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The Art of Sustainable Shelter-Making: Bakhtiari and Métis Craft Adaptation in Response to Environmental Change[1]

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ABSTRACT
How can craftwork offer ethical approaches to homemaking amid environmental change? In this paper, craftwork is both the technical knowledge and the aesthetic expression of homemaking that brings together human and more-than-human relations into an ethico-political tension. This paper was shaped by a web of relations and responsibilities stemming from my Iranian-Bakhtiari ancestry and my diasporic positionality in so-called Canada. I follow the craft practices of Bakhtiari nomads of southwest Iran to redefine homemaking, not in terms of land ownership, resource accumulation, or the exclusion of others, but in terms of sheltering. Following Bakhtiari teachings, sheltering is the ongoing labour of sustaining ethical and incongruent relations with human and more-than-human communities through collective care and socio-ecological mutual orientation. By thinking with Bakhtiari and Métis textiles and contemporary art, such as Métis artist Christi Belcourt's *Water Song* (2010-2011) and Bakhtiari artist Amin Roshan's *My Father's Contract* (2013), as shelter-making practices, I explore how these diverse crafts enact sustainable sheltering through mindful reorientations to place. Both

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Bakhtiari and Métis crafts enact forms of remembering and resistance that reveal the far-reaching and interrelated extractive violences of British imperialism across Indigenous lands. This paper argues that a transnational and cross-cultural comparative analysis of Indigenous crafts can help mediate the ethical and political tensions of diasporic disorientation to new environments—what I name as the *ab-be-ab* or *water-to-water* experience—refiguring this disorientation into a long-term, water-based pedagogy for learning with Indigenous peoples, watersheds, and creative works, to resist being comfortable with/in settler colonial societies.

Keywords
Sheltering; Diasporic Homemaking; Métis Craft; Bakhtiari Craft; Water Lessons; Environmental Adaptation; Kinship; Sustainable Futures

1. Water-To-Water Lessons

In October 2021, after a cross-country move from Edmonton to Hamilton to start my PhD at McMaster University, that familiar feeling persisted. Like many Iranians, Maman calls this feeling of discomfort the experience of *ab-be-ab* (آب به آب) and tells me to rest until my body adjusts to this new environment. The expression literally translates to 'water-to-water,' and Iranians use it to explain the body's physiological disorientation when moving from one climate to another, when recalibrating to a new place and learning new waters. This discomfort (headache, loss of appetite, nausea, etc.) is temporary and usually resolves when the body adapts to environmental change. *How do I adapt? What does adaptation resolve?*

Maman has long been my source of guidance. She never stopped carrying ab-be-ab in her bones quietly. She is neither at home nor has she stopped thinking about home. But she loves to crochet. And you see her most concentrated and at ease when she's crocheting beside Lake Simcoe, in her foldable chair, wrapped in a thick wool scarf she wears as hijab, even in the summer. She is often cold. While others enter the water, she sits looping yarn into patterned forms. She looks out of place. But she looks at the lake and says, "چه آب زیبایی"—Beautiful Water. In relation to the lake, she is not required to assimilate. She continues to crochet.

As an Iranian-Bakhtiari woman, my homemaking is shaped by my separation from Iran while being mediated through a settler colonial order that enforces heteropatriarchal, extractive, and racist notions of living in violent contention with Indigenous legal orders. Ab-be-ab names the bodily and ethical distress of dwelling within that contradiction, what I call the out-of-place condition. In this paper, I conceptualize an ab-be-ab experience not as a momentary dis/ease, but rather as a mindful orientation for re/learning while moving from 'water-to-water.' From the North Saskatchewan River to Hamilton Harbour,

water materializes the roots/routes of settler extraction and industrial circulation that position us within the ongoing legacies of imperialism. It is consequently never a neutral relocation when we move from one body of water to another; we as dispersed peoples enter distinct ecologies shaped by Indigenous legal processes and treaties, and the ongoing consequences of violent settler economies. We enter currents already structured by these material and legal realities. And so, as a bodily signal of disorientation, ab-be-ab should not be resolved through assimilation into the settler order. Rather, it should remain open through mindful and ongoing reorientations to new waters and ecologies.

Mindful reorientations can render ab-be-ab a pedagogical discipline of relational discernment, attentive to its Iranian specificity but responsive to the political and ecological conditions of diasporic presence. Through this ethical openness, I can learn how to adapt ethically as I navigate my bodily disorientation within this environmental disruption/contradiction. I think about the ways craft becomes another medium of relational attunement, enacting water lessons of individual integrity in relation to a collectivity. More specifically, I consider how craft rooted in water lessons and Indigenous contexts can reshape ab-be-ab into a pedagogy of deliberate relational discernment.

2. Sheltering and Shelter-Making

I have (re)turned to Bakhtiari sheltering traditions from southwest Iran to (re) learn how to sustain relations that open an ethical mode of adaptation. Sheltering in the Bakhtiari nomadic context is the structural process of care and adaptation grounded in relational attunement with human and more-than-human beings (water, trees, plants, goats, spiders, ancestors, water ceremonies, etc.). Shelter-making practices are the material, aesthetic, and pedagogical works and creations (such as craftwork) that ensure the culture of sheltering remains ethically open: adaptive and transformative through relational, place-based embodied attunement.

