Unsettling Inner Landscapes:
Critical Spirituality and The Poverty of Whiteness

Storying the journey to decolonizing a settler sense of identity and belonging

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ABSTRACT

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Recent climate scientists, Indigenous resurgence scholars, and psychologists have variously indicated that we need a transformation of consciousness in order to address the cultural and spiritual forces at the root of our current environmental, interpersonal, and individual crises of disconnection. My research is in direct response to diverse calls for this paradigm shift, including the words of Elders such as the late Grandfather William Commanda who encouraged settlers such as myself to 'remember our original instructions'. Through an anti-colonial and trauma-informed lens, my goal has been to strategically inform my roles and responsibilities in healing the disconnection and abuses in what I term the trilogy of my relationships to self, others, and Land. This study is both a critical auto-ethnography and as well as a theoretical engagement with Indigenous resurgence, settler colonialism, and sustainability discourses. I share dialogues with Anishinaabe-kweg in my community with whom I have established relationships and the results of our discussions focus on holistic models of transforming settler consciousness. What emerges is an emotional, uncertain, and yet radically hopeful narrative that points to the urgency of centering Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous relationship models while endeavouring to reconstruct a sense of identity and belonging along more accountable lines. Recovering a sense of my Celtic epistemology and story work is offered as a strategic exemplar of how settlers might begin to remember and co-create more balanced, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with and within place. Nurturing an embodied spiritual practice of deep listening, critical self-reflection, and collective action is discussed as potentially central to sustaining a decolonizing praxis for white settler Canadians more broadly.

Key Words

Transforming Settler Consciousness; Decolonization; Indigenous Sovereignty; Sustainability; Original Instructions; Critical Spirituality; Celtic Worldviews

May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world to gather you, mind you, and embrace you in belonging, (*John O'Donohue)*

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the continuation of all Life, and to healing in our relationships with our selves, with each other, and with the Land and Waters that sustain us all. To all those whose dreams, art, work, prayers, and ways of being seek to nurture Life and to be of service to this healing between, among, and within us; may our work of remembering awaken others. This work is for our ancestors, for each of us, and for the generations to come.

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To the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies, the Indigenous Environmental Science/Studies program, and Sustainability Studies department, its students, faculty, and staff, I extend my acknowledgement and heartfelt thanks. The insights, learning, and personal growth offered to me through my time with you have broadened my perspectives on what is possible when we bring our minds together in peace, respect, and friendship. Thank you for the opportunities to push myself in ways I didn't know were possible and to participate in meaningful learning within our community.

My journey along this path has been inspired and supported by many gifted teachers too numerous to mention here. And yet, I am here only because of the consistent and unfailing support of my dear friends and certain family, in particular, Ruth Van der Voort, Paula Anderson, Nikki Auten, Nahannee-Fé Shuitemaker, Sara Rogers, Marley Giunta and of course, most of all, my mother Nancy. I love you, mum!

In celebration of the life and work of Grandfather William Commanda, whose unifying vision of beauty touched my heart and rippling outward, continues to inspire the Circle of All Nations. Chi-Miigwetch.

And for the Anishinaabe-kweg who have welcomed me, taught me, and supported me on this research journey: for the members of Nibi Emosaawdamajig and the Sacred Water Circle, to Dr. Elder Shirley Williams (‘da boss / Auntie), Elder Dorothy Taylor, Liz Osawamick, Georgie Horton-Baptiste, Marjolaine LaPointe, and Grandmother Josephine Mandamin-ba, for your continued example making waves and transforming hearts and minds. Gchi-miigwech. Miigwech. Miigwech. Miigwech. You have my utmost love and respect.

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Prologue

Once Upon A Time…

Let me tell you a story - not a creation story, for my people, the Irish, are said to not have just one, or perhaps, ours was lost long ago – and yet, the tale I will tell you is an origin story none-the-less. It is not a pretty one, be warned, for ours is not a pretty tale, but one fraught with brutality and betrayal, confusion, loss, and profound grief. And yet, there is beauty still. Amidst the darkness in our tales, in the haunting truths of the stories we must remember now to tell ourselves, there may yet linger seeds, glistening seeds of hope, embers of an almost forgotten flame…Listen then, and let them take root in you, let them catch on the soft down of your imagination, and start a wildfire of transformation.

> In the old days, as I was saying, the kingdom of Logres was rich and beautiful, and the land offered nourishment for all, for it was properly tended and cared for. It's a contract you see, people and the land. You care for it, and it cares for you. The source of the kingdom's life, the life-giving blood which surged in its veins, was the sacred water of the wells, which flowed up out of the deep potent waters of the Otherworld. The wells were tended by maidens, and these maidens were the Voices of the Wells. And this is how they served: if a traveller in need should pass by a well in those times, a well-maiden would appear and, if he asked reasonably, offer him the food he liked best, and a drink of well-water from her golden grail. This gift was given to all, freely given in the spirit of service to the land.
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> But then there came a king in the land who did not cherish the old customs or understand his contract with the land and the duties of hospitality, which travel both ways. That king's name was Amagons. (…) As king, it was his duty to guard the land and those who lived on it; it was his duty to tend it and see that all was in good heart, for this is the sacred contract which maintains the balance of the world. It was his duty to keep the well-maidens safe, for they were the Voices of the Wells, and without the wells the land would lose its heart. But Amagons wasn't much of a man of duty, and the day came when he broke his faith. On that day a well-maiden, seeing him pass by, offered him food and water, as was the custom. After eating the food and drinking the water, Amagons tore off her white dress, threw her across the stone wall which surrounded the well, and raped her while his men looked on. (…) Can you imagine how the earth itself must have cried out in horror? How the waters of the wells would have stopped mid-flow, and recoiled from this evil which was visited upon the land? But it did not stop there. After this violation, Amagons stole the well-maiden's golden vessel and kept it for himself (…).
>
> Then, seeing what the king had done, and taking their lead from him, all around the country his men began to rape the other well-maidens. So the maidens no longer came out of the wells, and withdrew from the land altogether. And so it was that the people of Logres lost the Voices of the Wells, and the services of the wells ceased. This is how the land was laid waste. The leaves on the trees shrivelled and died, plants withered, fields and meadows turned brown, and the earth lay barren and scorched. The waters of the land diminished, and the rivers ran dry, and no one could find the enchanted court of the Fisher King, who had once made the land bright with his treasures.[1]

[1] Sharon Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted: The Journey to Authenticity and Belonging*, (Denmark: September Publishing, 2016), 30–31.

Section I: Earth (*Talam*) - Truth

"Is it the sky that breaks or the sea that ebbs or the earth that quakes or is this the distress of my son fighting against odds on the Foray of Cúailnge?"[2]

This Land
Is not my own
And yet
It is my home
The only home I've ever known

Sometimes I feel
Like an impermissible hybrid
An inadmissible truth
Between two worlds
Not fully belonging to either
Condemnable, contaminated
My very existence here the original sin

My bones are not from here
The language of my ancestors
did not originate in the melody of this place
The stories and music that run through my blood
Were born in a place I have never seen
If only in dreams…

This Land
Is not my own
And yet
It is my home
The only home I have ever known

I long to belong here
But there is so much to do…[3]

[2] An exclamation of the Ulster warrior Cú Chulainn in *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster.*

[3] Aleyah-Erin Lennon, 2018. Throughout this thesis, I have included several poems, some of which I composed, and some have been written by others. I reference them by the authors full name and date if available.

Chapter 1: Where We Find Ourselves

"This world needs a fundamental shift in our values, the way we think. I really believe this world would be a better place if the women were returned to the places that we once held."-Georgie Horton-Baptiste, Anishinaabekwe[4] *leader and research participant*

Our Crisis of Disconnection

The preceding tale in the prologue is Dr. Sharon Blackie's telling of The Elucidation – an ancient prologue of unknown authorship to Chrétien de Troyes' medieval manuscript Percival, le Conte du Graal.[5] It is one of many old Celtic stories, that tell us about how my ancestors lived in relationship with the land they grew up out of, of the veneration and reverence they held for the magic and beauty of the life-giving and therefore, sacred waters of the land, of the profound role women played in tending to and speaking for the land, and of the horrible consequences which ensue when these gifts of creation are disrespected, when we breach our contract with the Land.[6] This tale speaks of the profound loss - both material and physical as well as spiritual and

[4] I acknowledge that there are several dialects of Anishinaabemowin, and as a result, throughout this work the reader will notice variations in the spelling of certain words. This work has been written in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory and so I have endeavoured to be consistent with the spellings of this dialect, for example 'Nishnaabeg'. However, some of the research participants are from a different region and use 'Anishinaabeg' and 'Anishinaabekwe'. Since they have helped me in my language learning, when I refer to them or their teachings, I use the spelling according to their dialect.

[5] William Kibler, trans. "The Elucidation: A Prologue to the Conte Del Graal" (New York: Publications of the Institute of French Studies, Inc.), 1931., 2007.

[6] Here, as most often in my thesis, I am conceptualizing 'Land' as something other than simply physical matter, territory, or property. My personal understanding of Land includes all the more-than-human aspects of landscape as well as Spirit. I believe, as did my ancestors according to our stories, that the Land has agency, voice, lessons to bestow, healing to offer, and that the Land wants to be in relationship with us as human animals. What runs through the heart of this work is my observation that the settler colonial project has robbed many of us of this natural way of understanding and of being in relationship with and within our places. It is my assertion that the great work of our time involves drastically reformulating our relationships in Indigenous Land. For a beautiful example of how some in Bawaka Country (located in what is now called Northern Territory, Australia) are engaged in the work of 'co-becoming' through land-based cooperative and embodied practices, see the series of articles written in partnership with the Land: (e.g. Bawaka Country, Sarah Wright, Sandie Suchet-Pearson, Kate Lloyd, Laklak Burarrwanga, Ritjilili Ganambarr, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Djawundil Maymuru, and Jill Sweeney, "Co-Becoming Bawaka: Towards a Relational Understanding of Place/space," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 4 (August 2016): 455–75.).

psychological - of breaking faith with the land, and of the wasteland that results both in the landscape and in our hearts when we are no longer in intimate, reciprocal relationship with the earth beneath our feet. As Blackie writes, "they lost the Voices of the Wells, the source of the land's life, and the voices of the women who tended them. As a consequence, they lost the land's spiritual heart: the court of the Fisher King. And so we came to live in a Wasteland, barren in body and soul."[7] What might happen if more people were to awaken to the idea that we in the western world may be living in the wake of this now ancient legacy; that we are living in the Wasteland? And what might it look like if more of us were to remember what we have lost while endeavouring to transform our consciousness, seeking to renew our relationship to the land's spiritual heart, to embody a living devotion to healing within and between us once again?

These musings serve as the genesis of the thesis journey that I embark on here.[8] I concur with Blackie when she asserts that we are living in the Wasteland today. Speaking broadly as well as from my own personal experience, it is my contention that we[9] in the west are suffering from a crisis of disconnection in each of our fundamental relationships – our relationship to self, to others, and to the Land. I perceive our modern-day wasteland as an interconnected triple spiral[10] of relational crises of disconnection and see the aim of my work therefore, to explore how I might contribute to healing in these relationships both theoretically and practically.

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[7] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted,* 32.

[8] My intention with this work has been to both theorize and then to embody and enact healing in what I term the trilogy of my relationships to Self, Others, and Land.

[9] Throughout this thesis, I use the terms "we" and "us" to refer to fellow settlers, and more specifically to white Settler Canadians because I am one myself. Whereas I do not assume this particular positionality in all readers, the intention of my work here is to take up what I have come to accept as my responsibility to "begin with myself" and to "talk to 'my' people" about our inherited legacy of white supremacy and settler colonialism and of our obligations to transform ourselves and our relationships here in Indigenous lands. The "we" can be inclusive or exclusive to you the reader depending on how you identify.

[10] In chapter two, I elaborate on my conception of this triple spiral, how my understanding has grown from working to remember my Celtic original instructions, and how *An Thríbhís Mhòr* (The Great Triple Spiral) or *Triskele* forms the foundation of my theoretical framework for this thesis. From the outset, I want to mention that in the envisioning and formulation of this work and through its unfolding, I center Indigenous voices, Indigenous ways of knowing, and the aims of Indigenous resurgence as I currently understand them.

As human beings we are relational creatures, and as such, regardless of one's current understanding of, or concern for, these relational disconnections, we do indeed suffer under them. In this introductory chapter, I endeavour to articulate my particular understanding of not only the nature and seriousness of our disconnections, but also to demonstrate how they can be traced to the ongoing problem of settler colonialism.[11] I conceive of these crises of disconnection as stemming from and resulting in what I have heard termed our collective colonial wounds. Extending humbly to Settler Canadians[12] what Indigenous Resurgence scholar Jeff Corntassel has stated about settler colonialism and its impacts on First Nations people: "this is a spiritual crisis

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Concomitently, I am informed by my own celtic epistemologies which also offer me instruction in how to approach more balanced, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with and within place.

