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*This book is dedicated to all the social justice and Earth justice warriors who continue to stand in defence of our sovereignty, our lands and our peoples all over Turtle Island. We would not be here today — engaged in acts of Native resurgence and cultural revitalization — had our ancestors not been steadfast in their resistance.*

*Our ancestors resisted the colonizer's assimilation, oppression, domination and genocide of our peoples, as well as the theft and destruction of our lands and waters, and our relations, the plants, animals, birds, fish and insects. We owe them our very lives.*

*Today, new generations of Native warriors continue the work of our ancestors to resist racialized and sexualized violence, forced poverty and marginalization and the continued invasion and destruction of our territories. Their strength, determination and commitment to our sovereignty is passed on to a new generation who continue the resistance while also standing in defence of the human rights of all peoples and the protection of our planet for all living things.*

*Our only hope of saving this planet rests on the strength, determination, resilience and sacrifices of our Native warriors. They deserve all of our support.*

*Wela'in. Miigwetch. Ekosi. Woliwon.*

*Nia:wen. Thank you. Merci.*

# FOREWORD

By Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair

In Anishinaabemowin, the word we use for warrior is *ogichidaa*.

A warrior in our nation is not what the term means in English, though. In Western culture, a warrior is usually characterized as some soldier embedded in combat in some distant place. Coming to mind immediately are hyper-masculine images celebrated in movies, professional wrestling and sports. The term warrior is an embodiment of conflict based in the root word, “war.” Absent of violence, a warrior in English seems to have no purpose.

An *ogichidaa* is different. The word breaks down into three stems: *ogi* (“esteemed”), *gichi* (“large”) and *ode* (“heart”). Brought back together, the term *ogichidaa* means a person held in high esteem due to their “large heart.” This kind of warrior is not one defined by violence but by love.

An *ogichidaa* is someone who dedicates their entire life to building, sustaining and protecting community. This is someone who picks medicine, takes care of everyone and is a model for ethics and leadership at all times. An *ogichidaa* stands up for those who need help and need to be heard — and particularly for those who cannot stand up for themselves. This involves a sacrifice of personal comfort (and often safety) alongside a refusal to tolerate suffering and oppression. Far more importantly, this represents a duty to see the potential in all things at the same time.

An *ogichidaa* is literally the embodiment of responsibility, showing up whenever a community calls upon them but also serving when no one is watching. This means an *ogichidaa* gifts everyone around them everything they have; becoming the humblest in the physical or literal sense but the richest of all when it comes to living a life of value. This is why an *ogichidaa* is often a grandparent, a parent or a child — even more often than a middle-aged person — for these are the people who live to promote life, dedicating themselves to forging and maintaining peace above all else.

An *ogichidaa* is a person revered for the love they distribute willingly and without question through kindness, tenacity and dedication.

To be clear, I'm not talking about the kind of love one sees in Hollywood romances but Indigenous-centred, decolonial and land-based love. A love of responsibility. Once again returning to our language, the word in Anishinaabemowin for love is *zaagidiwin*, which literally means to open or expand. It emerges from the stem *zaagi-*, found in words like *zaagibagaa* ("when leaves start to bud") or *zaagidawaa* ("when water flows into a lake"). Love, for us, is therefore not something that magically happens or is chosen but is something performed and earned that expands and grows the world around us. Everything an *ogichidaa* does is encapsulated through *zaagidiwin*.

An Anishinaabe *ogichidaa*, therefore, is not a title someone chooses; it's a role a person earns. Being named an *ogichidaa* means a person has earned a community's respect through their *bagijiganan* (gifts), and their time, sacrifice and thought are being acknowledged.

This is why Pam Palmater is an *ogichidaa*.

Pam is a warrior in every possible Indigenous sense, fighting for the rights and dignity of our people and our nations. I could list her decades of activism, her multiple university degrees and books, her dozens of awards or the hundreds of television and radio programs where she demonstrates this, but I'll leave you to see this in the collection she has published here.

