Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

CELESTE PEDRI

MA (Royal Roads University, 2011)
BCom (Lakehead University, 2006)

“Maamakaajichige Mazinaakizon: A Journey of Relating with/through Our
Anishinabe Photographs”

Department of Anthropology

Wednesday, August 31, 2016
10:00AM
First Peoples House, Ceremonial Hall
Room 110

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Andrea Walsh, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Ann Stahl, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)
Dr. Christine O'Bonsawin, Department of History, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Kate Hennessy, Interactive Arts & Technology, Simon Fraser University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Lorna Jackson, Department of Writing, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Anishinabeg are not strangers to photography. Like many Indigenous communities in North America and elsewhere, Anishinabeg have a history of being pictured by governments, artists, and researchers working within the confines of colonial thought and practice. Not surprisingly, much of this colonial artwork has drawn considerable scholarly critique, calling attention to issues including misuse of power, cultural appropriation, assimilation, and misrepresentation. While this work continues to be significant in contributing understanding of how colonialism played out visually and materially, it may also unintentionally generate the misconception that Indigenous Peoples were only the subjects of the camera or had little or no authority over the photographic experience. Indeed, photography has its own history and place within the creative practices and traditions of many Indigenous Peoples.

This research project explores the role of Anishinabeg photography in the reclamation and continuance of Anishinabeg stories, memories, and knowledge among Anishinabeg families with ancestral and present day ties to Anishinabeg lands in the northwest region of Ontario. As a result of imposed colonial legislation, Anishinabeg in this region have been displaced from their traditional lands, which has had direct consequences on their ability to retain their language, culture, and life skills. Today, Anishinabeg live in the aftermath of colonial violence perpetuated against their ancestors. The severing of land and kin connections has left many Anishinabeg struggling with issues including loss of identity and sense of belonging. Despite of these ongoing challenges, Anishinabeg have struggled to recover and maintain their knowledge, language, sovereignty, and spirituality through various personal and shared activities and initiatives.

This research incorporates an Anishinabe-based framework that integrates visual, narrative, and material strategies to directly confront the aforementioned colonial legacies of erasure and disappearance of Anishinabeg. It seeks to explore and privilege Anishinabe experiences and stories by weaving together various theoretical and methodological threads of decolonization, photography, place, visuality, materiality and memory. Through processual and creative ways of bringing together and experiencing photographs, it contributes to understandings of the significance of photography to Indigenous-led efforts directed towards decolonization, including cultural revival and continuity, sense of belongingness, identity, and caring for relationships among person, place and land. This research intervenes in Anishinabe lands, stories, and experiences that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Indian Act or “official” dominant versions of history and therefore provides a powerful counter narrative that seeks to both destabilize widely accepted colonial myths and contribute to Anishinabe sovereignty.

Major findings of this research position Anishinabe photographs as highly relational and social things that may help configure and congeal a host of relationships between people, the land, and their ancestral past. It introduces new ways of working with and through historical family photographs—ways that are grounded in existing Anishinabe material and embodied practices. Through these practices it contributes knowledges about the past that can be acquired through these practices. As such, it offers new sets of relationships that strengthen individual ties to the ancestral past in ways that both honour our responsibilities to our ancestors and their teachings as well as our commitments to generations ahead of us.