[11] Chapter three is dedicated to an in-depth examination of settler colonialism, settler as identity, and whiteness in the context of decolonization. This work walks with each foot in different worlds. Although I engage extensively with settler colonial theory, my academic home is the discipline of Indigenous Studies. In this work, I engage diverse literatures to better understand and grapple with our settler colonial reality while navigating and narrating my own journey towards healing and spiritual recovery in the context of my anti-colonial work. This work is non-linear and rather has followed a spiral path in its concept, design, and execution.

[12] The term settler is a potentially contentious one. It broadly refers to those of us who are not Indigenous to these territories, whose ancestors came here from elsewhere, as well as those who have immigrated here more recently. My understanding of the term 'settler', which I explore in more depth in chapter three, comes from reading, among others, the work of Emma Battell Lowman and Adam Barker in *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*, (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2015); Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2016); Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); as well as Jeff Corntassel, Rita Dhamoon and Corey Snelgrove, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014); and of course, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 1, no. 1 (2012).

I capitalize the term 'Settler Canadian' as suggested by Battell Lowman and Barker as I appreciate their reasoning that the terms Indigenous and Settler are relational terms of identity in the Canadian context. 'Settler' and 'settler colonialism' will be explored in more depth to operationalize a foundational understanding in chapter three.

just as much as it is a political, social, and economic one."[13] I also point to the prevalence of trauma[14] that I believe permeates our various experiences of relational disconnections and how the nature and prevalence of such trauma is indeed a moral and spiritual crisis.[15] Defining the problems thusly, throughout my thesis, I take a trauma-informed approach to discussions of the pedagogical implications of transforming settler consciousness while arguing for the role of spirituality[16] in the healing/decolonizing process.

Our Ecological Crisis

One need not look very hard or far to see the destruction and desolation to the land and to the human heart; the Wasteland is all around us.[17] The causes and consequences are many and varied, myriad and

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[13] Jeff Corntassel, "Re-Envisioning Resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-Determination," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 86–101. https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.0.004088.

[14] My use and understanding of the term trauma comes from my own lived experience with trauma from growing up in a family which although had a lot of love and relative privilege, also included addiction, mental illness, neglect, and abuse, as well as my personal research of the psycho-neurobiology of trauma [see Bessel van der Kolk, *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2014)]. I have also been learning from Indigenous voices about the nature and effects of inter-generational trauma. The following definition of *historic trauma* is offered by Linda Archibald in *Decolonization and Healing: Indigenous Experiences in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Greenland*, (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006), i: "Historic Trauma is a cluster of traumatic events. Hidden collective memories of trauma, or a collective non-remembering, is passed from generation to generation, as are the maladaptive social and behavioural patterns that are symptoms of many social disorders. Or - is a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations resulting from massive tragedies."

[15] David Brooks, "Trauma Is a Moral and Spiritual Issue as Much as a Psychological or Chemical One," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/19/opinion/mental-health-ptsd-community.html

[16] For the purposes of this study, I operationalize the concept of spirituality in its most basic or distilled definition; 'spirituality' is an embodied understanding of our interconnection and interdependence with the human and more-than-human world. And as such, I believe the nature of both these colonial wounds of disconnection and their possible solutions to be spiritual. Chapter five explores spirituality as it relates to this work in more depth.

[17] 'The Wasteland' as conceptualized here can be taken to mean an epistemic state, a state of relations, a material state, or all three. Although settler colonialism and industrial capitalism, for example, are conceptually separate, in the Canadian context, which is my focus, they intersect. In my work here, I am not only critiquing the process of settler colonialism, rather I am attempting a much broader and holistic consideration of what is plaguing the diversity of human experience in the contemporary context.

horrifying in their ubiquity and pervasiveness. We see it in countless industrial wastelands the world over, Canada's tar sands, poisoned rivers, decimated forests, and continued clear cuts. We hear it in statistics such as: approximately 50% of the earth's biodiversity has declined or become extinct since 1970 or the fact that "90% of the world's seabirds are estimated to have fragments of plastic in their stomach."[18] We see it in the countless horrific images from around the world; starving children, emaciated and traumatized by war; the fact that so many cannot eat the fish or drink the water in their own communities; astronomical cancer rates; soaring cases of anxiety and depression; addiction; suicide…

Our current cultural stories have come to reflect the immanent peril of the Wasteland. Apocalyptic narratives have become commonplace in movies, television, and fiction, as well as conversational parlance. Even young children are aware that the proverbial sky is falling.[19] These are not just stories we tell ourselves; the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report warns that unless we make drastic, fundamental, and immediate changes to the way we are living, within 11 years – little over a decade – runaway climate change will be inevitable, resulting in millions of deaths and climate refugees planet-wide.[20] Even more recent analysis, due to the estimation that Arctic sea ice will disappear as early as the year 2022 thereby releasing unprecedented amounts of methane and setting off positive feedback loops, puts this point of no return at five years out.[21]

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[18] World Wildlife Fund, "Living Planet Report 2018 (LPR)."

[19] Irene Banos Ruiz, "This apocalyptic is how kids are imagining our climate future," *DW.com*, October 13, 2017, https://p.dw.com/p/2lOKQ. When this journalist asked children ages 6 to 12 years old to draw pictures of what they expect the world to be like in 50 years, they overwhelmingly drew images of apocalyptic demise.

[20] IPCC, "Global warming of 1.5°C," Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (IPCC, Switzerland: October 2018), https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/

[21] Jeff McMahon, "We Have Five Years To Save Ourselves From Climate Change, Harvard Scientist Says." *Forbes.com*, January 15, 2018. The content of this article is based on remarks made by Dr. James Anderson, a Harvard University professor of atmospheric chemistry at a lecture he delivered at the University of Chicago's Gordon Center for Integrative Research on January 11, 2018 entitled "Climate, Chemistry, Technology and Society: The University Responsibility".

In December 2018, Dr. Jem Bendell, a sustainability scholar at the Institute of Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS), University of Cumbria in the UK, published what was at the time, the most up-to-date synthesis of the world's best climate science and concluded that due to the already unfolding global climate tragedy, "there will be a near-term collapse in society with serious ramifications for the lives of readers." He goes on to clarify that, "recent research suggests that human societies will experience disruptions to their basic functioning within less than ten years due to climate stress. Such disruptions include increased levels of malnutrition, starvation, disease, civil conflict and war – and will not avoid affluent nations." Bendell characterizes these disruptions and their probability as: "inevitable collapse, probable catastrophe and possible extinction."[22] Based on the science, it seems more than fair to admit that we are in the midst of an environmental crisis. Without a healthy, functioning ecosystem, biosphere, and planet, life cannot exist. We are quite literally facing a potential global apocalyptic scenario.

Our Personal and Interpersonal Crises

The psychological, emotional, and social ramifications of coming to grips with this fact, of living with this ubiquitous threat and uncertainty can be colossal. Many people are terrified, frustrated, grief-stricken, or shutdown and tuned out in turns, feeling powerless or overwhelmed, enraged, or disengaged. Denial and therefore, lack of effective action, are rampant.[23] Bendell discusses the various systems of such denial to be both personal and institutional and points to how "people often avoid voicing certain thoughts when they go against the social norm around them and/or their social identity. Especially in situations of shared powerlessness, it can be perceived as safer to hide one's views and do nothing if it goes against the status quo."[24] Whereas Bendell is writing here in the context of our climate crisis, the same kind of avoidance, dishonesty, or lack of personal

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[22] Jim Bendell, "Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy," IFLAS Occasional Paper 2, (July 27, 2018), www.iflas.info.

[23] See for example: Per Espen Stoknes, "Rethinking Climate Communications and the 'Psychological Climate Paradox,'" *Energy Research & Social Science* 1, (2014): 161-170.

[24] Bendell, "Deep Adaptation," 2018.

courage to challenge the status quo can be seen in many of our individual relational experiences. For example, abuse in our families, as well as more broadly as Canadians continue to struggle to admit our settler problem.

Issues of identity, belonging, and denial run at the heart of our inter-related crises of disconnection. In the Wasteland, not only is the earth sick, her ecosystems and creatures dying, humans too are suffering from a profound sense of disconnection.[25] As a 'culture', we are disconnected not only from the land, from a sustainable or reciprocal relationship with our environment, the earth and all her creatures; we are disconnected from our very selves, for we are born from and of the earth. As Blackie puts it, "we are bleeding from the roots, because embracing the Wasteland means that we are out of touch with the seasons and cycles of the year, with the natural world to which we have forgotten we belong. And when we lose our relationship with the land and the other creatures, then in the deepest sense, we lose ourselves."[26] Similarly, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer describes "a deep, unnamed sadness stemming from estrangement from the rest of Creation, from the loss of relationship."[27]

While I am not asserting that every Settler Canadian experiences this loss of relationship and this estrangement from the rest of Creation, and while I recognize the multitude of positionalities and inter-sectionalities in the make-up of Settler Canada, there is a large and growing contingent of settlers in North America[28] who simply do not have these connections and are acutely aware that something essential is

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[25] There is an emerging body of knowledge in the medical field that speaks to the dangers and increased health risks posed by growing rates of loneliness and isolation in modern western culture. See for example: Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., and Stephenson, D., "Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review," *Perspectives on psychological science : a journal of the Association for Psychological Science*, *10*, no. 2, (2015): 227–237. A popular article summarizing these findings can be found here: Sarah Knapton, "Loneliness found to be More Deadly than Obesity: Experts Fear Death through 'Social Isolation' could Hit Epidemic Proportions that Target Young and Elderly," *The Daily Telegraph,* Aug 07, 2017.

[26] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 43.

[27] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 209.

[28] I acknowledge that terms such as 'North America', 'western', and 'settler' used throughout this work represent a totalization that does nothing to indicate the nuances, complexities, and intersectionalities of the many identities and ways of relating existing in our places. However, common scholarly and popular literatures

missing.[29] Speaking as a settler myself, the notion that we as a society are disconnected from the land beneath our feet, from our ancestors, from their stories, from one another, and most shatteringly therefore, from our very selves, resonates with me.[30] As Indigenous resurgence scholars Jeff Corntassel and Taiaiake Alfred write, "relationships to each other, communities, homelands, ceremonial life, languages, histories . . . These connections are crucial to living a meaningful life for any human being."[31] And yet,[32] how many of us can say that we have these crucial connections? For many of us, in forgetting who we are, where we come from, our

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speak in these generalizing, binary ways that can be both useful and productive as well as necessarily limiting. With this work, I am responding personally to these dichotomies established along the colonial divide and am offering my personal reflections and experiences as evidence to be interrogated. Whereas I do address the problem of settler binarism in chapter three, and grapple with the inherent complexities of this work throughout my thesis, I maintain there is merit in taking a broad view of the systems and structures of power and thought that operate hegemonically in our daily lives.

An excellent example of the kind of discourse I am grappling with and responding to with this work can be found in Battell Lowman and Barker's book, *Settler*. In chapter three, "It's Always about the Land," the authors contrast Indigenous place-thought with a settler colonial worldview, and offer an analysis of how epistemology and ontology are related (or separated) by Indigenous and settler thought respectively. As they write, "there is a simple but important difference in the ways that Indigenous and Settler identities operate with respect to place: one integrated into the land and one imposed upon it. There is a difference between a relationship *with* the land, in the case of Indigenous peoples, and a relationship *to* the land, in the case of settler societies," (53). This kind of delineation, salient across various literatures, is productive insofar as it makes visible the gaps in settler logic and 'common sense' that perpetuate harm. And yet, as a settler myself, it also illuminates the ways in which my own epistemology and ontology are not represented or encompassed by common sense constructions. Acknowledging my personal disconnect and displacement within these discourses, while concomitantly respecting that I remain an inextricable part of them, *and* insisting on (re)imagining and articulating alternatives for myself and others of like mind, is what this work is engaged in doing.

[29] In chapter five, I explore more about spiritual searching in the west as well as the issues of appropriation and cultural theft in the 'new age'.

[30] I acknowledge the multiplicity of narratives that exist when engaged with the ideas that I explore here in my thesis and I wish to express that what I am offering here is but one pathway, necessarily limited, and ever evolving.

[31] Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Politics of Identity - Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism," *Government and Opposition*, (2005): 599.