Instead, I offer you this story.

In late 2012, Idle No More was sparking a revolution amongst Indigenous young people. I was one of them. In those days, I had more anger than language for it. I knew about colonialism, the Indian Act and residential schools, of course, but I lacked the ability to fully articulate positive change and innovative solutions for our communities. A revolution for me occurred when I heard Pam Palmater's voice. I marvelled at her knowledge and breadth of reading and research, her articulate and well-crafted ideas and how she never gave up an opportunity to teach, advocate and learn in whatever forum she entered — whether it be at the Assembly of First Nations, in media or at marches in the streets.

When I eventually met Pam, she immediately saw the potential in me and helped me hone my skills and abilities. She was always generous with her time — even when running for AFN National Chief — and I have seen her do similar things with thousands of Elders, children and people across Indigenous Nations everywhere. Throughout the years, Pam has

willingly and without question offered me mentorship, guidance and a willing phone call whenever I needed to work out a complicated situation. We have since appeared many times on talk shows and radio news panels together. I am constantly in awe of how fierce, brilliant, and visionary she is and continues to be. I have also marched with her and have seen her commitment to putting her life on the line for Indigenous futures. In all she does, Pam is someone dedicated to advocacy and public education while demanding nothing but vigorous solutions to complex problems facing Indigenous communities.

This is the epitome of what an *ogichidaa* is all about. Pam Palmater is a warrior by gifting her love to others so that they may grow, expand and become everything they can be. She is a one-of-a-kind voice in a generation. We are lucky to have someone so dedicated to mutuality and reciprocity in our communities, and someone embedded in thinking about the future. Her voice, found in these pages, will carry far beyond our lives and into our children's.

Enjoy *Warrior Life* and follow these words to lead, enact change and create the future. Listen, learn and become like an *ogichidaa* too.

Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair  
September 2020



## INTRODUCTION

# NEW GOVERNORS, SAME COLONIALISM

There has been a changing of the guard in Canada's colonizing governors — from Conservative to Liberal — but they still preside over a racist, patriarchal country that remains fully engaged in the violent colonization of Indigenous lands and bodies. Ongoing racism and violence by the state and its agencies is the direct root cause for all of the suffering in so many of our families, communities and Nations. The extent of the damage that has been and continues to be done by Canada's colonizing governors and their corporate beneficiaries has led to a massive loss of life since contact. There is no doubt that Canada — pre- and post-Confederation — has engaged in a manifest pattern of conduct that reflects an intention to destroy Indigenous Peoples spiritually, culturally and physically. There is only one word that could possibly hope to encapsulate the centuries-long, targeted campaign of violence, dispossession and oppression of Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island: genocide.

State perpetrators of genocide never admit their own crimes and they fight vehemently against claims of genocide. For many states, it is easy to deflect their own genocidal behaviour by pointing to human rights violations in other countries and then assume the holier-than-thou position of calling on those “other” countries to end the abuses. The vast majority of countries around the world, including Canada, have ratified the United Nations' 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Yet, Canada, like other state signatories with significant Indigenous populations, have long engaged in grave human rights abuses that should be acknowledged and punished as crimes of genocide. Indigenous Nations all over Turtle Island have long called out the violent colonization of Indigenous lands and bodies

as genocide, despite the many decades of wilful blindness and denial by the governments and many other Canadians.

Even when the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) released their final report concluding that Canada had, as a matter of fact and law, committed both historic and ongoing genocide, the outrage in media commentators was immediately evident. Canadians have been conditioned to look outside of Canada's borders for evil. Evil always exists in some other country, committed by some other people, led by a villainous leader. Within our borders, the very same heinous crimes are downplayed as an inevitable clash of cultures or good policy intentions gone wrong. Sometimes Indigenous Peoples themselves are blamed for their own conditions. The reality is that Canada's laws, policies and practices are not broken. They have done exactly what they intended to do: remove the Indian problem from the resource-rich lands in our borders. The resulting abuse, exploitation, trauma and death does not lay at our feet — this is unequivocally on Canada.