Shelter-making for Bakhtiari people is mostly carried out by women (shearing goat hair, weaving, butter making, cheese making, foraging, fetching water, etc.). Weaving, in particular, is a group activity. Shirin-Jan, a Bakhtiari woman, tells me that women usually weave as a group, and that "the style and the patterns" convey their "یگانگی"—to mean both individuality and unity—as well as their "relationships and desires."[2] Weaving expresses Bakhtiari women's indi-

2. From my 2025 interview with members of a Bakhtiari tribe in Iran. Translated from Farsi to English.

vidual and collective identity, becoming a site where difference is interlaced and negotiated through relational desire in shared making. Shirin-Jan adds,

> It is important that we [the encampments] are located near a stream. Water is important for good health. When there is access to water, we can work with peace of mind… And when it rains, we do not weave, so we are not bothered… we ask about each other's health, we talk about the water and the air [weather], and future plans.

She continues: "Handweaving is hard work. And it is very difficult to do this during migration when thinking about moving. But if it is necessary, of course we will do it." Shirin-Jan shows us how women approach craft with their embodied place-based knowledge. This knowledge is shaped by how they relate to and wonder about each other's health, the various scales of hydrological movements from rain to land to goat/human body to textile, and how they envision their futures. Being in relation to water offers a sense of sanctuary and the knowledge and speculative curiosity needed to adapt and reroute Bakhtiari sheltering to remain ethically open, even during environmental and political changes/disruptions. At its core, Bakhtiari sheltering is centred on women's interdependent desires and practices for a viable and transformative Bakhtiari life/future.

Bakhtiari weaving brings storytelling and craftwork into a co-constitutive pedagogical process for learning sustainable sheltering. Shirin-Jan shows that Bakhtiari women's collective making is also a space for storytelling, where individual narratives are woven into a shared material form. This co-making is sustained through attentiveness to water as a teacher, guiding collective practice in responsiveness to environmental and social change. Through shelter-making practices such as weaving, storytelling becomes a way of moving into relation with multiple stories and water-based lessons in ethical attunement that sustain collective sheltering. In this paper, I move between distinct Indigenous craft practices, attending to storytelling as it emerges through relations of reciprocal learning.

Métis artist-researcher Zoe Todd theorizes storytelling as a "reciprocal, relational" research method and ethic, guiding Métis/Indigenous scholarship in anthropology and cross-homeland work ("Métis Storytelling" 170). Building on this research ethic, I approach craftwork as reciprocal and relational spaces (much like water bodies) where stories coexist through their individual material and aesthetic forms, teaching specific sheltering practices while attending to the "broader political and historical realities and structural power imbalances" of British imperialism and empire across transnational contexts (170). I weave Bakhtiari and Métis craft stories to learn how they can reorient ab-be-ab, a bodily signal of disorientation, into a diasporic pedagogy for sheltering.

In Farsi, I think with the kinship vocabulary around *khooy* and *kheesh* (خوی/خویش) when thinking about how to sustain ethical relationality. Khooy signifies disposition/temperament/character, and kheesh signifies the self. This understanding of kinship is grounded in affinity and shared values. It means aligning the integrity of the self with human and more-than-human beings who share a disposition toward respecting interdependent, relational ways of being. Yet moving with (affecting and being affected by) kin is also a struggle, because affinity carries an ethical responsibility; it asks us to remain accountable to those relationships. Relationships adapt, strengthen, or diminish based on how responsibility is enacted. This ethical imperative of kinship, to remain accountable to the self and the relative (the other being in relation with us), determines the possibilities for sheltering to sustain collective wellbeing. To evoke sheltering as moving (adapting) with kin, both the preservation of tradition and creative adaptation to new conditions must coexist through a pedagogy of living responsibly within the political and ecological conditions of a place to re/learn and discern ethical relations. This is where an ab-be-ab pedagogy shaped by Indigenous crafts and stories can help sustain the ethical imperative of moving with kin through practices of relational and co-creative attunement when sheltering in Canada.

Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte describes "collective continuance" as a value developed from three concepts in Anishinaabe intellectual traditions: interdependent relationships, systems of responsibility, and migration, "a value that is similar to social resilience in its relationship to self-determination" (128). I draw on this framing to think about sheltering through craftwork as the collective continuance of movement, relationality, and responsibility. In this sense, craftwork, intertwined with stories and embodied kinship networks, offers material and pedagogical lessons for maintaining social resilience, through which relational structures are sustained, and collective forms of making and learning emerge amidst change and movement.

I also want to emphasize, following Whyte, that migration should not be understood as a means "to normalize one particular type of mobility, which would be morally problematic" (131). He explains:

> Migration suggests that relationships of interdependence and systems of responsibility are not grounded on stable or static relationships with the environment. Rather, these relationships arise from contexts of constant change and transformation. A key idea is that relationships that are constantly shifting do not sacrifice the possibility of continuity. (131)

In line with Whyte's thinking, moving with kin entails not only physical movement but also movement of knowledge and skills that teach us how to be and become through reciprocity and responsibility.