[32] Although the use of 'and yet' is grammatically unconventional, my use of the phrase is intentional; it is meant to gesture towards the inherent paradoxes involved in decolonizing identity work, to acknowledge co-existing and often contrasting realities that we never-the-less must contend with.

place in creation, we have forgotten our roles and responsibilities to *all our relations*,[33] to the web of life on which we depend. This forgetting was not by accident. In Chapter 4 *Footprints and Echoes of my Ancestors*, I explore the rise of capitalism and with it, empire, which was entrenched through a centuries long European genocide and which used Christianity as one of its sharpest colonial tools. For settlers of European ancestry, many of our various indigenous[34] lifeways were purposefully and brutally suppressed, oppressed, and largely destroyed. We have forgotten what was lost – we have even largely forgotten that we forgot. As I narrate throughout this thesis, the consequences of our individual and collective forgetting have been dire; in the face of this forgetting, we must now remember.[35]

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[33] Use of the term 'all our relations' is not without contention. It is an Indigenous teaching and phrase, which I respectfully acknowledge as having been shared with me. I choose to employ it here and sparingly elsewhere to articulate my belief that I am inextricably embedded in a deeply interconnected web of relationships with other beings on this planet, including the Water, Trees, all creatures, and the Earth herself. I also respectfully acknowledge that this teaching has originally come to me and been reinforced through the sharing of Elders and First Nations individuals from whom I have learned.

[34] My use of the word Indigenous in most contexts throughout this work is in keeping with the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the working definition as set out in UN documents, which states that: "Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system," (José R. Martínez Cobo's Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations). I caveat the repetition of this definition with what the World Council of Indigenous Peoples has adopted as a core principle; namely that Indigenous Peoples retain the right to define for themselves who is an Indigenous person (Martinez Cobo report: (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/Add.4). My use of the term indigenous here must not be misconstrued; I am not claiming an indigenous identity for myself. Rather, I am asserting that for many settlers with heritages stemming from various European cultures, there exist stories which point to how our ancestors may have conceptualized and embodied relationships *with* their places in dramatically different ways than how we are living today. For a pointed summary of how our place-based relationships and place-based knowledges in Europe were forcefully eradicated to monopolize land and profit, see Appendix A.

[35] It is important to note that the process of forgetting as well as remembering is not simply an individual enterprise. As I explore in chapter three, the settler colonial project, through its various structures (such as race) and institutions (like our education system) actively and routinely impel and reinforce this forgetting, encouraging the bio-reproduction of colonizing subjects. Resisting and refusing this forgetting requires both a personal and collective effort. Similarly, the sustained action required to dismantle globalized structures and systems of oppression will require collectivity, coordination, and cooperation undertaken on multiple fronts and in multiple ways by a diverse coalition of people.

Identity, Trauma, and The Abusive Relationship

"Hurt people hurt people."[36]

In forgetting ourselves, we have become more easily integrated into the settler colonial project[37] and have become (unwittingly perhaps) perpetrators of, and complicit in, the same destructive forces here on Turtle Island that our ancestors may have experienced in Europe. This ongoing cultural genocide[38] against the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island is concomitant with the continual and progressive destruction of the natural ecosystems and processes that support all life on earth. Black feminist scholar bell hooks has named the systems currently governing our society the "imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy."[39] These interlocking systems, that have worked to both establish and uphold settler colonialism, are at the root of these interrelated crises of disconnection and the resulting destruction. Under these systems of 'imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy', settlers have been raised to be consumers. As a society, we are operating with an ideology of unbridled consumption and perpetual growth, "an ideology that has made the human race so poor at addressing a threat to its wellbeing and even existence. It is an ideology that many of us have been complicit in promoting. […] It is important to recognise that complicity." As Bendell puts it, "climate change is not just a pollution problem, but an indicator of how our human psyche and culture became divorced from our natural habitat."[40] Similarly, Blackie offers:

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[36] While it is not readily possible to originally cite this quote, it is a salient saying in recovery literature such as can be found in Al-Anon. Self-help authors such as Sandra Bloom, Joan Betts, and Sandra D. Wilson have published works making use of this phrase.

[37] The nature of this settler colonial project is touched upon in this chapter, but it is something I explore in greater depth in chapter three and throughout this thesis. Settler colonialism is the 'water' we are swimming in; it forms the foundation of our lives and lifeways here within it and I therefore interrogate it from several angles in various chapters.

[38] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," (Canada: 2015).

[39] bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 17.

[40] Bendell, "Deep Adaptation," 2018.

> Our insanity springs from the fact that that we have constructed an exclusively human world for ourselves, and in so doing, we have cut ourselves off from the source of our belonging: the land, and the non-human others who occupy it with us. We have lost touch with the sense which our ancestors had of being a part of the natural world, of living in our bodies, embracing the cycles of the seasons, fully present in time. We do not recognize ourselves any longer in their stories. Something essential has vanished from our consciousness. [41]

Raised to be consumers and living within interlocking settler colonial systems of disconnection and consumption, western society displays all the trauma-induced symptoms of addiction:

> According to Maté, addiction is any behavior — not necessarily just drug use — that individuals cannot stop doing, despite harmful consequences, because it provides them with some relief or pleasure […] For Maté, the question is not "Why the addiction?" but "Why the pain?"[42]

Why do we seem to be in so much pain as a culture? Could it be our disconnection from Land and from a healthy reciprocal relationship with the other Beings with whom we share this land? Despite all the signs and science, we seem unable or unwilling to let the denial break and to deal with these inter-related crises. As Blackie writes:

> There is a collusive madness here, irrationality on a planetary scale. A civilization which can do this much damage to the planetary fabric on which it depends, and which can continue to do so in spite of unambiguous signs pointing to the catastrophic direction in which we're heading, is nothing less than pathological. […] We are caught not only in an industrial wasteland, but in a Wasteland of the heart and the spirit. The Wasteland is not just outside of us, a sickness in the system, in our culture: the Wasteland is in ourselves.[43]

Disconnection in our fundamental relationship to land and to ourselves are forms of trauma and trauma begets trauma in a cyclical loop or spiral until and unless it is faced, processed, and healed.[44] The 'crisis of disconnection' in our relationship with the land and therefore, ourselves, profoundly affects our ability to relate

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[41] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted,* 49–50.

[42] Abraham Gutman, "How a Traumatized America Finds Relief in Hate," *The Inquirer*, November 2, 2008, https://www.inquirer.com/philly/opinion/commentary/hate-addiction-pittsburgh-shooting-childhood-trauma-gabor-mate-20181102.html

[43] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted: The Journey to Authenticity and Belonging*, 49–50.

[44] For more information on the prevalence and myriad consequences of trauma in our society, see the many articles continuously being published in medical journals about the chronic, long-term effects of Adverse Childhood Events (ACE), e.g. Michael McCarthy, "Traumatic Childhood Experiences Associated with Chronic Health Problems, Study Finds," *BMJ : British Medical Journal (Online)* 349, (Dec 09, 2014).

in healthy ways with others, which in turn exacerbates our problems. Furthermore, settler colonialism is premised on inequality, injustice, oppression, and the suppression of Indigenous peoples. In this state of disconnection that we are in there is an increase in social inequities, political extremism, and various forms of violence. Gutman summarizes the following point made by trauma and addiction specialist Gabor Maté:

> "The research is absolutely clear," Maté says. "The more inequality in a society, the more hate, the more dysfunction, the more mental illness, the more physical illness." It should come as no surprise, then, that we see more addiction and more mass shootings since "the inequality is rising all the time." Violence against racial, ethnic, or religious groups "is a manifestation of a society that foments division amongst people and sets people against each other." […] Both hate and addiction are a manifestation of a society that is ill, disconnected, and traumatized.[45]

Inequality is built into the systems that govern our lives and are premised on notions of scarcity, competition, and domination;[46] within these systems, many of us, even those most privileged, are hurting on a profound level. These systems literally are sick and are in turn making us sick(er). As Maté writes:

> We live in a culture where many people are hurt, and like the leaders they idolize, insulated against reality. Trauma is so commonplace that its manifestations have become the norm. People who are anxious, fearful and aggrieved may be unable to recognize the flaws in those seeking power. They mistake desperate ambition for determination, see grandiosity as authority, paranoia as security, seductiveness as charm, dogmatism as decisiveness, selfishness as economic wisdom, manipulation as political savvy, lack of principles as flexibility. Trauma-induced defences such as venal dishonesty and aggressive self-promotion often lead to success. The flaws of our leaders perfectly mirror the emotional underdevelopment of the society that elevates them to power.[47]

Interestingly, Bendell relates that, "more people are losing faith in electoral democracy and in the economic system. The questioning of mainstream life and of progress is also reflected in the shift away from secular-rational values to traditional values that has been occurring worldwide since 2010 (World Values Survey, 2016)."[48] Throughout this thesis, I explore the ways in which these shifts may be crucial to a decolonizing praxis, as well as the ways in which they can be taken up problematically.

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[45] Gutman, "How a Traumatized America Finds Relief in Hate," 2018.

[46] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2013.

[47] Gabor Maté, "Trump, Clinton and Trauma," *Dr. Gabor Maté* (blog), October 15, 2016, https://drgabormate.com/trump-clinton-trauma/.

[48] Bendell, "Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy," 2018.

These interlocking systems of oppression, exploitation, and disconnection have been built upon a particular and dominant paradigm of consciousness or worldview. My research has been a direct response to Indigenous voices who have called on upon settlers to address the trauma and injustice of our shared history and the legacy of settler colonialism. This painful legacy and shared history here in Canada, and more broadly, in the 'west', are bound up in the ongoing settler colonial project, which has been founded on a Eurocentric worldview cut off from an understanding or respect for Indigenous ways of knowing of right relationship with self, others, and the land. This particular paradigm of consciousness has resulted in the continued theft of Indigenous lands and the attempted extermination of Indigenous peoples themselves – their identities, stories, and lived realities. As I explore in the following chapters, this paradigm of consciousness can be understood as *settler consciousness* and/or *whiteness*. As I argue, issues of settler consciousness, identity, belonging, entitlement, responsibility, and accountability in relationship are at the root of our current ecological, social, and spiritual crises. We cannot hope to avert or mitigate the global climate catastrophe already unfolding around us if we do not turn our attention inward (individually as well as collectively) and deal with the root causes of these complex and dire problems. In a keynote address he gave to the Spotlight of Indigenous Peoples plenary at the 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions, Lenape scholar Steven Newcomb said, "working on climate change without working on paradigm shift would be a grave mistake. We need a mental and behavioural shift away from the prevailing paradigm of domination and dehumanization, the symptoms of which are everywhere on planet earth, our Mother"[49]

The Abusive Relationship

The prevailing paradigm of domination and dehumanization of which Newcomb speaks runs at the heart of settler colonialism in Canada, which Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has aptly described as an abusive relationship between Settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. The nature of this

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[49] Newcomb, "Keynote Address: Spotlight of Indigenous Peoples Plenary at the 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions."

abusive relationship finds its logic in ongoing settler colonialism and is kept alive through our current paradigm of capitalist patriarchy and the *cognitive imperialism* and legacy of Christianity.[50] These structures not only govern our lives, as settlers, they live within us and are perpetuated by us, often unconsciously. In order to begin healing our crises of disconnection, we need to uncover this truth for ourselves and begin what Georgie Horton-Baptiste terms the *hard heart work* of remembering/healing/decolonizing ourselves; this involves grappling with both shame and with grief. As Simpson relates of her experience with shame from her Nishnaabe perspective:

> And if I am honest, I also thought of the shame that I carry inside of me from the legacy of colonial abuse, the unspoken shame we carry collectively as Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. It is shame that is rooted in the humiliation that colonialism has heaped on our peoples for hundreds of years and is now carried within our bodies, minds and our hearts. It is shame that our ancestors-our families-did not rally hard enough against the colonial regime. It is shame that we were tricked into surrendering our life, land and sustenance during the Williams Treaty process. It is shame that makes us think that our leaders and Elders did not do the best they could. To me, this colonial shame felt like not only a tremendous burden to carry, but it also felt displaced. We are not shameful people. We have done nothing wrong. I began to realize that *shame can only take hold when we are disconnected from the stories* of resistance within our own families and communities. I placed that shame as an insidious and infectious part of the cognitive imperialism that was aimed at convincing us that we were a weak and defeated people, and that there was no point in resisting or resurging. I became interested in finding those stories of resistance and telling them so that our next generation would know.[51]

Settler shame is necessarily different than the kind of shame Simpson talks about, because in this abusive relationship, we are part of the group that have done something wrong. We are the ones responsible for perpetuating colonial abuse, or at the very least, for standing by and tacitly condoning abuse by pretending it isn't happening, and by remaining ignorant of it. While our settler shame is necessarily different, it is no less insidious or harmful. Social scientist and author Brené Brown defines shame in this way: "shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. […] Shame corrodes the part of us that believes we can change and do better. […] Shame is much

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[50] In both Chapters 4 and 5, I explore what I mean about Christianity being a tool of colonization and cognitive imperialism. The term cognitive imperialism is one I have learned from Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste.

