to contribute in constructive ways to rethinking our collective national history, present and future.

The thesis tells the story of a research journey. In the first instance, Hallenbeck and Georgeson searched for a history of Indigenous women's relations with fish and fishing in the archives but found little evidence there. Jessica theorizes this absence through a critical assessment of the archive as a technique of colonial power. Hallenbeck and Georgeson then moved to other sources of historical knowledge by exploring the history of Indigenous women and fish in the Pacific Northwest through Rosemary Georgeson's extended family history. In the course of and through the research together, Rosemary literally found and reconnected with her family members. Along with Jessica, her family members pieced together their collective history, which involves removal from coastal areas and loss of fishing licenses. The thesis is a careful parsing of what Jessica can and cannot tell of this history, of what should be left to Rosemary to narrate in her own time in her own words. The external examiner, Emilie Cameron, wrote in her report that the thesis "succeeds in slowly and carefully outlining the contours of a space that is purposely not made legible, both as a form of ethnographic refusal and in honour of the specific relationships and obligations that have created the work. It enacts a way of knowing within and through the academy that is not primarily oriented toward the demands of settler colonial institutions and conventions, and it honours Indigenous feminist methodologies without claiming or coopting them. This could only have been accomplished in relationship, serious and ongoing relationship, and with a sincere and longstanding commitment to learning from and with Indigenous scholars and collaborators about how to do research. On this basis alone, I feel the work makes a substantial and important contribution, and I want to honour and celebrate it."

The dissertation's goal is to foreground "the role of Indigenous women and the importance of salmon within understandings of urbanization in the Pacific Northwest and along the Salish Sea, crucially bringing together work on urbanization and settler colonialism through the lens of critical Indigenous studies" (16-17). The dissertation slowly paints a picture and pieces together traces of what has been occluded in the colonial archive, and readers are left with a rich, complex story of the Pacific Northwest that centers Indigenous women without coopting their knowledges and voices. Dr. Emilie Cameron notes that "It manages to displace settler stories and foreground a whole other set of dynamics and practices not by arguing with the settler academy, but by simply turning away and pointing to what is there (and also what is lost, forgotten, retrieved). This is a remarkable accomplishment, skillfully rendered."

The thesis is innovative in other ways as well. As an accomplished filmmaker, Jessica has incorporated film into the research, producing two films in the course of researching and writing the thesis. Chapter six of the thesis is -- literally -- a film in which Rosemary sits with different

family members (most of whom she was meeting for the first time) to hear their memories of fish and fishing and of their communities removal to distant reservations and their loss of fishing licenses. The film and thesis provide serious and sustained documentation of loss, tempered in tone and substance by the gift of connecting with family members and a sense of the past and future that comes with this. Of the film, the external examiner wrote: "Notably, Ch 6, a film, is both beautifully integrated into the larger whole and deeply resonant in its own right, which speaks to the style and content of the writing around it, the importance of film and storytelling in the overall project, the strength of the collaboration that created the work, and the skill of the author as a filmmaker."

As a model of how settler researchers might engage ethically with Indigenous individuals and communities, the research took shape as a multitude of research outputs. It led to the production of conventional research materials (conference presentations, scholarly papers, a dissertation) and to other innovative tangible and intangible contributions (two documentary films and number of community events). The research process and research outcomes are intertwined; Jessica has conceived them as a way of modeling relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as an intervention into the colonial imaginary and as a way of bringing diverse peoples together in the same public spaces to create new publics of understanding and dialogue.

This is a brave thesis that pushes at the conventions of social science research to demonstrate what decolonial research practices might look like for non-Indigenous scholars in Canada, as well as the rich knowledge that they produce.