Craftwork embodies a movement of knowledge and skills, expressed through both functional items and artistic expression, and can teach us how to re/learn and discern ethical relations. I do not treat artwork and handicraft as mutually exclusive categories, nor do I collapse them into sameness. I focus on how each demonstrates distinct skills, techniques, and material knowledge, and how these orientations converge in textile-making. Bakhtiari weaving, for example, is at once technical and aesthetic. It is this convergence that enables sheltering to remain ethical while adapting to changing climates—what I call the art of sustainable shelter-making.

As a society that "lived and thrived at the intersection of mobility and fixedness" (Macdougall et al. 9), the Métis cultural landscape offers an orientation for thinking about sheltering as an ongoing practice of moving with kin. In dialogue with Bakhtiari nomads, known as *migration dwellers* (کوچ نشین), I compare the specificities of Bakhtiari and Métis shelter-making to ask how sustainable sheltering is enacted in practice: how everyday life is woven together with political, ethical, and poetic relations through craft, story, and kinship guided by water lessons. To answer this question, I turn to the Bakhtiari Salt Bag and the Métis Sash to examine how craftwork offers lessons for moving with kin through deliberate, consistent practices of relational attunement, shaping an ab-be-ab pedagogy.

3. Salt Bag and Métis Sash

Weaving is a central shelter-making tradition among Bakhtiari nomads, helping them create tents and other daily essentials while mapping their ecological and cultural landscapes. Textiles are not only designed to meet everyday needs, but the patterns/motifs are material manifestations of the "artistic taste and thought of the creative artist" (Yaghoubzadeh and Khazaie 44; my trans.) that shape/affect and are shaped/affected by their cultural and physical landscapes.

The creative artists are Bakhtiari women who are architects of their shelters. A "feminist architecture," as described by Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa,[3] is the "making [of] a new culture" (19) through an embodied and relational consciousness forged through contradiction, "and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking

3. Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa (1942-2004) was a queer Chicana poet and feminist theorist. Her work profoundly influenced Chicana/Chicanx and Latinx feminist thought, as well as women-of-colour feminism.

down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (51). Within a Bakhtiari context, weaving exemplifies Bakhtiari women's individual selves—memories, desires, pain, and refusals—that map the past/current traditions while remaining in creative/relational motion, interlacing them into a collective, non-binary Bakhtiari cultural futures. Bakhtiari tradition has been and remains women-led, and Bakhtiari women are respected as warriors, knowledge holders, and "the basis of nomadic life" (Abdullahi);[4] however, they are also affected by patriarchy and binary gendered roles, in part due to imperial and nation-state influences on tribal life. It is through Bakhtiari women's "continual creative motion" that a feminist architecture arises, open to the complexity of sheltering so that Bakhtiari people can move with kin ethically, with the integrity of the self. I ask myself, how can this feminist architecture shape my ab-be-ab pedagogy—how to navigate my bodily disorientation—to live consciously re-formed, to make carefully, fluidly, and sustainably between multiplicity and contradiction?

Grappling with this question, I turn to the Bakhtiari Salt Bag. Traditionally, the Salt Bag (see fig. 1) is used to store salt harvested from natural brines in the Zagros Mountains. These Bags are woven to store salt for a long period of time, minimizing the need for Bakhtiari women to travel frequently to salt sources, especially when the tribes are settled in temporary encampments without direct access to these sites. To learn about its practicality and sustainability, I conducted a microscopic analysis of a Salt Bag (gifted by a Bakhtiari family). With the help of my friend and textile archaeologist Maria Elena Bertoli, a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, I learned that the warp (vertical) and weft (horizontal) threads were spun in a clockwise (Z) direction and plied in a counter-clockwise (S) direction. This keeps the Salt Bag from unravelling and improves durability. We then counted the warp and weft threads to determine their densities. I acknowledge that not all Salt Bags will have similar thread counts, as they are each unique in how they are woven. However, the thread count helped me learn about the structural logic of the Bags. For example, we counted that the warp density is slightly looser compared to the weft (specifically, a difference of 3 threads per cm). Because of this, the fabric is flexible and can be folded as needed. The denser weft provides the structural integrity of the Salt Bag; the warp and weft work together to make the Bag both expandable and strong enough to contain fine-grained salt.

I also learned why goat hair is an important weaving material. Bakhtiari women use goat hair to weave their Salt Bags and most other handicrafts due to its sustainability and biodegradability. It is sustainable because it is abundant,

4. From my 2025 interview with Mehdi Abdullahi, a member of a Bakhtiari tribe in Iran. Translated from Farsi to English.

but also because it prevents items from getting wet. The coarse and porous material of the goat hair helps retain moisture, and since salt is hygroscopic (it absorbs water from the air), the microgaps in goat hair prevent water from reaching the salt, keeping it dry. These deliberate weaving techniques show us how Bakhtiari women use craft to engage in sustainable shelter-making. Their weaving embodies their consciousness of both their collective and personal needs. This ecological and needs-based consciousness enables them to mediate ecological changes, migration conditions, and their habitual labour into a "continual creative motion" (Anzaldúa 51) that recenters women's selfhood as an ethical disposition within Bakhtiari culture and collective continuance.