[51] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 13–14, *emphasis my own*.

more likely to lead to destructive and hurtful behaviours than it is to be the solution."[52] For Simpson writing about an Indigenous experience of shame says:

> Shame traps us individually and collectively into the victimry of the colonial assault, and travels through the generations, accumulating and manifesting itself in new and more insidious ways in each re-generation. The cycles of shame we are cognitively locked into is in part perpetuated and maintained by western theoretical constructions of "resistance," "mobilization" and "social movements," by defining what is and is not considered. Through the lens of colonial thought and cognitive imperialism, we are often unable to *see* our Ancestors. We are unable to *see* their philosophies and their strategies of mobilization and the complexities of their plan for resurgence.[53]

The western theoretical constructions, the lens of colonial thought, and the crime of cognitive imperialism that Simpson is writing about exist through us; as settlers, many of us have ancestors, themselves carrying generational trauma within their minds and bodies, who brought these paradigms of consciousness to Turtle Island (North America). Lyla June, an author and activist of Diné and European heritage reflects:

> When and how did this egalitarian, earth-loving, woman-honouring culture, become the colonial, genocidal conquerors that washed upon American shores? Could it be that our beloved Indigenous European ancestors were raped and tortured for so many thousands of years that they forgot who they were? Could it be they lived in a pressure cooker of oppression for so long that conquer-or-be-conquered is all they knew? Yes, I believe so.[54]

We have inherited this legacy and we live with this history deep in our bones; yet whenever we came to be here on Indigenous lands, as settlers we are now responsible for repairing the damage on which our privilege rests. It is our collective responsibility to tackle and transform the settler colonial system that is perpetuating harm. It is my belief that much like healing from trauma and abuse in one's family, we need to deal with the shame, we need to grieve what has been lost, we need to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions, and more often than not, we need to be held within the collective in order to complete the healing. Simpson's thoughts on

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[52] Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*, (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden Publishing, 2010), 39-41.

[53] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 15–16.

[54] June, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous European Roots," *The MOON Magazine*, 2018, http://moonmagazine.org/lyla-june-reclaiming-our-indigenous-european-roots-2018-12-02.

Indigenous models of restorative justice in healing the abusive relationship deeply resonate with me as I think this model applies across the trilogy of our relationships. As she writes,

> From a Nishnaabeg theoretical perspective, regeneration or restoration is at the core of re-balancing relationships. Nishnaabeg legal systems are, at their core, restorative. Restorative processes rely upon the abuser taking full responsibility for his/her actions in a collective setting, amongst the person s/he violated, and amongst the people both the perpetrator and the survivor hold responsibilities to - be that their extended family, clan, or community. […] [E]thically taking responsibility for one's actions is paramount in the healing or restoration process; as well, the purpose of these models in the long term is the rehabilitation and restoration of all of those individuals back into mino bimaadiziwin.[55]

It is to this rebalancing of relationships that Simpson speaks about that I am drawn and committed to.

Transforming Settler Consciousness

The connection Simpson makes between healing the shame of colonial abuse and remembering our stories is something that I take up as part of my approach to transforming settler consciousness and contributing to healing in the trilogy of our relationships.[56] Remembering our stories is part of the process of remembering who we are, where we have come from, how we came to be here, and where we are headed. To begin the work of healing our abusive relationships, settlers need to face the truth of our stories on this land – how we came to be settlers here and what that means and has meant for our sense of identity, belonging, and notions of home – what it has done to our relationships and connections. "Such a process of untangling stories, legacies, and complicities is crucial for locating ourselves – in relation to our pasts, to each other, and to the land on which we live."[57] Brown writes about the fundamental importance of facing the truth of our stories, which is particularly applicable to the Settler Canadian identity myths of our being a polite, peaceful, inclusive, and just people:

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[55] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 23–24.

[56] As I narrate throughout my thesis, I take anti-colonial and decolonizing work, transforming settler consciousness, and contributing to healing in the trilogy of our relationships - to be essentially synonymous.

[57] Johanna Lewis, "'Ask the Colonial Ghosts ': Intimate Histories, Harmful Complicities and the Search for an Accountable Relationship with the Past," *MA Thesis* (York University: 2016), 4. Lewis recognizes, as do I, that "even if every settler in Canada wrote self-reflective decolonizing autobiographies, those histories would still be impacting our contemporary moment, and the material structures of colonization would still be in place […] historical work is far from unimportant, but it can never be enough," (40).

> When we spend a lifetime trying to distance ourselves from the parts of our lives that don't fit with who we think we're supposed to be, we stand outside of our story and hustle for our worthiness by constantly performing, perfecting, pleasing, and proving. Our sense of worthiness-that critically important piece that gives us access to love and belonging-lives inside of our story.[58]

As settlers, truly confronting the social and spiritual forces affecting our relationships together involves doing the hard heart work. This hard heart work for me, as she and I discussed, involves engaging in a process of decolonizing our sense of identity and belonging – of transforming our settler consciousness. The first step on any healing journey is to admit that there is a problem and to get clear on what that problem is. Johnson succinctly offers the truth of the fundamental settler problem at the root of our relational crises: "We live in a colonial society. It was built upon the European theft of land. It was built by conquering and destroying the nations of people already here, and it continues its assault on Native lands and culture. This isn't something we chose, but it is something we inherited, and thus have to reckon with."[59]

As settlers, we are being called to decolonize, and as Fanon (1963) states, "decolonization will require a change in the order of the world."[60] Reckoning with our settler inheritance means decolonizing our sense of identity, belonging, and responsibilities here, of working to dismantle and transform the settler colonial state and the capitalist economics that it is predicated on. Engaging with and being led by the work of Indigenous resurgence scholars,[61] I begin to understand my responsibility to "work to unsettle the ideational terrain of the settler colony" within myself and fellow settlers, "[thereby] opening possibilities for the emergence of a collaborative politics of decolonization."[62]

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[58] Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection,* 23.

[59] Myke Johnson, "Wanting to Be Indian: When Spiritual Searching Turns into Cultural Theft," *Unsettling America: Decolonization in Theory and Practice,* (2011): 5.

[60] as cited in Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 31.

[61] See, for example: Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014, 2016; Simpson, 2011, 2014, 2016; Elliot, 2018.

[62] Michael Elliott, "Indigenous Resurgence: The Drive for Renewed Engagement and Reciprocity in the Turn Away from the State," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1, (2018), 63, 80.

Taking up the call to decolonize our sense of identity and belonging as settlers here on Turtle Island while endeavouring to enact reconciliation by supporting Indigenous resurgence means doing the hard heart work of learning how we might be accountable[63] to our roles and responsibilities in our relationship to ourselves, to each other, and to the earth. But despite Canada having a national policy of Truth and Reconciliation, many Settler Canadians are not yet at a point where we are willing to collectively face our settler shame and become ready to make amends. Many are not ready to reconcile because we as a nation are not yet ready to really change:[64]

> [T]he idea of reconciliation is not new. Indigenous Peoples attempted to reconcile our differences in countless treaty negotiations, which categorically have not produced the kinds of relationships Indigenous Peoples intended. I wonder how we can reconcile when the majority of Canadians do not understand the historic or contemporary injustice of dispossession and occupation, particularly when the state has expressed its unwillingness to make any adjustments to the unjust relationship. [65]

As Canadians, we must work then, to understand the historic and contemporary injustice of dispossession and occupation and to demand that the state of Canada adjust our relationship with Indigenous Nations to be one predicated on justice – Indigenous notions of justice.[66] Before we can heal our abusive relationship, we must first endeavour to transform ourselves. Simpson again reminds me of the role that far too many Settler

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[63] I am inspired here by the work of Shawn Wilson on *relational accountability*, which I take up in more depth in chapter two.

[64] Throughout my work, I interrogate white supremacy and white privilege - bigotry and racism is certainly alive and well in Canada. I also narrate my experiences and observations in the classroom, with both students and colleagues, as well as my own personal reflections in order to illuminate that for many Settler Canadians, this unwillingness might have more to do with being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem and its possible solutions – of feeling the kind of powerlessness that Bendell notes keeps people upholding the status quo.

[65] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 21.

[66] It is important to note that there is plurality and diversity of perspectives regarding Indigenous notions of justice, which are place-based and unique to culture and nation. To be specific, I am suggesting that given the fact that I live in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory, I be beholden to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg notions of restorative justice as described by Simpson.

Canadians play in our abusive relationship with Indigenous peoples and of the necessity of taking up and embodying responsibility:

> If Canadians do not fully understand and embody the idea of reconciliation, is this a step forward? It reminds me of an abusive relationship where one person is being abused physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally. She wants out of the relationship, but instead of supporting her, we are all gathered around the abuser, because he wants to "reconcile." But he doesn't want to take responsibility. He doesn't want to change. In fact, all through the process he continues to physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally abuse his partner. He just wants to say sorry so he can feel less guilty about his behaviour. He just wants to adjust the ways he is abusing; he doesn't want to stop the abuse. Collectively, what are the implications of participating in reconciliation processes when there is an overwhelming body of evidence that in action, the Canadian state does not want to take responsibility and stop the abuse? What are the consequences for Indigenous Peoples of participating in a process that attempts to absolve Canada of past wrong doings, while they continue to engage with our nations in a less than honourable way?[67]

Current scholarship focused on transforming settler consciousness has identified the need to "shift the consciousness of contemporary Canadians to a new story, where Canadians recognize and acknowledge themselves as occupiers of Indigenous homelands, perpetrators of cultural genocide and sustainers of settler colonial practices in the present." Lynne Davis and colleagues point to the need for further research in order

> to understand the conditions that help settlers turn toward, and acknowledge, their own implication in the settler colonial project. Understanding such conditions is crucial to creating a pedagogy that brings about change rather than denial or paralyzing guilt. [It is] necessary that future efforts seek to understand the conditions that allow the move from simply acknowledging, to meaningfully transforming settler consciousness, in a way that furthers processes of decolonization and supports Indigenous resurgence and nationhood.[68]

It is within these important questions of how to catalyze and sustain the transformation of settler consciousness identified by scholars that my thesis and its primary questions are situated. As an educator and activist, I have been investigating such conditions and pedagogies academically, professionally, and personally for some time now, in my everyday relationships, in the classroom, and on social media. I have come to see issues of shame, trauma, identity, and spirituality as fundamental to transformational pedagogy and the sustainability of decolonizing praxis for myself, and perhaps for Settler Canadians more broadly. It is my

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[67] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 21.

[68] Davis et al., "Complicated Pathways: Settler Canadians Learning to Re/Frame Themselves and Their Relationships with Indigenous Peoples," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 4 (2017): 411.

contention that, as far as the literature is concerned, as we are seeking to transform settler consciousness, we are neglecting to effectively address a critical ingredient necessary to create a place of possibility for settlers to transform into. Consider this reflection from Davis et al., as the authors ponder what constitutes a challenge to settler colonial positionality:

> We were left questioning whether the centering of Indigenous perspectives and leadership, and the related decentering of settler narratives, is in itself unsettling or transformational. If these processes of centering and decentering are two necessary pieces of the same transformational puzzle, how do we get to the stage where settlers are both engaging with and *centering Indigenous knowledge* and narratives (*learning*) while simultaneously *deconstructing settler identities* (*unlearning*), and *actively challenging* settler colonial practices of Indigenous displacement and settler encroachment.[69]

The authors both outline a desired outcome in transforming settler consciousness as well as to indicate that there is a gap in our understanding of how to get there. If part of the decolonizing process for settlers is to deconstruct our settler identities, could we begin the process of constructing a *new* identity with a contingent worldview or episteme that is not so incommensurable[70] with Indigenous ways of knowing and being in relationship? To address this gap, I have found the literature on transformational education,[71] and specifically, the *threshold concept framework* and concept of *liminality* helpful in thinking about how to approach my vision of effective anti-colonial and decolonizing pedagogy.[72] As Ray explains:

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[69] Davis et al., "Complicated Pathways" 409.

[70] Please see chapter three for an exploration of incommensurability as it relates to decolonizing identity work.

[71] Flanagan, 2015; Land, 2014; Meyer and Land, 2005; Rattray, 2016; Ross, 2011.

