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For More Information

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New documentary, *The Country*, gives voice to Newfoundland Mi'kmaq

On June 24, 2018, the documentary channel (CBC) is premiering feature documentary film, *The Country*, as part of its programming celebrating National Indigenous History Month.

Filmed entirely in Western Newfoundland between October 2016 and July 2017, *The Country* shares the voices of a handful of compelling Newfoundland Mi'kmaq who champion an inspiring story of recognition and a remarkable community of people reviving their nation. A backdrop to their stories is the terribly flawed federal enrolment process, designed to grant status under the Indian Act after nearly half a century of change-seeking by Mi'kmaq communities since being "penciled out" of the Terms of Union in 1949.

The film explores issues around identity, colonialism, divide-and-conquer, culture, and the land, all told through the voices of the multiple protagonists discussing what it means to be Mi'kmaq, while also navigating through the frustrating enrolment process. A key moment in the film is the opening of the letters that were sent out in January 2017.

Kelly Anne Butler, a Mi'kmaq woman and one of the film's producers, sees the film as a way to share very human stories that have been obscured by mainstream national coverage of the troubling and protracted enrolment process. That coverage has put Newfoundland Mi'kmaq in an awkward position with both settler society and Indigenous groups across Canada, especially around questions of legitimacy. Butler states, "For me, the act of working on this film together, for all of us, is an example of reconciliation in action. And people across Canada can participate in that simply by taking the time to watch this film and listen to our voices."

On the more than 100,000 applications submitted for membership, one of the film's voices, Scott Butt, states, "There's probably ninety percent that are having a resurgence or a reawakening. My only comment is, don't forget the rest of us, right? Because I'm not having a resurgence. I'm not having an awakening to culture, because I was raised with it. So, there is no awakening for me."

On the early years of the movement, from Calvin White: "Recognition was about legitimacy. We were fighting for recognition. In what form is that recognition going to come? We learned very early that there was only one form of recognition, and that was status under the Indian Act."

On the process, from Linda Wells: "The whole process was bad, right from the beginning. And telling people across Canada, and helping them to understand, that the people here are not devoid of culture."

On the landscape, from Calvin White: "Everything I like about life is here. When you're on the land, it's the closest time that you are to the Creator. We call this the country."

The Country is a complex portrait of a resilient people in search of their own truth, legitimacy, and reconciliation. Directed by award winning filmmaker Phyllis Ellis and lensed by Iris Ng. Produced by Kelly Anne Butler, Phyllis Ellis, and David Maggs.

CBC documentary channel, Newfoundland Time:

Sunday, June 24, 2018, 10:30pm Monday, June 25, 2018, 2:30am Sunday, July 1, 2018, 2:30pm