Fig. 1. Zahra Tootonsab. *Salt Bag*. 2024.

When imperial and heteropatriarchal state systems disrupt the sustainability of shelter-making practices, these practices can be appropriated into systems of ecological and political harm, as occurred when the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1911 purchased close to 7,000 acres of the Bakhtiari winter pastures and fields in Masjed Soleyman, Khuzestan (Khazeni 125). Bakhtiari nomads traditionally migrate to Khuzestan near the end of summer, so that their herds can graze throughout the winter on the region's green pastures. However, the arrival of the oil company transformed Masjed Soleyman into an extractive zone unsuitable/unsustainable for pastoralism. This transformation happened through social and geological uprootings. For example, the subsurface movements of salt and the tectonic stresses that produced "large 'whaleback'-shaped folds, known as anticlines," had trapped oil and gas for millions of years (Shafiee 4), creating the geological conditions that later enabled large-scale oil extraction. Salt, integral to Bakhtiari sheltering, had become implicated in the company's material architecture.

Bakhtiari women, however, use their weaving to encode alternative forms of spatial and ecological knowledge that disrupt imperial systems of mapping and territorial control. Ethnographic and historical accounts tell us that patterns on the Salt Bag (zigzagging lines, horizontal/vertical lines, and geometric borders) symbolize "arduous migration routes" (Sarikhani and Karimian 81; my trans.) and "river meanderings" (88; my trans.), which demonstrate both the physical difficulties and the spatial intelligence required for nomadic seasonal mobility that escapes the logic of imperial mapping and reference points. Many of the terrestrial and hydro routes remain unknown to outsiders who cannot read and locate them from the woven items, or even embark on these paths. The narrow roads across the Bakhtiari mountains and near the Karun River, for example, were once described by English archaeologist Austen Henry Layard as "scarcely practicable to the mountain goat" (qtd. in Khazeni 79). Bakhtiari nomads, however, know these paths *like the palms of their hands* (a phrase Iranians use to mean they know them very well), which hold/offer ecological, political, and creative significance. These paths preserve their independence from imperial and state infrastructures of control/invasion. When Bakhtiari women weave these patterns, they express their daily interaction with the land. These habitual practices turn into patterns that make and rework a relational collective consciousness into being.

While history tells us much about Bakhtiari Khans (their bravery but also greed), we know more about Bakhtiari women through their craft. As such, my learning through Bakhtiari woven crafts begins as a meeting with Bakhtiari women who have encoded their "struggle with nature" (Afrough 67; my trans.) into the very fabric of their woven items and thus become mentors of future ecological stewards, shapers of kinship and love. I carry these lessons into my own ab-be-ab condition: how to move with their desires and irritations as I

attempt to shelter ethically on Indigenous lands and with water, holding tradition and reinvention in deliberate tension.

Following water lessons imbued with plural consciousness and possibilities, as understood by my Maman and her Maman, and so on, wherever we go, we are within a watershed. If all land belongs to a watershed, then I, too, become part of this water collection area that cycles water from the skies, the mountains, the city, and my body back into a water body like the North Saskatchewan River. Near a bank of the North Saskatchewan River, an Indigenous water walker extends me a bowl for smudging, and before I begin, they nod and say *As-Salamu Alaykum*. I am at first surprised to hear this prayer for peace, safety, and wellbeing in my religious language, but then I acknowledge that we are in a mutual orientation with the water and each other, an orientation of peace and healthy minds and bodies, and so I smudge myself and return the covenant through the sacred smoke. What I learned on Indigenous territories now known as Treaty 6 is how I can reorient myself to abide by the "Indigenous laws of relationality" (Martin 233) through creative intervention (221) that also draws on my own ancestral traditions of moving with kin. It is here that ab-be-ab signals how I live within an out-of-place condition that can "attend to the nuanced relationships between Indigenous communities and people of color" (221). By reorienting myself to the North Saskatchewan River, I learned how the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the North West Company (NWC) used the River for resource development and colonial trade routes. More specifically, I learned about Métis communities as "distinct peoples with unique historical relations with European settler and Indigenous ancestors" (Toorenburgh and Reid 74) who continuously unsettled colonial borders through their mobility, kinship systems, and material practices.