[72] Since beginning my writing, I have noticed a shift towards the use of the term 'anti-colonial' over 'decolonial'. In listening and reading, I have learned that most of the time that I have used the term 'decolonial', my intended meaning is more closely captured by the term 'anti-colonial'. Decolonization is a process and is not complete. The use of the word 'decolonial', especially by settlers - to some - can seem to imply a post-colonality, which is not our reality. I have chosen therefore, to include anti-colonial and decolon*izing* when I refer to pedagogy and my work, and I use decolonial when referring to my praxis, which is by definition a continuous process of learning and action rather than an achieved state. I understand enough of this conversation to know that I have much more to learn about the nuanced differences in these terms, as well as the work required to embody them. Some literature to begin a self-study in this regard could include: Stephanie L. Daza and Eve Tuck. "De/colonizing, (Post)(Anti)Colonial, and Indigenous Education, Studies, and Theories." *Educational Studies (Ames)* 50, no. 4 (2014): 307–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2014.929918; Anila Zainub, eds. Decolonization and Anti-colonial Praxis, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense, 2019) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004404588

> Liminality is viewed as a transformative state in the process of learning in which there is a reformulation of the learner's meaning frame (Schwartzman 2010) and an accompanying shift in the learner's subjectivity (Meyer and Land 2005). A state of comparative uncertainty is encountered 'in which the learner may oscillate between old and emergent understandings' (Cousin 2006, p. 4). Learning thresholds are often the points at which students experience difficulty and are often troublesome as they require a letting go of customary ways of seeing things, of prior familiar views. This entails an uncomfortable ontological shift, as, in many respects, we are what we know.[73]

These uncomfortable ontological shifts in learner subjectivity are echoed in the current discourse of settler colonial studies that speak to the affective dimensions and uncertainty of settler decolonization.[74] As settlers learn from Indigenous voices, histories, and worldviews, and as we unlearn the settler logics and narratives, we must also begin (re)building an identity for ourselves that reflects our transformed understandings.[75] Again, Land articulates:

> There then follows an envisaging (and ultimate accepting) of the alternative version of self which is contemplated through the threshold space, the learner's 'emergent being' as Blackie et al. (2010) portray this. This involves a 're-authoring' of self, according to Ross (2011), or 'undoing the script'.[76]

Throughout my research journey, I uncover and interrogate these potential liminal points on a decolonizing journey with the hope of embodying and contributing to possible answers to the following question:

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[73] Ray Land, "Liminality Close-up," *Think Piece for 7th Higher Education Close-Up Conference (HECU 7)*, 2014.

[74] Boler and Zembylas, 2003; Mackey, 2016.

[75] This does not mean we get to disavow our settler status; our relational identity as Settler Canadians may only shift if our relationships with Indigenous Nations are utterly transformed (see: Snelgrove, Dhammoon, and Corntassle). Similar to the term ally, which can only rightfully be conferred rather than claimed, it is not solely up to us to determine our settler status. This being said, I do believe that we must engage in the work of re-imagining ourselves, grounded in relational accountability and an anti-colonial awareness, so that we may come to our relationships in a transformational way.

[76] Land, "Liminality Close-up," 2014.

> Most importantly, we question how to foster movement toward the next stage of thought and action in the transformation process, in which the realities of settler colonialism and consciousness are understood plainly, and the land and Indigenous sovereignty[77] are central to discussions of reconciliation.[78]

The hard heart work of decolonizing for settlers, then, involves both interrogating and deconstructing our settler sense of identity while concomitantly retracing and reclaiming what we ourselves have lost to these divisive and destructive forces. We must re-author ourselves and our sense of identity and belonging here in a new way.

Remembering our Original Instructions

"If there is every going to be healing, there has to be remembering and then grieving"[79]

Shawn Wilson in his book *Research is Ceremony* notes, "the word Indigenous carries political implications […] Indigenous is inclusive of all first peoples – unique in our cultures – but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world."[80] *What does it mean to be Indigenous?* The United Nations has offered that Indigenous people as a 'group present and occupying a given area prior to the creation of modern states and borders […and as] distinct relative to dominant culture'. I am not Indigenous to

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[77] Sovereignty can be a loaded term, especially in Indigenous-settler contexts. It is beyond the purpose and scope of my thesis to engage with the extensive literature and nuanced debates around Indigenous sovereignty, including the growing body of literature by Indigenous resurgent and legal scholars. Indeed, Dale Turner argues that "the precise content of a theory of Aboriginal sovereignty will remain open, as indeed it should; the meaning of Aboriginal sovereignty in all its diversity is best understood by listening to the myriad voices of Aboriginal peoples themselves." [Dale Turner, *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2006)]. However, I take as fact what Indigenous nations assert – their sovereignty and nationhoods have existed since time immemorial, well before colonization, and continue today. I do take up what I and many others see as the current illegitimacy of the Canadian state's claim to sovereignty over Indigenous peoples throughout this work, especially in my discussion of our treaty relationships. I will later discuss the concept of sovereignty from a Celtic ontological perspective.

[78] Davis et al., "Complicated Pathways," 409.

[79] Sinéad O'Connor, "Famine", released September 1994, track 13 on *Universal Mother*, Chrysalis Records, compact disc.

[80] Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, (Nova Scotia, Canada: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 15–16.

this place; I am a settler here. And yet, I don't *see* myself or my values reflected in 'western culture'; without moving to deny or disavow my settler positionality, I do set out to find ways to refuse it, to transform and transmute it. Where does this leave me? Where are *my* people from? What are my cultural reference points? And how do I fit in here? I have my own experience of and distaste for colonialism, and I believe I share a certain understanding of the world that fits the definition of an Indigenous worldview. But by what right do I identify with these perspectives? What cultural authority can I turn to in order to contextualize and justify my own lived experience with regard to worldview, values, and beliefs about the nature of time or the cosmos? These are perhaps the most daring and yet the boldest of questions for me to pose out loud; questions of identity, belonging, homemaking, connection. These are questions that so many of us are asking ourselves, seeking answers to, whether we are Indigenous or non-Indigenous to these lands. It is my belief that however sensitive this line of inquiry is, it is necessary as it aims directly at the intense vulnerability, confusion, messiness, and contention that lies at the heart of the decolonization and, hopefully, reconciliation journey.

Leroy Little Bear states that "colonization created a fragmentary worldview among Aboriginal peoples. […] [It] left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. Their consciousness became a random puzzle, a jigsaw puzzle that each person has to attempt to understand."[81] Could it be that the same applies to me, a non-Indigenous person, as well? He goes on to explain that:

> Yet all colonial people, both the colonizer and the colonized, have shared or collective views of the world embedded in their languages, stories, or narratives. […] However, this shared worldview is always contested, and this paradox is part of what it means to be colonized. Everyone attempts to understand these different ways of viewing the world and make choices about how to live his or her life. No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again.[82]

[81] Leroy Little Bear, "Jagged Worldviews Colliding," *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (2000), 84–85.

[82] Little Bear, 85.

Little Bear's concepts of a precolonized and colonized consciousness are intriguing. I feel that I have been colonized; as my journey to remember my own ancestral stories and history reveal, my ancestors in Ireland very much were colonized, brutally, and yet, in this place, I am the colonizer, a settler "benefitting from the dispossession and destruction of Indigenous peoples."[83] I am interested in exploring these concepts of 'pre-colonized consciousness' and 'colonized consciousness'; how do they differ? What kind of values and understandings of relational accountability[84] constellate a precolonized consciousness? How can a settler journey to rediscover our own precolonized consciousness help the healing that is so desperately needed in the trilogy of our relationships?

Kimmerer muses generously on settlers' behalf when she asks can settlers become indigenous to place? In essence she is asking if through the critical re-imagining of our sense of identity and belonging in our relationships that stories can foster, can settlers learn/remember our roles and responsibilities to Land and to its human and more-than-human inhabitants? Can we learn to live here as if we intend to stay, she asks, "and where are the stories that will lead the way?"[85]

Many have spoken about the fragmentation that colonialism creates; but whereas settlers are rightly implicated in the damaging effects of settler colonialism, we are rarely asked to consider our own fragmentation and what we ourselves have lost to and within these systems of domination. Acknowledging, as Njoki Wane

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[83] Battell Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 16. According to Battell Lowman and Barker, by its very definition, the concept of Settler as identity is in opposition to the concept of Indigenous as identity, both being intimately relational terms which when interrogated reveal "incommensurable epistemes" (Hiller, 2017). These epistemologies, or ways of knowing, will be explored and interrogated throughout my thesis.

[84] Relational Accountability is a term I have learned from Shawn Wilson in his book *Research is Ceremony* and one which I value deeply as the concept encompasses the Four Rs of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). I would venture to say that my entire thesis is my attempt to more deeply understand, conceptualize, and articulate what this term means to me personally.

[85] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2013.

puts it, the colonial logics that have divided us, "ourselves, our histories, our roots, our humanity,"[86] is a key step in returning ourselves to wholeness and right relationship with one another.

Remembering our original instructions, as Elders have been encouraging settlers to do, provides an ethical entry point to reclaiming, what Georgie Horton-Battiste calls our *human heart knowledge*.[87] Remembering our original instructions can be a potent part of this transformational process**.** I believe that acknowledging ourselves as settlers as well as diasporic subjects,[88] and confronting the grief of our own colonial wounds (both as previously colonized and presently as colonizers) can be profound liminal points for decolonizing settler consciousness. Again, Simpson offers me insight into just how important culture and identity are to living a good life:

> Our culture is beautiful and loving, and it nurtures our hearts and minds in a way that enables us to not just cope, but to live. We always *feel* good after being out in the bush, or after ceremony. I thought of this that day as I walked. I thought of the word *e-yaa'oyaanh*, which means who I am, the way I am living or becoming my identity. In order to have a positive identity we have to be living in ways that illuminate that identity, and that propel us towards mino bimaadiziwin, the good life.[89]

June, in writing about remembering and reclaiming her own European ancestors, shares her vision of the great work of our time:

> Our task is to remember that we are those beautiful Earth People. The ones whose love and prayers were so strong that they could carry 25-ton blue stone monoliths for miles and miles and build the sacred place of prayer known as Stonehenge. That is who we are. When we remember this, the healing of our lineages comes full circle. When we remember this, we will no longer need to borrow spiritual practices from other cultures.[90]

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[86] Njoki Wane, "The place of spirit in the academy," (panel discussion, CIARS Decolonizing Conference, University of Toronto, November 2018).

[87] This is how Georgie Horton-Baptiste defined human heart knowledge: "Human heart knowledge is the stuff that we know intuitively, what we should do, what we should be like, what should seek after. I think what it boils down to is if we dig deep enough, work hard enough, we already have the answer, we already have the answer- that's why I often tell people if you have questions, listen first, listen first and think about what's being said and then, after everything's been said and you still have a question, just ask."

[88] Celia Haig-Brown, "Decolonizing Diaspora: Whose Traditional Land Are We On?," 2012. *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2009).

[89] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 13.

[90] June, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous European Roots," 2018.

I argue that part of the 'sustainability' of a decolonizing praxis for settlers might be to engage in a process of 're-authoring one's self'. Building on Hiller's double spiral model of transforming settler consciousness, I offer that it may be a triple spiral process: *learning*, *unlearning*, as well as co-*creating* a new sense of identity,[91] one that is supported and sustained by an *embodied spiritual practice as a strategy for decolonization,*[92] and is rooted in ontologies/epistemologies that are accountable to the trilogy of my relationships. As we learn about Indigenous epistemologies and realities, and endeavour to unlearn our settler logics, we must also engage in reconstructing a sense of self-in-relation, a new identity and sense of belonging that is relationally accountable to the trilogy of our relationships. Remembering my original instructions and reclaiming as best I can, the land-based epistemology of my ancestors as a diasporic Irish descendant is helping me to do this in a way that feels meaningful and productive.

My thesis rests on the assumption that the embodied spiritual dimension to human identity is vital to holistic wellbeing and argues for "the place of spirituality and spiritual learning in the promotion of transformative education."[93] I believe decolonization to be a profoundly spiritual endeavour; it involves courage, surrender, uncertainty, trust, grief, the transmutation of deeply embedded shame and denial, as well as radical imagination, hope, and love. In essence, to decolonize, is to heal, and as Marie Battiste has said, "we all must become healers in this wounded space."[94]

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[91] It is important to mention here one of my core tenets or guiding principles for this work, which is that "relationships are the ground of our identities." The process of reconstructing or re-authoring our sense of identity and belonging is a co-creative endeavour; it does not happen in the isolation of our own heads. Rather, it is a praxis, an ever-evolving process of inquiry, interaction, and reflection, experimentation, imagination, and story sharing with other beings, both human and more-than-human.

[92] Brunette-Debassige, "From Subjugation to Embodied Self-in-Relation"; Earl Young and Nadeau, "Decolonising the Body: Restoring Sacred Vitality"; Leon and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence."

[93] George J Sefa Dei, "Spiritual Knowing and Transformative Learning," NALL Working Paper # 59, 2002.

[94] Marie Battiste, "Cognitive Justice and Transsystemic Change: Indigenize the Academy," (keynote address, CIARS Decolonizing Conference, UOIT, Toronto, CA, November 9, 2018).

