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

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MA (University of Victoria, 2012)
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“Beyond Rights and Wrongs:
Towards a Treaty-based Ethic of Relationality”

Indigenous Governance Program

Monday, December 18, 2017
1:00 P.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B017

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Taiaiake Alfred, Indigenous Governance Program, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Jeff Corntassel, Indigenous Governance Program, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Mishuana Goeman, Department of Gender Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Budd Hall, School of Public Administration, UVic

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

This research explores the implications of the distinction between transactional and relational understandings of the Numbered Treaties, negotiated by Indigenous peoples and the Dominion of Canada from 1871-1921. It deconstructs representations of the Numbered Treaties as “land transactions” and challenges the associated forms of oppression that emerge from this interpretation. Drawing on oral histories of the Numbered Treaties, it argues instead that they established a framework for relationship that expressly affirmed the continuity of Indigenous legal and political orders. Further, this dissertation positions treaties as a longstanding Indigenous political institution, arguing for the resurgence of a treaty-based ethic of relationality that has multiple applications in the contemporary context. It demonstrates how a relational understanding of treaties can function as a powerful strategy of refusal to incorporation within the nation state; arguing that if treaties are understood as structures of co-existence rather than land transactions, settler colonial assertions of hegemonic authority over Indigenous peoples and lands remain illegitimate. Furthermore, it examines how a relational orientation to treaties might inspire alternatives to violent, asymmetrical, and hierarchical forms of coexistence between humans and with other living beings. To this end, it takes up the potential for treaties to inform legal and political strategies that are reflective of Indigenous philosophies of relationality, providing applied examples at the individual, intrasocietal, and intersocietal levels.