During the Great Lakes fur trade, the families who would become the Red River Métis began migrating to the Red River Valley (in what is now Manitoba) between 1780 and 1810, engaging in seasonal mobility that sustained their economic and cultural life through trade and kinship ties with northeastern Plains tribes (Peterson 31). Water routes connected Red River to fur trade networks south and north of the forty-ninth parallel,[5] helping Métis traders move and circulate goods and knowledges (Barclay 71). However, Métis economic networks and mobility were increasingly constrained by HBC's consolidation of its fur trade monopoly in the region, particularly with the arrival of technologies such

5. The forty-ninth parallel refers to the line of latitude at 49° north that forms much of the present-day border between Canada and the United States. It became more actively surveyed and enforced in the 1870s, cutting through Métis homelands on the northern Plains and reshaping mobility, trade, and territorial governance.

as the steamboat in 1859 and through its exclusionary hiring practices (MacKinnon 203-04). After HBC sold Indigenous lands to the "Canadian government" in 1869-70 without Indigenous peoples' consent, which led to Treaty negotiations, Métis communities in the Red River Valley experienced intensifying processes of "displacement, dispossession, and migration" (Kermoal 115-16). Métis women played key roles in sustaining cultural identity and social life by "passing on their values in relation to the land" through their medical expertise, plant and foraging knowledge, hide tanning, beadwork, and other shelter-making practices (122). For example, "by choosing in some instances to bead plants and flowers that have curing powers," women were effectively "mapping the territory on leather or fabric as a way of affirming their Métis identity and their role in society" (129). In this way, Métis women actively reshaped and renewed cultural continuity, adapting "to an ever-changing environment, just as stories are constantly retold, and new interpretations layered onto older ones" (129).

The ceinture fléchée, or "arrow sash," exemplifies Métis women's innovation and adaptation within ongoing colonial encounters (see fig. 2). First Nations and Métis women used European materials such as wool and traditional finger-weaving techniques to create distinct styles, incorporating and adapting French textile patterns (Simard and Rousseau 12, 17; my trans.; Canadian Geographic). Métis women developed their own weaving patterns and styles according to their kinship group, and as Métis archaeologist Kisha Supernant explains, each thread colour and pattern in the Métis Sash represents "essential components to Métis ways of being" such as geography, mobility, kinship, economies, and daily life; the "five threads" woven together produce "a full, relational understanding of a Métis way of being" ("From Hybridity to Relationality" 362).

The Métis Sash became an economic symbol and political tool during the fur trade, and it also had multiple practical uses: supporting the back, securing coats, lashing a canoe to secure cargo, and functioning as a rope or sewing kit (Canadian Geographic). The Sash later symbolized Métis cultural and political identity, especially in connection with Louis Riel and the Métis resistance movements of the 19th century (Simard and Rousseau 15; my trans.). Today, the Sash is a national Métis symbol with a specific pattern worn by Métis community members during "gatherings and cultural events… to denote their connections to the past and present" (Supernant, "From Hybridity to Relationality" 363). Supernant describes the Sash as a metaphor, explaining that "[t]he power of the Sash as a metaphor" lies in the fact that "each thread cannot be understood on its own. It is only in their weaving that a cohesive and meaningful understanding of the whole can emerge" ("Reweaving Relations" 512). As such, weaving becomes a medium through which Métis women weave their personal experiences with the histories, stories, and lessons of their community. The Sash represents "the emergence of this new way of being in relation with lands,

waters, and human and other-than-human kin that makes the Métis a distinct people" ("From Hybridity to Relationality" 369). The Sash is thus not a metaphor of "mere semantic transaction," but rather a "binding character" (Martin 229) of ongoing Métis commitment and attention to "the places of the ancestors, the belongings left behind, and the lands and waters that hold these places and belongings today" (Supernant, "From Hybridity to Relationality" 368).

Bakhtiari women also adapted their craft in response to non-Indigenous influences, though through distinct historical contexts and contacts. For instance, I have seen some Salt Bags decorated with coins from the Pahlavi dynasty, and others with beads. These adaptations during the 1900s allowed Bakhtiari nomads to assert and practice their own sense of status and cultural identity in ways that contested imperial and state definitions. The Salt Bag and the Métis Sash reveal that a sustainable shelter-making practice, such as weaving, is shaped by divergent relationships with land and community. This diverse relationality necessitates a continual making and remaking of habits that ensure sheltering remains open to the belief in a transformative self in relation to collective cultural renewal.

Fig. 2. Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada (IPAC). *Traditional Métis Sash from the 19th century*. 2018, Canadian Geographic.

When living between a new home and a previous one, between longing and belonging, this disorientation to the contradictions of space can be co-opted by multicultural assimilation that leaves extractive/colonial structures intact. So, how can we ensure disorientation remains generative: not as a hybrid *in-between*, but as a field of distinct political and cultural identities and nations that continually re-form ways of moving with kin in resistance to colonial, imperial, and heteropatriarchal power? I now move from traditional fibre practices to contemporary artworks that mobilize weaving conceptually and materially, methodologically threading disparate aesthetic forms together to think transnational sheltering as relational practice and collective making. I read Métis artist Christi Belcourt's *Water Song* and Bakhtiari artist Amin Roshan's *My Father's Contract* as craft stories: works that activate weaving through patterning, intertwining, and breakage to produce ethical reorientations toward community and ecology.