To assist in this journey of embracing the critical uncertainty and discomfort inherent in allowing the very foundations of our settler identity, culture, and society to be so utterly rocked,[95] in learning to act with empowered humility and relational accountability, I believe that we need to build our spiritual stamina[96] as human beings. To encourage the sustainability of a decolonizing praxis, to help grapple with the darkness of our inherited and ongoing colonial legacy, as well as our resultant disconnection and spiritual isolation, we need a vision of ourselves that allows us to imagine ways in which we might transform. This vision of a possible future can find its roots in turning our attention back towards where we have come from, and who we might have been before we came here and forgot so much of our humanity. Doing this hard heart work is in line with Indigenous voices that encourage settlers to work on ourselves first. As Blackie writes,

> If we genuinely want to contribute to the world, if we want to change it, we need to do some work on ourselves first. We need to understand our dysfunctional ways of being, to confront the beliefs and values we have subscribed to which caused both women and this planet to be in this mess in the first place. We need then to discover our own authentic values and ways of being in the world, to wake up to our own creative power as women, conceive our own individual vision for what we might offer to an ailing earth […] It is a journey which leads us firmly back to our own sense of belonging to this earth – but after that, it is a journey which requires us to step into our own power and take back our ancient, native role as its guardians and protectors.[97]

Echoing this profound call and potential for remembering our original instructions, our own ancestral wisdom traditions and sense of responsibility and relationship to Land, June movingly writes:

> Our task is to shake the amnesia. To not be ashamed of our European-ness, but to reclaim our beautiful grandmothers, to reclaim our venerable grandfathers, to reclaim our lost languages, our lost ceremonies, our lost homelands and become one with the Great Sacred Motherland of Europe once again. The European diaspora is spread all throughout the world, searching the planet for something that lives inside.[98]

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[95] Chris Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement: Euro-Canadian Narratives of Coming to Grips with Indigenous Sovereignty, Title, and Rights," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 4 (2017).

[96] My concept of spiritual stamina is explored further in chapter five and is both informed by and an extension of Robin DiAngelo's concept of *racial stamina,* which I examine in chapter three.

[97] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted,* 16–17.

[98] June, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous European Roots," 2018.

Research Questions, Objectives, and Core Arguments

Taking all of the above considerations into account, I have found myself sitting with the following key questions and objectives as my focus of exploration in this study.

Questions

- How can 'remembering our original instructions' contribute to the sustainability of a decolonizing praxis for Settler Canadians?
- What are the potential dimensions and implications of such *hard heart work* in transforming settler consciousness?

Objectives

- To story my journey of decolonizing my own sense of identity and belonging as a diasporic Irish descendant, Settler Canadian/zhaaganaashikwe[99] living in *Michi Saggiig Anishinaabeg* territory.
- To strategically inform the roles and responsibilities of settlers such as myself in our solidarity efforts such as how to support Indigenous resurgence and co-create a sustainable future together.
- To develop my practice in decolonizing and anti-colonial pedagogy as an educator and to contribute to conversations around the role of spirituality in transformative education.

Thesis Map

My study is both a critical auto-ethnography as well as a theoretical engagement with several transdisciplinary literatures, most notably settler colonialism, Indigenous resurgence, and sustainability discourses. I also draw on work from the fields of trauma psychology, transformational education, spirituality,

[99] This is an Anishinaabemowin word in the Odawa dialect that was borrowed from the Scottish word 'Sassenach' which referred to the English (someone from outside the land of the people). It essentially means 'white person' (kwe=woman); it is sometimes a term used with some derision, and I use it here as it is currently a salient word in the language to refer to settlers. As Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel discuss, if we wish to transcend these names, we must transform our relationships.

and Celtic studies. Through an anti-colonial lens, I investigate my own positionality and sense of identity and belonging as a settler woman of Irish ancestry living in Michi Saggiig Anishinaabeg Territory with the aim of mapping the internal landscape of decolonizing identity work.

To accomplish this, I begin in Chapter two by positioning myself in relationship to this work and the land in which I live. I describe the liminal points of my own decolonizing journey thus far and I articulate the values and approaches that serve to guide my understandings and theorizing as I continue the journey in the form of this work. I also describe the ethical considerations taken up in my method of continuing conversations throughout my research journey with Anishinaabe-kweg[100] in my community of Nogojiwanong, who have helped to guide and check my thinking. I describe how the Triskele has come to serve as a multi-dimensional theoretical framework for this work, and how I have moved through a triple-spiral approach of deep listening, critical self-reflection, and engaged action. These methods are my anti-colonial praxis and have included the following in a continuous spiral:

1. *Engagement with diverse literatures* including settler colonial theory, Indigenous resurgence discourses, and sustainability studies.
2. *A process of remembering my original instructions,* of ancestral identity work, diving into my history as a third generation diasporic Irish descendant, and our trove of Celtic stories and cosmologies.
3. Participating in *ongoing dialogue and collective action in community,* and sharing conversations with Anishinaabekweg Elders and friends.

Chapter three explores the settler colonial landscape of current day southern Ontario, as well as theorizations on setter identity, logics, and what I term *the poverty of whiteness*. I reflect on my own lived experiences of anti-colonial work and bring them into conversation with the writings of Indigenous resurgence scholars and with research participants to explore the affective and material nature of decolonization, which is always about the Land. In Chapter four, I trace my own family's colonization story and attempt to excavate more of my ancestral family story. I also explore what my original instructions might be through exploring my

[100] Plural, feminine: the word in Anishinaabemowin for 'the people of this place'.

Celtic epistemologies and reflecting on how these stories can inform a reconceptualization of place-based relationships as well as why this is an important part of the decolonizing journey. Bringing this work back into conversation with present day experiences of a settler search for meaning, in Chapter five, I explore pluralistic definitions of spirituality and articulate the issues of appropriation in the new age, while arguing for the need for embodied spiritual practises that are accountable to the trilogy of our relationships and which contribute to the sustainability of a decolonial praxis. Chapter six is about bringing learning into practice; here I explore my roles and responsibilities as a settler engaged in solidarity with Indigenous resurgence and as an educator committed to anti-colonial and decolonizing pedagogy. In Chapter seven, my concluding chapter, I reflect on my learning while sharing more of the reflections of the Anishinaabe-kweg who have supported me on this journey. I discuss the importance of radical hope for the uncertain future ahead. Nowhere do I feel that I come up with answers, but rather, I find that I am currently in a place of holding and exploring these questions with humility and openness, continuing to sit with my own discomfort and uncertainty, while learning how to cultivate a radical hope through critical action. One theme threaded throughout the work is how our relationships – with one another and with place – are contingent, complicated, and troubled. And yet, there are places of possibility for settlers to transform into, to reconceptualize and embody transformative ways of relating that are more balanced and respectful, of co-becoming and co-creating a deeper sense of belonging with the Land and with the human and more-than-human beings that we share this place with.

This thesis is about what decolonizing my settler self and what healing in the trilogy of my relationships means to me at this point in my own journey. This is both a personal and a vulnerable process, but I believe that there is potential value in sharing it so that we might continue to deepen our understanding of the internal landscape of transforming settler consciousness individually and collectively. My hope is that fellow settlers who read this collection of stories, conversations, and reflections may find something of value to assist them on

their own decolonizing journey. Borrowing a sentiment that Simpson states so succinctly, “I know my thinking on this will change, because the process I am engaged with is transformative.”[101]

[101] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, 25.

Chapter 2: Storienteering[102]

Stories as Method

In imagining an appropriate and strategic way to approach this research and its pedagogical implications, I have been inspired by diverse voices on the transformative importance and healing power of stories.[103] In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer offers a "braid of stories meant to heal our relationship with the world." As she puts it, her work is "an intertwining of science, spirit and story – old stories and new ones that can be medicine for our broken relationship with earth, a pharmacopoeia of healing stories that allow us to imagine a different relationship in which people and land are good medicine for each other."[104] She also notes "as Gary Nabhan has written, we can't meaningfully proceed with healing, with restoration, without re-story-ation."[105] I have been profoundly moved by these stories and the concepts and deeper wisdom contained therein. Kimmerer's work and my responses to it are threaded throughout this thesis.

Similarly, Blackie emphatically asserts that we humans are myth-makers; we make sense of our world and ourselves through the stories we tell ourselves. She writes:

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[102] I use this term with poetic license to indicate how stories can be orienting, instructive, and indispensable on any journey and especially on the journey I am continuing here with this thesis; namely, a decolonizing journey to remember my original instructions as a diasporic Irish descendant and Settler Canadian. I first encountered the term many years ago while working as an outdoor educator with traumatized and vulnerable youth. On a field trip to Brick Works in Toronto, the organization had an experiential day of learning about the history of place on the land through interactive stories combined with mapping/orienteering activities. As an educator interested in embodied, experiential, and land-based pedagogies, this dimension of the term *storienteering* also resonates with me.

[103] Jo-ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit,* (2008); Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants,* (2013); Margaret Kovach, "Conversational Method in Indigenous Research," (2010); Sharon Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted: The Journey to Authenticity and Belonging,* (2016); Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization,* (2016).

[104] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, x.

[105] Kimmerer, 9.

> Change always begins with individuals, and it always begins with imagination. With the mythic imagination. It begins with a different story which succeeds in capturing our imagination more effectively than the now-crumbling story we've been living by for way too long. It begins with a story which speaks to our longing for deeper connection, for deeper meaning. Which reflects the old ways of knowing that are still written in our bones: the knowing that tells us we are part of the great web of life on this planet." [106]

Gary Holthaus has also written about the importance of stories in transforming worldview and culture:

> The difference between a culture of exploitation and a sustainable culture lies more in worldview than in practice. Practice always follows on worldview; change the worldview and a change in practice is soon to follow. Our real worldview is most often expressed in the story we tell ourselves about who we are and what we are about in the world. Our culture needs a new story, one that will lead to that new worldview.[107]

It is in service to this envisioned transformation of the settler logic or worldviews and our colonial, capitalist 'culture' that I perform personal, ancestral, and cultural *story archaeology*.[108] I have also been inspired by Indigenous scholar Jo-ann Q'um Q'um Xiiem Archibald and her book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, in which she explores how story "provides the reader with a framework for thinking critically about one's own historical, cultural, and current context in relation to the story being told by using personal life-experience stories as examples."[109] I have been fortunate to learn a little about how important

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[106] Blackie, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous Roots," *Garrison Institute* (guest blog), October 30, 2018, https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/finding-our-mythic-ground.

[107] Gary Holthaus, *Learning Native Wisdom: What Traditional Cultures Teach Us About Subsistence, Sustainability and Spirituality*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 225.

[108] Pegi Eyers, *Ancient Spirit Rising: Reclaiming Your Roots and Restoring Earth Community*, (Otonabee, Ontario: Stone Circle Press, 2018). A student in one of my seminars that I ran as part of my work with Dr. Lynne Davis in her course *Indigenous Studies Research Methods* at Trent University in 2018-2019 gave me this book. In it Eyers cites various calls by Indigenous Elders for settlers to 'remember our original instructions' and argues for settlers of European heritage to work to decolonize through retracing our own Indigenous traditions. I credit her work with introducing me to the Celtic Reconstructionist movement and some of their resources, namely a few semi-scholarly translations and interpretations of certain ancient Irish manuscripts. As I explore in chapter four and five, the journey to retracing and reclaiming is frought, especially given the prevalance of 'fakelore' and appropriation in the new age. As will become apparent throughout my thesis, I have come to rely heavily at this stage in my journey on the work of Dr. Sharon Blackie and her vetting of scholarly and reliable sources of Irish folklore, stories, myth and tradition. A note on my use of the term 'story archeology': I have borrowed this term from Eyers who seems to use it, as I do, with poetic license to gesture towards the process of 'digging' into our ancestral lineage and how remembering our stories can be a potent part of this journey.

[109] Jo-ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, (Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press, 2008), 32.

Indigenous oral traditions are here and have been remembering how my Irish ancestors had and still maintain a robust oral tradition in Ireland.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her seminal work on decolonizing methodologies states that "a large part of the research stories that need to be told are small stories from local communities across time and space, in other words, the stories that map devastation across generations and across landscapes, or the stories of transformation and hope that can also be tracked in this way."[110] I respectfully draw on her insights into Indigenous research and apply them to my own work which strives to contribute to such stories of transformation and hope, while recognizing that these cannot be told without also mapping the devastation across generations. The narrative of my thesis is one such settler story that seeks to engage with a new kind of imagination, one that calls on us to imagine ourselves differently here on Indigenous lands.

The importance of imagination more generally is an intriguing and resonant theme in relation to this work. As Kimmerer states, "imagination is one of our most powerful tools. What we imagine, we can become."[111] She notes that "as the land becomes impoverished, so too does the scope of [our] vision." Indeed, in relating a story of her students, she writes, "they could not even imagine what beneficial relations between their species and others might look like."[112] I believe, as Kimmerer does, as well as Blackie, that we need new visions for ourselves and our relationship to one another and the earth. Settler colonial scholar Lorenzo Veracini writes, "a new language and imagination are needed; we must become able to represent the decolonisation of settler colonial forms."[113] In order to do this more effectively, we need to reclaim and remember a sense of who we

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[110] Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, Second Edition*, (Zed Books, 2012), 225.

[111] Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, 184.

[112] Kimmerer, 6.

[113] Lorenzo Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies," Settler Colonial Studies 1, no. 1 (2011): 5–6.

are, who we once were, and who we might yet become. Stories can both capture our imagination and help us to imagine a radically different world.