The all too frequent response to these facts is that Indigenous Peoples just need to get over it. Many still rely on the false notion that all of these problems are in the past and, at some point, everyone needs to move on. That wouldn't be an appropriate response even if all of the genocidal acts were in the past. The problem is that Canada's genocide against Indigenous Peoples is ongoing and we continue to suffer the same forms of racism and violence under similar policies with different names. The National Inquiry confirmed this as a legal fact:

Canada has displayed a continuous policy with shifting expressed motives but an ultimately steady intention, to destroy Indigenous peoples physically, biologically and as social units.

We are not talking about a history of genocide. We are talking about the biggest human rights crisis facing Canada today — right now. This insight into genocide as ongoing crimes and human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples is critical to empowering Canadians to see through the false narrative created by politicians. The problem isn't Liberal or Conservative and the sooner we understand that, the better prepared we will be to hold Canada to account.

It is all too easy to rely on the well-rehearsed and seemingly heartfelt sentiments of politicians, assuring us that things have changed in Canada. This purposeful and very strategic political misdirection helps to fuel in

Canadians a sense of collective relief that the suffering is over and we can all move on. This is what prevents governments at all levels from being held to account for both historic and ongoing crimes. But worst of all, this is what allows the genocide to continue unabated. Putting our faith in political promises is both misdirected and irresponsible.

If we compare political parties on the surface, then yes, the transition from Conservative to Liberal federal governments was a welcome relief. There has been a significant change in rhetoric from the former Conservative government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper to the current Liberal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The previous government was often anti-First Nation in its sentiments, directly or indirectly implied that First Nations were to blame for their conditions and even called First Nations leaders threats to national security. That form of blatant racism helps to incite hatred in society against Indigenous Peoples. This decade-long war against First Nations took many casualties, but also inspired the Idle No More movement and our renewed resistance to state-based violence and oppression.

This was the theme of my last book, *Indigenous Nationhood: Empowering Grassroots Citizens*. That book was based on my *Indigenous Nationhood* blog, where I started to voice my concerns about what was happening at the social, political and legal levels of Crown–First Nation relations. When I started the blog, very few Indigenous people were ever interviewed in the mainstream media about issues impacting us, unless there was a crisis. Even then, the usual go-to guests were the heads of Aboriginal organizations. The voices of our powerful matriarchs, our Elders and our grassroots citizens had few avenues for Canadians to hear their concerns. The assumption had always been that national Aboriginal organizations like the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) spoke for us. But, they didn't. The other issue that had been developing for some time was the problematic relationship between the AFN and government, which became so close that the AFN served more to prop up the government of the day rather than to be our advocates.

The increasing use of social media as a means to connect with one another also became a very effective tool for us to not only exercise our voices but share important information about issues. It also allowed us to circumvent the mainstream media's exclusive club and speak to one another about our concerns and send strong messages to political leaders that our voices counted. The use of social media to question decisions

being made by leaders without our input was key to challenging decisions being made about our rights without our knowledge or consent. That included both Canadian and Indigenous leaders. No, this was not online lateral violence. This was about putting the government back in the hands of the true governors — the people. Our voices are powerful.

Through my blog posts, I was able to express my concerns about ongoing injustices towards our peoples, help educate Canadians about the legal obligations of their governments and advocate for real justice — social justice and Earth justice. This sometimes required breaking the golden rule about appearing to be united. There is real strength and power in Indigenous Peoples being united to resist colonial forces, but when some Indigenous leaders are co-opted by those same colonial forces, that's when we need to break unity. We are all colonized peoples and decolonization is a long, complicated process. We have to be able to see when some of our leaders are working against our interests to serve their own interests and challenge their decisions if they will or do cause harm to our peoples. Sometimes that means calling out bad behaviour or bad decisions, even if it might “look bad” for our unity. It also means wrapping our arms around those who do speak out and helping to insulate them from the blowback that comes from those well entrenched in the status quo.