4. *Water Song*

Christi Belcourt explains that Indigenous art traditions around the world reflect direct connections to lands, often expressed through the artwork itself ("About"). These art traditions include craft techniques, textile designs, and other forms of visual art. For Métis people specifically, the land is embedded in their beliefs and incorporated into their artwork, which informs how they are meant to live in relationship with land ("About"). Belcourt reminds us that Métis people have historically been known as "The Flower Beadwork People" ("About"). As she learned more about plants and Métis beadwork, Belcourt developed a painting technique that translates beadwork into painted form. She does this by "dipping the end of a paintbrush or knitting needle into paint and pressing it onto the canvas" to create floral patterns in dots ("Artist Statement"). For Belcourt, beadwork design is not simply recreated ("About"). Artwork becomes a process of translation in which craft knowledge is conveyed through the visual art, transferring floral knowledge about caring for the land and water, and the respect that must be shown toward the earth and all beings ("About"). Belcourt's painting engages with the political and ethical foundations of Métis craftwork, the "five threads" of geography, mobility, kinship, economies, and daily life that are woven within the Métis Sash (Supernant, "From Hybridity to Relationality" 362).

This adaptation of Métis beadwork techniques into a visual art form offers another way to transmit traditional Métis knowledge systems, particularly in contemporary times. Elder and healer Rose Richardson explains, "Years ago many of our ancestors were not able to write. As a result, stories and knowledge

were beaded or embroidered into clothing and on items of everyday use. As they drew the design they told the story of the plant…" (8). This cyclical relationship of learning from plants and transferring plant knowledge through storytelling and craftwork exemplifies Métis ways of making and remaking the Métis Homeland. Belcourt's artworks illustrate this cyclical relationship through her embodied and creative learning (from the plants and her paintings) and as a collective movement outside the body, in relation to a multiplicity of bodies and changing environments (how the paintings affect us as viewers within our specific environmental conditions). It is a sheltering with kin beyond the boundaries of space, time, and predetermined relationships, as long as we are accountable to Métis ways of making and remaking sustainably with land and beings.

Belcourt also portrays her beaded paintings as electricity. She states that the dots suggest the circle of life, but also "represent the sheer expanse and mystery of life from molecules to universes" (*Medicines* xii). Belcourt explains that the stand-alone dots "represent the universe" and the "circles" of "copper-coloured" dots represent "the spirit world" ("Métis Artist" 08:09-31). She emphasizes that "each plant has a spirit and there's also spirits that are always around us and always helping us" (08:35-45). The dotted/beaded patterns embody the kinetic force of the universe and the spirit world. Belcourt's weaving of the material and spiritual worlds energizes the vitality of Métis cultural consciousness, of respecting what is both known and the "mystery of life" that is unknown (*Medicines* xii).

In the 2010-2011 painting titled *Water Song* (see fig. 3), Belcourt reenergizes Métis culture through the fluidity and generative power of water as a kinetic force within Métis collective consciousness. The creative process involves dotting beautiful, vibrant colours upon a black background. The black background symbolizes the "black velvet used historically by Métis beadworkers" (*Medicines* xii), grounding the painting in material and cultural memory. The black background is akin to the "five threads" of geography, mobility, kinship, economies, and daily life that are woven into a Métis Sash. Each of these threads carries the political and ethical tensions of Métis life. The dotted floral motifs on the background represent Indigenous plants found throughout the Métis Homeland (xii). Métis curator and writer Tarah Hogue describes Belcourt's painting as not a medium "to elevate the natural world to the status of art, but rather to signal the connection to the natural world as itself transformative." The aesthetics of beadwork offer "histories, stories and lessons" from the land on how "to learn to be a good relation" (Supernant, "Reweaving Relations" 512-13). The painted beadwork, like weft (horizontal) threads, reconfigures the ethical and political tensions of Métis life and reenergizes a fluid and collective way of living in tune with the rhythms of a nourishing relationality (like a water song).

Fig. 3. Christi Belcourt, *Water Song*, 2010-2011, courtesy of the artist.

In *Water Song*, the left and right sides mirror each other, evoking the "symmetry, balance, and harmony" found in Métis beadwork (Belcourt, "Artist Statement"). The symmetry also activates the kinetic force of water that shapes Métis geography, mobility, kinship, economies, and daily life (the "five threads"), providing the rhythms for collective balance and harmony. When we look closely, we see hundreds of vibrant dots that make up the symmetry of the painting as a whole. Water brings us into a collective and open relation with the painting. At the same time, Belcourt's beadwork attunes us to the labour of being in relation, the individual dots that are a bit disorganized, a bit different from the others. The painted dots depict the labour of beadwork, which requires a continuous rhythm of contact and release, and by discerning the dots, we also discern how to readjust through this labour and how to relate to each plant, animal, and cosmic energy. We experience then a tactile pacing that reattunes us to both the symmetry of water and the minute tendencies that sustain Métis relational ethics. In this sense, craftwork becomes pedagogy. When I look closely at the dotted rhythms, I learn stories of ethical attentiveness, relationality, and respect, shaping Métis traditions and continuity.