I have oriented myself to current scholarship on transforming settler consciousness and its relationship to narrative in part through the work of Hiller. She offers the following descriptions of the settler stories that she engages with:

> They are also stories of interrogating guilt: not only to pull apart its production and to challenge its legitimacy, but also to use it as a form of critical intelligence regarding our deepest investments, both in settler colonial mindsets and privilege and in our own desires for an ethical place to stand. These stories speak as well of spiritual unsettlement: more than simply learning about or even from the spiritual traditions of Indigenous peoples, these are narratives of being spiritually undone in relation to Indigenous peoples and their relations to land.[114]

In centering myself and my own thinking in the telling of my settler story, I am cognizant that, as Hiller has pointed out, "some scholars raise concerns regarding the ways in which white settler discourse works to re-center whiteness." Furthermore, I am aware that "decolonization scholars – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – caution against projects that re-center non-Indigenous interests and identities in general and stoke a self-serving pre-occupation with settler perspectives and emotions in particular." In her own work, Hiller grapples with this contention and yet states the following:

> While recognizing this as an ever-present danger, I approach these stories of grappling with Indigenous sovereignty, territory, and rights not as narratives of redemption, but as imperfect and unfinished yet critical resources for envisaging and working through the trap that dominantly positioned settlers find ourselves in under settler colonialism.[115]

Similarly, my own narrative is neither a story of redemption nor a plea for exceptionality.[116] Rather, it is my attempt to continue to do the hard heart work of transforming my own consciousness and to map the internal landscape of such decolonizing work while narrating what this might look and feel like. I explore what it necessarily entails and what I am finding is working for me – in order to better commit myself to it, as well as to

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[114] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 11.

[115] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 5.

[116] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," (2012); Carol Lynne D'Arcangelis, "The Solidarity Encounter Between Indigenous Women and White Women in a Contemporary Canadian Context." (2015); Chris Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement,: (2017).

invite more of my fellow settlers along on this journey. I am listening intently and have heard the instruction that settlers must focus on ourselves first, to get right with ourselves and to educate ourselves first. Since settler logics and systems are the problem, it is important we both recognize and address our problem(s) for ourselves and with each other. Given that I have been privileged to learn so much from Indigenous friends and teachers, I understand that it is my responsibility to use this knowledge in a good way – to pass it on in service of healing and all life. This work seeks to "unsettle the ideational terrain of the settler colony" and to suggest transformational avenues to do so, thus "opening possibilities for the emergence of a collaborative politics of decolonization."[117]

My understanding of decolonization develops through listening to Indigenous resurgence scholars as well as Indigenous people in my community. From Elliot, I understand that decolonization

> carries distinctive historical and political content, requiring profound material changes to the Canadian landscape including (but not limited to) rematriation of stolen and other illegitimately appropriated lands and waters; substantial reparations for injustices inflicted and associated patterns of harm and suffering; and recognition and reinstatement of self-determining Indigenous political authority and legal jurisdiction. To strip the term of this radical meaning can only be to support interests of continued colonial domination.

I also accept his contention that:

> Members of settler society should be under no illusions in this regard as (or if) they take up opportunities for engagement extended through resurgence. To participate in a process of unsettling norms and exploring alternatives does not automatically render oneself any less complicit in perpetuating colonial injustice, and it emphatically does not render the experience of such injustice any less acute or real. It can, however, better demonstrate a commitment to tackling the complexities involved in decolonizing the Canadian landscape.[118]

It is in this spirit of demonstrating my commitment to tackling the complexities of decolonization and to healing our relationships to one another and the earth and waters that I offer this work.

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[117] Elliott, "Indigenous Resurgence," 63. It is important to note that while I center Indigenous resurgence scholars in my learning journey to conceptualize my own roles and responsibilities to an anti-colonial pedagogy, as Leanne Simpson reminds, "there is virtually no room for white people in resurgence. Whiteness is not centred in resurgence." Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*, (U of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[118] Elliott, "Indigenous Resurgence," 80.

Situated within Sustainability Studies and informed by the field's concept of 'wicked problems,'[119] I take a transdisciplinary approach to the complex and interconnected issues facing us in this time. In order to address these issues and as an attempt to employ a *radical imagination*, I draw from diverse literatures including trauma psychology, transformative education pedagogies, Indigenous environmental science, climate communication science and notions of spirituality. I also cannot help but be informed by my many years as a teacher and outdoor experiential educator, as well as by the time I continue to spend with the land, including the Waters, Rocks and Trees, who are some of my most profound teachers. My study is both a critical auto-ethnography and a theoretical engagement with settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence discourses. Through an anti-colonial lens, I investigate my own positionality and sense of identity and belonging as a settler woman and diasporic Irish descendant living in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory.

My conceptualization of how to embark upon this learning journey as a thesis project evolved through my own self-reflection and time spent on the land. It has evolved out of and through my relationships in community, my own sensibilities, my developing understanding of my Celtic epistemologies, and my connection with Spirit. My study design and approach are naturally personal, relational, and emergent, and involves the sharing of continual dialogue and stories as well as attentive listening. As I progressed through my learning with the various literatures, I found resonance in the work of several scholars that have reinforced and illuminated my choices. As a non-Indigenous scholar on a journey to dismantle the systems of settler colonialism and contribute to healing in the trilogy of my relationships, I have been informed by the work of Carlson on anti-colonial methodologies in settler colonial studies. As she states,

> Settler colonial research which would promote anti-colonial, decolonial, and solidarity content and aims must occur in relationship and dialogue with Indigenous peoples, involve meaningful consultation with

[119] Valerie Brown, John Harris, and Jacqueline Russell, eds. *Tackling Wicked Problems: Through the Transdisciplinary Imagination*, (London, Washington: Earthscan, 2010). The authors of this volume draw on the definition provided by Rittell and Webber (1973) and state that "a wicked problem is a complex issue that defies complete definition, for which there can be no final solution, since any resolution generates further issues, and where solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time. […] Rather than limiting the focus to any one avenue of inquiry, *the requirement here is to be open to different ways of thinking, to use imagination to the full, and be receptive to new ideas and new directions that match the times*," 4, *emphasis my own.*

> and oversight by Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers, and draw upon work by Indigenous scholars."[120]

I am very fortunate to have ongoing relationships with Indigenous colleagues, teachers, neighbours, and friends. Gaining some of their insight and perspectives on the work that I do as a settler educator, academic, and activist is vital to the relational accountability that I seek in my community as it assists me in revealing my own blind spots and strengthens my own praxis and reflexivity in my anti-colonial and solidarity work. In the envisioning and formulation of this project and through its unfolding, the insights of these colleagues, teachers, and friends were influential. I have endeavoured to center Indigenous voices and the work of Indigenous scholars as the foundation of my work.

Kovach's writing on the *Conversational Method in Indigenous Research* provided me with the theoretical grounding to proceed with my intended conversational approach with research participants in a good way. As she states, "the conversational method evokes stories, our own and others." Interpersonal and relational preparation is important as "research with Indigenous peoples is holistic for both researcher and participant: one respects self and others by being prepared."[121]

> The conversation itself helped to deepen relationships with the research participants who also comprised my collegial community. In all cases, participants shared stories from their lives resulting in a highly contextualized, powerful source of knowledge. In receiving the gift of story, I was ever mindful of the responsibility inherent in research and the reciprocity it entails.[122]

My methods follow a fluid, non-linear, triple spiral path. They have involved: firstly, a careful review of and engagement with current discourses in sustainability, settler colonialism, Indigenous resurgence, and scholarship on Indigenous-non-Indigenous alliances as they pertain to my research focus; secondly, 'remembering my original instructions', I document and reflect on my ancestral investigations, tracing my own

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[120] Elizabeth Carlson, "Anti-Colonial Methodologies and Practices for Settler Colonial Studies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, n.4 (2017): 501.

[121] Margaret Kovach, "Conversational Method in Indigenous Research," *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 5, no.1 (2010): 47.

[122] Kovach, 46.

colonization story, and mapping my learning in the rediscovery and reclaiming of a Celtic worldview through stories that inform me of my contract with the land; and thirdly, bringing what I am learning back into dialogue with the women who agreed to be research participants to address, consider, and respond to potential limiting as well as transformative discourses in anti-colonial identity work.

The conversations with women in my community of Peterborough/Nogojiwanong served to guide and check my theorizing and have helped to distill key learnings in illuminating transformative avenues for co-creating safe yet unsettling spaces in decolonizing alliances. The women who offered support on my research journey in the form of these ongoing conversations are all known to me through our solidarity work together, in a teaching and learning as well as a collegial context, and on a more personal basis. As such, I found Kovach's reflections on the implications of this informative:

> For the conversational method, the relational factor – that I knew participants and they knew me – was significant. In each case I had known or met participants prior to the research. With this method the researcher must have a certain amount of credibility and trustworthiness for people to participate in the research. With more trust there is the likelihood of deeper conversations, and consequently the potential for richer insights to the research question. The conversations were dialogic, relational, and reflective. As a result, I found that I had to work to be an active listener. As an active listener and participant in the research, the process felt less extractive and one-sided (even with the given that research can inevitably be an extractive process). Because I was a co-participant, my own self-knowledge deepened with each conversation.[123]

Each of these women has generously agreed to be acknowledged by name and to share with you some of what they shared with me throughout this work; they are Dr. Elder Shirley Williams, Elder Dorothy Taylor, Georgie Horton-Baptiste, and Marjolaine LaPointe. Throughout the text as I discuss various interrelated topics, I weave passages or direct quotes from the conversations we had together and credit them by name. Since the research participants are known to me, our sharing on these topics as well as my learning from them has no defined beginning or end. For the purposes of this research process however, we did arrange to share more focused conversations related specifically to this research. Guiding questions centered around deepening mutual understandings of the decolonization process, academic theory vs. 'reconciliation-on-the-ground' in community,

[123] Kovach, "Conversational Method in Indigenous Research," 46.

innovative avenues for transforming settler consciousness, issues of language and identity, as well as the spiritual dimensions of decolonizing education and sustainability efforts. These more focused conversations were audio-recorded for purposes of accuracy and took place in April 2019 at either my home or theirs, whichever was most convenient or preferable for them. I offered my sema (tobacco) in acknowledgement that what I was asking of them was to share some of their knowledge with me. I provided a meal and we talked while we shared food.

Ongoing collaboration and engagement between research participants and myself as researcher-in-relation[124] was inherent to this study's design. The women who helped me on this journey through our conversations were invited to participate in and oversee all stages of the project and to guide its progress to the extent that they were available. Our dialogues were intended to be ongoing and therefore, supporters had opportunities to review text and confirm the accuracy of how I was capturing and relating to their knowledge and perspectives. As I attempt to decolonize my own thinking and ways of doing, I do not produce typical 'western' results, but rather a deepening of my own personal understandings as well as more questions. Participants had access to my text and continue to retain ownership and control of the knowledge they shared with me. As Kovach notes, "in using a conversational method that is guided by an Indigenous paradigmatic approach, I struggle in decontextualizing and fragmenting the data […] Within Indigenous methodologies, the organization of data for purposes of analysis requires on-going conversation."[125] I too struggled with fragmenting the sharing and perspectives of my research supporters into 'data'. I chose instead to weave their sharing and insights throughout my own narrative and have responded to it as an embodied way-of-doing, demonstrating my ongoing commitment to continue to listen differently. Taking back my writing and thoughts to each individual to demonstrate how I am responding to and relating to their sharing took place at the

[124] Kovach, "Conversational Method in Indigenous Research," 2010.

[125] Kovach, 47.

convenience of participants, mainly in May of 2020, at which time they gave me consent as to whether and how they wished to be acknowledged, quoted, or referenced in the final draft.

In each of our conversations, we spoke about the ongoing and inter-relational nature of this decolonizing approach to transformational learning through dialogue:

> Marjolaine: *Conversations are inter-relational too. So it's not like I'm coming here and having lunch and doing the thing and then am gone. Like, I have a responsibility now to part of the work that you're doing now.*
> Me: *And I have a responsibility to you. And that's part of this.*
> Marjolaine: *Yeah. So we'll just keep - because it's a conversation - we are inter-related. So we'll just keep going.*

Each participant also reminded me in their own way of the importance of storytelling, of sharing truth in ways that embody patience and faith and the willingness to keep going in this work. Here is what Elder Dorothy Taylor offered:

> *And you have to do it through storytelling, not by lecturing. Not as a lecturer, but as a storyteller. That's how we used to –the way our Indigenous teachings - we don't tell people what to do, we don't even tell them how to do things. We just tell them a story and you have to figure it out yourself. And it takes longer than maybe one lecture for it to sink in. It might not even be within the generation. You just have to have faith that what you planted will become something. Have patience...and faith.*

A Triple Spiral Framework

I utilize the Irish cosmology of Land, Sea, Sky as a poetic and conceptual basis for organizing this work. In keeping with my own gifts and impulse as poet, and now grounded in a deepening understanding of the central importance of poetry to Irish worldview, I offer poems throughout this work. The *An Thríbhís Mhòr* (The Great Triple Spiral) or *Triskele* is the symbolic framework threaded throughout my approach to this transdisciplinary topic. Much like the Medicine Wheel is a geometric symbol through which many layers of teachings and understandings can be illustrated, as I have been working with it, the Triskele continues to reveal different teachings and meanings to me, helping me to conceptualize my emerging worldview as I try to remember my original instructions.