Here is the thing about the status quo — it is literally killing our people. Racism, which is so often portrayed as name-calling and stereotypes, goes far beyond insult or offence. Racism and hatred go hand-in-hand and lead to the premature deaths of our people in many ways, from the purposeful, chronic underfunding of essential programs and services to the failure to provide adequate health care to Indigenous Peoples. The result is that Indigenous Peoples have the worst socioeconomic conditions of any group in Canada. The roots of these crises are racism and hatred, which are the very foundations of genocide in Canada and implicate all levels of government, their agencies and even some segments of society. We literally have the data to back up the fact that racism kills Indigenous Peoples:

- Police shoot and kill more Indigenous people than any other group;
- Indigenous Peoples are over-incarcerated at increasing levels;
- First Nations children are over-represented in foster care at increasing levels;
- First Nations and Inuit communities have the highest suicide rates in Canada;

- Indigenous Peoples have the highest poverty rates in Canada;
- Indigenous Peoples are the number-one targets of white hate groups;
- Indigenous Peoples have very low levels of education, employment and income; and
- Indigenous Peoples have unacceptably high levels of food insecurity and less access to clean water.

For Indigenous women and girls, there is also a very gendered aspect to ongoing genocide:

- They face crisis-level rates of physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, disappearances and murders;
- They are subjected to forced and coerced sterilizations and abortions;
- The theft of children into foster care creates higher rates of depression and suicide in mothers;
- They experience sexualized violence from police and corrections officers;
- They are the number-one targets of human traffickers and serial killers;
- They have the fastest growing incarceration rates in the country; and
- They are denied compensation for historic and ongoing exclusion from treaty rights, band membership and Indian status due to state-enforced sex and race-based discrimination in the Indian Act and associated policies.

All of these critical issues are piled on Indigenous families, communities and nations, causing multiple, overlapping crises. These crises are difficult to address for individuals without addressing the larger root causes of racism in Canada's laws, policies and practices and their actions and omissions. Each one of these crises represent breaches of Indigenous laws, treaty rights, Aboriginal rights, Canadian laws and international human rights laws. At this point, it should become very clear that Canada is an outlaw in every sense of the word. It has thrown out their much beloved "rule of law" to achieve its own capitalist profit agenda.

*Warrior Life* covers all of these issues, exposing the contradiction between Trudeau's so-called reconciliation agenda and his failure to

address ongoing genocide. While Trudeau convinced many Canadians of his commitment to renewing the relationship with Indigenous Peoples based on nation-to-nation relations that respect Indigenous rights, his government has done anything but that. His nation-to-nation relationship has skipped over the actual rights-holders and sovereign Indigenous Nations. He has instead chosen to maintain the status quo, often with the support of many national Aboriginal organizations. At every opportunity he had to show Canada respect for Indigenous rights, he dashed those hopes with grave violations of our rights. From buying a pipeline to try to defeat Indigenous land rights to failing to address the public safety crisis of sexualized violence against Indigenous women and girls, reconciliation has turned out to be a lie.

To make matters worse, climate change is like a massive tidal wave getting closer and closer to our shores. We are only at the catastrophic point in Earth's history because of the dispossession and oppression of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples have long been the guardians of Mother Earth and wounding them wounds the Earth. Ecocide and genocide go hand-in-hand, each making the other worse. In other words, the health of Indigenous Peoples is reflected in the health of the Earth and vice versa. Any chance we have to protect the planet absolutely requires that we end the genocide of Indigenous Peoples.

The story of our resistance at the grassroots level continues — from the ten-year war under Harper that resulted in #IdleNoMore, to the fight to protect our sovereignty, lands and peoples under Trudeau that resulted in #WetsuwetenStrong. We continue to challenge the lie of reconciliation to secure our hope for the future on our continued resistance. Creating solidarity will move us forward together to force a radical change for social justice and Earth justice. We must end the genocide of Indigenous Peoples and the planet and not allow those in power to preserve the status quo, which ensures no future for any of us.