At the centre of the painting, we see red maple leaves. A maple leaf is a familiar Canadian national emblem that catches our attention as viewers who may be unfamiliar with other beings in the painting. However, instead of collapsing kinetic energy into this one symbol, when kinship becomes simply a metaphor for "mere semantic transaction" (Martin 229), we are invited to know land through how the maple "draw[s] out relationships" (229) into conditions for moving with kin. The viewer is drawn into a contact zone where looking itself becomes a political and ecological act. To understand the maple—or any being in the painting—the viewer must move slowly, look closely at the patterns,

and ask: What is being offered here? How are these beings woven together? As Belcourt explains in *Medicines to Help Us*, the maple is more than an emblem; it is a medicinal being whose properties can soothe nerves, strengthen the liver, and whose sap, rich with nutrients/vitamins (34), flows in early spring as the tree awakens. This knowledge comes from Métis land-based practices, which understand how water cycles through the environment, within trees and bodies. "Before the introduction of salt," Belcourt states, "many foods were traditionally flavored with maple syrup," embedding maple syrup within seasonal practices of "collection and preparation" (33). Thus, the maple in *Water Song* connects us to the temporal significance of watery ecologies of the Métis Homeland, where the kinetic force of water continually reenergizes "the yearly cycle" of "collection and preparation" (33), supporting a sustainable Métis cultural landscape.

Belcourt's adaptation of Métis beadwork into painting sustains and reenergizes Métis ways of knowing. The strawberry, for example, represents the Métis people's economic adaptations. As the fur trade declined in the nineteenth-century due to factors such as over-trapping of buffalo and the expansion of settler colonial settlement, Métis knowledge of plants and roots, particularly their gathering and trading, became "one example of the continuity of the Metis history and culture" (MacKinnon 198). Strawberries appear beaded near the bottom of *Water Song*, scattered on the left and mirrored on the right. As "the most widely known fruit in Canada" (Belcourt, *Medicines* 53), the strawberry's recognizable form draws viewers into a shared ecological understanding of strawberries as sustenance. Yet Belcourt's craft does not gesture only toward familiarity; it is a pedagogy of ethical relationality. As a non-Métis viewer, I use my ab-be-ab as my own weaving aesthetic, a disorientation that I weave in and out of Belcourt's beadwork. My discomfort ensures that I do not treat the strawberries and the maple leaf as national emblems to settle into a Canadian identity. Instead, I weave a pedagogy that challenges me to move ethically with the beings I encounter. This process requires me to form kinship by respecting the incommensurability of knowing as an Iranian, while also being accountable for my movement and creation within the Métis cultural landscape. The ab-be-ab condition becomes both a disruptive and generative force in learning how to engage with identity as a process of ongoing relational transformation.

5. *My Father's Contract*

Amin Roshan's *My Father's Contract* (see fig. 4) depicts a deeply personal yet historically entangled site of memory: the national oil company employment contract belonging to his father, dated 28 December 1968 (Janet Rady

Fine Art). The contract becomes the conceptual ground and material support of the screen print, literally layered with crude oil and Bakhtiari photographs. As Roshan recounts, he was born in Masjed Soleyman, the site of the first oil well in the Middle East, a city both transformed and toxified by the "discovery" of oil in 1908 (Janet Rady Fine Art). Roshan's family, his grandfather, father, and brother, worked for the company, and they were eventually displaced due to toxic gas releases, a contraction of life possibilities under petro-colonial capitalism.

Fig. 4. Amin Roshan, painter, *My Father's Contract,* 2013, courtesy of the artist.

Roshan's artistic technique begins with collecting crude oil from a valley in Masjed Soleyman, where oil continues to seep from the ground more than a century after the first drills (Janet Rady Fine Art). He then prints this oil onto paper using silkscreen printing, creating a visceral, material connection to the tangled history of the Anglo-Persian pipeline and the Bakhtiari people. The crude oil, used both as medium and contaminant, stains the surface of the paper and visually replicates the environmental degradation, bodily toxicity, and the disruptions to the Bakhtiari nomadic lifeways that accompanied

the industrialization of their land. Yet Roshan's work does not center Bakhtiari defeat. His silkscreen technique transfers the logic of Bakhtiari weaving into an art form: each printed layer acts like a weft thread, knotting together personal memories (i.e., "childhood games with tar, walking over oil pipelines in the way of school"), familial photographs, and crude oil into a textured cultural landscape (Janet Rady Fine Art). We move, then, from goat hair as the material agent of sustainable Bakhtiari sheltering to oil as an adapted material for contemporary shelter-making.

While Belcourt's painting reminds us of the kinetic force of water, Roshan's screen print—the viscous oil marks—evokes the absence of healthy water; we are reminded of ecological destruction. The work invites us to consider the byproducts of petroleum extraction, such as water mixing with crude oil and circulating through surrounding watersheds. Roshan collects this crude oil and reclaims its deep-time properties by printing it onto his father's contract. Both of these materials, the crude oil and the paper contract, become part of a process of attending to past histories to remain accountable to a generative and transformative Bakhtiari culture.

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) transformed Bakhtiari lands from a place hosting Bakhtiari Black Tents and flocks to a mined oil land of "derricks and pipelines" (Khazeni 112). Bakhtiari tribes, including Roshan's ancestors, were forcibly contracted into the APOC system through waged labour (112), coerced agreements (123), displacement (125) and contamination (129). For Britain, however, the exploration of oil was justified as "an imperial project that would discipline the tribes and induce them to end their pastoral nomadic way of life" (114).[6] In addition to dispossessing and unsettling Bakhtiari nomads, the 1905 Bakhtiari Agreement between the ruling Khans and the D'Arcy Oil Syndicate also "fractured tribal solidarity" (Khazeni 122-23). Roshan's artistic techniques offer another point of entry into understanding how kinship obligations might wane. By printing images of family onto his father's contract using crude oil, Roshan helps us reflect on how honouring and critically engaging with our kinship ties also requires confronting the material realities of colonial-capitalist systems that continue to shape how we relate to others and labour. This artistic practice follows the weaving tradition of Bakhtiari women. Through the weaving of individual and collective stories onto a conflicting medium, Roshan invokes the ethical disposition of Bakhtiari women, recreating a perpetually fluid collectivity. It is through this ethical disposition of kinship that the artwork resists linear, resolved histories, creating instead an unsettled field of

6. Donald A. Smith's involvement in both HBC as a prominent HBC officer and later as chairman of APOC illustrates the far-reaching tentacles of empire across continents.

remembrance that openly accepts the nuances and tensions of kinship and love for community.

In *My Father's Contract*, Roshan offers a counter-story/memory to resist and refuse absorption into extractive logics. For example, we see the Persian employment contract centred, with its English translation on the left. Yet on the right, there are Farsi words left untranslated into English. From what I can discern, the Farsi text outlines specific work conditions, for example, that maintenance, electricity, and facilities provided by the company would be deducted from workers' wages (my trans.). It also stipulates that if a worker is absent for 21 days without justification, they would be fired on the 22nd day (my trans.). I learned that despite these working conditions and enforcements, Bakhtiari men "still sought to tend to their seasonal obligations" (Khazeni 127). Bakhtiari men showed resistance in various forms, such as workers continuing to drink river water and "forgoing the new facilities for obtaining drinking water" (127). Another example is expelled tribes "interfering with the company's work during winter seasons" (153). Why, then, display these terms only in Farsi? Roshan shows us that craft/art and language are a joined shelter-making practice; the aesthetics of language can create a liminal space where the ethics of sheltering remain open. This liminal space can only be fully entered and embodied by those already rooted, linguistically and culturally, in the distinct movements of kin.

6. More Lessons

I continue to shelter out of place, both as someone displaced from my ancestral lands and as someone sheltering within Indigenous lands. I follow the water lessons of Belcourt's art. I follow the water lessons of Roshan's art. Water in one teaches me the ethics of flow, reciprocity, and mutual shaping; in another, water teaches me the ethics of critically engaging with ancestral history and relations. Both teach me how to transform disorientation into a pedagogy for reorientation. To shelter out of place is to insist on staying with the affective labour of ethical reorientations to histories, lands, and relations rendered precarious by imperial/colonial infrastructures.

I believe that our disorientation in the diaspora should be held open as an ethical adaptation. How do we, as Iranians, adapt again and again so that we remain perpetually committed to collective liberation? What does freedom look like when displaced and living on stolen lands? These are some of the questions shaping our bodily discomfort and disorientation. I reorient myself to place by learning from Indigenous craft practices and how they inspire affective-feminist forms of sheltering. My understanding of sheltering is not a singular "aha" ontological moment (Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take" 8);

it is a continuous, habitual form of learning: a praxis shaped by Bakhtiari teachings on sheltering that informs my ab-be-ab pedagogy for living out of place (physically outside of homeland and a praxis outside the logics of the settler territorial regime).

One example of this practice occurred during the Palestinian solidarity encampment at McMaster University in May 2024, where I participated in a tatreez (Palestinian embroidery) workshop. During this workshop, I learned stitching techniques along with the histories and stories embedded in Palestinian craft. I recognized resonances between Bakhtiari weaving and Palestinian tatreez; they are both practiced by women who interweave stories of kin, culture, and resistance onto fabric. As Amita Khurana, a Palestinian-Indian tatreez artist, explains, the practice of tatreez indicates Palestinian women's "refusal to occupation and erasure," preserving Palestinian memory, identity, and history (17).[7] Women weavers pass down "embroidery skills and tips from generation to generation" and "transmit stories of their lives in Palestine pre- and post-1948" (17). Participating in this workshop and encampment reinforced for me that craft can teach ethical practices of sheltering grounded in feminist principles. Both weaving and tatreez forge connections between homeland and homemaking in diaspora, where women's biographies teach us how to adapt in the present. Craft becomes part of an embodied pedagogy for building decolonial solidarity on Indigenous lands, from one watershed to another.

Water takes me back and forth… through cycles… ab-be-ab… sometimes in grief and sometimes in rage. And then I remember Ohrón:wakon, the Place in the Ravine/Ditch, so-called Hamilton. Below the mountain, I think, and am moved by the running water that cut a ravine into this landscape. I think and am moved to find water again and again, meandering in this deep cut.

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7. Refer to Amita Khurana's article to learn more about Palestinian tatreez and to see pictures of Palestinian dresses and embroidery patterns/motifs.

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