The three arms of the spiral represent many things, one of which, for the purpose here, can be considered as the three areas of study that are woven together in my research, and spiral back on one another, always

interconnected and informed by each other. Growing through the centre of the Triskele is the *bile* (sacred tree/tree of life), the transformative bridge between all three worlds, and which supports all of life. It is my contention that these three areas are inextricably inter-connected and at the centre is *Life, Community, Belonging, Home* – it is the heart of what it means to be a well and ethical human being in right, respectful, reciprocal relationship with self, others, and the more-than-human-world.

My triple spiral process as well as my understanding of the trilogy of our relationships to self, others, and land is a concept that has grown out of my own journey to remember and reclaim my Celtic ancestral wisdom tradition. The teachings embedded and arising out of the *Triskele* have synergistically guided my thinking and research process as have my learnings from Indigenous voices and my continuing lived experience in solidarity. It is challenging to accurately delineate or compartmentalize the concepts layered within the Triskele as I understand them for the purposes of this research, but the following are some for consideration:

1. LAND- Truth/Ecology/Environment/Sustainability/Restoration/Rejuvenation/Here and Now
2. SEA- Honour/Identity/Roles and Responsibilities/Sense of Place/Ancestors/Personal Healing/Past
3. SKY- Courage/Treaties/Decolonization/Radical Imagination/Restitution/Reconciliation/Future

According to Irish cosmology, the unifying force that moves throughout each realm and dwells within the centre of each of us as inspiration is the fire within, Spirit. In our conversations, Georgie defined spirit as "that inner light that feeds you" whereas Dorothy and I discussed her concept of "spiritual courage" and the connection and unity of all things, belonging, right relationship, Home.

Mind Like Water

Recently I was gifted a mala made up of tiny, round tiger's eye beads. On the silver circle, which makes up what is known as the guru bead, is an engraving; it reads '*mind like water'*. This simple phrase contains many teachings, but in relation to describing how I go about telling the story of my research journey, it speaks to the spiralling nature of my narrative and the embodied and theoretical way in which I come to understand the interwoven and interdependent threads of my research topic. In the original inspiration for the direction of my

thesis work, I have been very much informed by remembering my own Celtic epistemology, and continue to work along a triple spiral path, moving through my research like water, which eddies and swirls back into pockets of literature and reflection as a continuous thread of narrative flows forward. The opportunity to learn more about how to listen to and communicate with the Spirit of Water, to walk for and sing to her, has been extended to me and many others by Anishinaabe-kweg such as Grandmother Josephine Mandamin-baa, Dr. Elder Shirley Williams, Liz Osawamick, Georgie Horton-Baptiste and the work of Nibi Emosaawdamajig, of which I have been a part since moving to Michi Saagiig Nishinaabeg territories in 2016. I am so grateful for their continued example and teachings which have brought me into deeper relationship with Nbi. Like Water (Nibi, *Uisce)* moves, my concept of time and the nature of personal and spiritual evolution, my writing is non-linear in its design and execution. In keeping with my understanding of the holistic and circular nature of thought and time, these chapters were not conceived of, or written in, chronological order.

Arms of the Riverbed

My understanding of how water in a river flows forward and finds its momentum includes a consideration of the boundaries of the riverbed. The banks and foundation of the river hold the shape the water takes and thus influences how it flows and moves and where it goes. I am deepening my understanding of my Irish ancestral tradition, which tells me that as a woman, I have a responsibility to speak for the water and the land. Anishinaabe-kweg have taught me this through the Water Walks and they remind me of this through the sharing of their teachings. I am grateful for their embodied taking up of this responsibility here on their lands. I am deeply inspired and informed by the teachings I receive from Anishinaabe-kweg with whom I walk for the Water. My spirit intuitively understands the sacredness of Water and always has. I have been swimming in and turning to Water since I was a little girl. She, Water, Nibi, *Uisce*, is the place I go continually, each day, to find refuge, reprieve, healing, clarity, and renewal. Water teaches me. She has gifted me this understanding and

metaphor to articulate my understanding of how to move through my research journey, and how to tell my research story.[126]

The arms of the riverbed give shape to the fluidity of my thoughts here and are threefold; they are tenets, which guide and undergird my thinking.

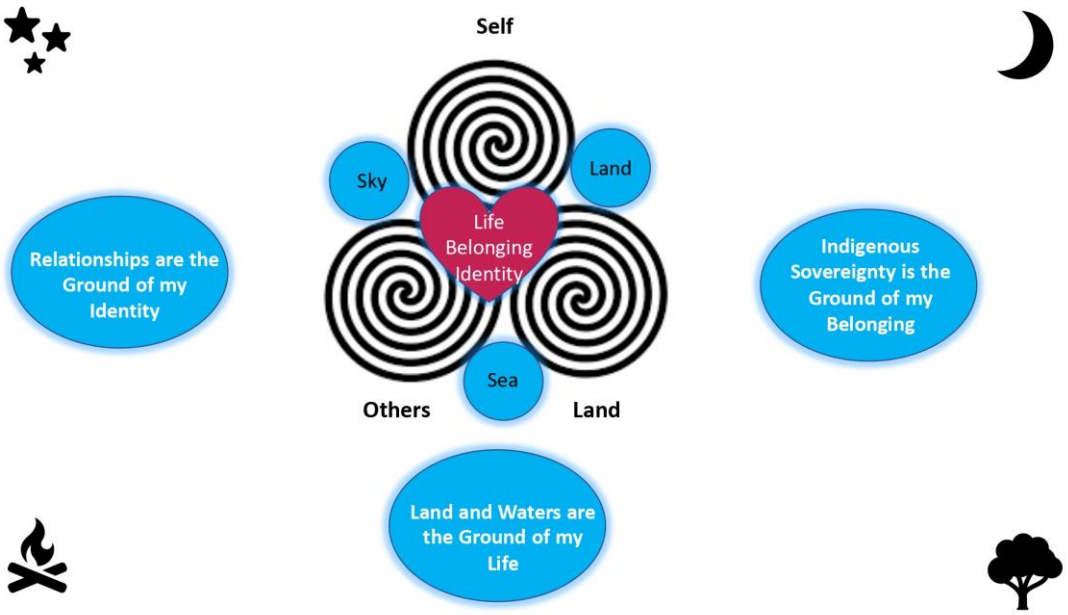
- ***Earth and Water are the ground of my life*** forms the foundation over which I move. Earth and Water are sacred and any conversation we are having must center this truth. Everything we do must protect and uphold the wellbeing of the Earth and Waters and thus, the wellbeing of all Life.
- ***Indigenous sovereignty is the ground of my belonging*** is one bank of the river, reminding me always that everywhere I go here in this place, I am living in Indigenous sovereignty,[127] and therefore, I have responsibilities to listen, to respect, and to be accountable to what this means.
- ***Relationships are the ground of my identity*** is the other riverbank. I understand that as human beings, we are relational creatures. I cannot heal these relational wounds of mistrust and injustice in isolation nor can I (re)create an identity for myself in the absence of my relationships with other human and other-than-human beings. Kimmerer, in writing about the wisdom of the Three Sisters and their teachings on relationships, offers: "the gifts of each are more fully expressed when they are nurtured together than

[126] This metaphor or personification of the river is something that occurred naturally to my consciousness and that I use with poetic license. I like to think of the arms of the riverbed as akin to the arms of a mother, guiding, protecting, and instructing me on my journey, creating natural boundaries for my exploration. It is important to make clear that I am not attempting to relay Nishnaabeg teachings about rivers here, but rather exercising my own imagination to help me make sense of my own embodied spiritual understandings.

[127] I have borrowed and adapted this assertion from Fiona Nicoll, a critical whiteness scholar in Australia, whose work I explore in chapter three. The word 'sovereignty' means different things to different people in different contexts. The western idea of sovereignty is itself a colonial concept, and can include notions of power over, authority, and nationhood. As I explain in chapter four, my ancestral Irish understanding is that Sovereignty is the Land herself. It is not up to me to determine or define what Indigenous sovereignty is, but what I have gleaned from listening to resurgence scholars is that it may include ideas of self-determination and autonomy, freedom from the oppressive settler colonial state, a revitalization of languages and a return to cultural lifeways. I recognize that Indigenous sovereignty is currently not a lived reality within the Canadian state, and I am attempting to challenge this wrong by asserting what is more true. As Nicoll discusses, this assertion is meant to turn the settler gaze upon ourselves and to challenge settler notions of sovereignty.

alone. In ripe ears and swelling fruit, they counsel us that all gifts are multiplied in relationship. This is how the world keeps going."[128]

Taken together, these arms of the riverbed reveal to me the imperative of fostering good relationships of respect, reciprocity, gratitude, peace, and friendship with all my relations, human, other-than-human, seen and unseen. This thesis is part of my story of how I am dreaming this into being for myself, the world I inhabit, and the generations that will follow me. Below is an illustration of some of the layers of meaning that I am working with throughout this work:



Who I am in Relation to Where I Come From

Aaniin, Boozhoo
Gaawiin aapiji ninitaa-ojibwemosii
Aleyah Erin Lennon nindizhinikaaz
Zaginaashii-kwe ndaaw
Ireland ndoonjibaa
Ndoo-demag kenjigazgazook giw-gaa-n-taawbiinchejigejig
Nogojowanong, Michi Saagiig Anishinaabegogamig migwe dodaa

[128] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 140.

I wish to introduce myself in the language of the place where I live as a sign of my respect for the Anishinaabeg nations on whose lands I am living. I wish to demonstrate my commitment to living in a good way and to contributing in every way I can to healing our relationships together and to supporting the resurgence and flourishing of Indigenous sovereignty, cultures, life ways, and languages. I endeavour to learn Anishinaabemowin because it contains the melody and wisdom of this place. Kimmerer in describing her journey to relearning and reclaiming her ancestral Potawatomi language offers, "our language sounds like wind in the pines and water over rocks, sounds our ears may have been more delicately attuned to in the past, but no longer."[129] I say gchi-miigwech to Dr. Elder Shirley Williams and Liz Osawamick, both phenomenal language teachers, for helping me with the spelling and pronunciation of the above Anishinaabemowin introduction.

I also wish to introduce myself in my ancestral language of *an Ghaeilge* (Irish). As I have been learning, language contains the culture of a people and shapes how we conceive and perceive of the world around us. As Marjolaine LaPointe shared with me, "*In my journey as a language learner, that's one thing that I've come to understand...everything is in the language. Go back to a language, everything that you need in order to connect to that way is embedded in the language. You have to engage with it*." The place-based wisdom encoded within Indigenous languages contains the heart and soul of a people, which is why colonial powers made speaking one's Indigenous languages illegal; this happened here on Turtle Island under the Canadian government, and it happened under the English in Ireland. These languages must be protected and maintained, not least because of their power to transform our consciousness and our relationship with the land. Again, Marjolaine offers: "*So for me, the notions of spirituality as they relate to climate change, when you speak your Indigenous language and you know it, you know the bones of it, you cannot engage blithely with processes that contribute to climate change. Like, you can't because your way of thinking, your mind, has literally re-wired itself*."

[129] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 23.

I endeavour therefore, to find ways of committing myself to learning both *an Ghaeilge* and Anishinaabemowin more effectively and to allowing the melody and wisdom contained within each of these Indigenous languages to continue to shape my ability to think and feel and make sense of my place in creation.

Dia Dhuit
Is mise Aleyah Erin Lennon
Is de bhunadh na hÉireann mé.
Thuig mo shinsir go bhfuil an talamh naofa agus go raibh orthu meas a thabhairt don saol ar fad.
Ba óna gcuid scéalta a d'fhoghlaim mé go bhfuil orm, agus mé i mo bhean, labhairt thar ceann an uisce.
Rugadh agus tógadh mé i gcríocha Aninishinaabeg.
Tá mé i mo chónaí i gcríoch Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg.
Go raibh maith agaibh uilig, a ghaolta.[130]

Hello (May God be for and with you)
My name is Aleyah Erin Lennon
I am of the tribe/folk of Ireland (or) My origins are in Ireland.
My ancestors understood that the land is sacred/holy and that it was upon them to give respect for all the things in the world.
From their/my (share of) stories, an intrinsic, latent knowledge awoke in me that it is on me (my duty) as a woman to speak on behalf of the water.
I was born and was raised in the territories of the Anishinaabeg.
I am in my place of living in the territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg.
Thank you (It is my hope that it be good with) all my relatives.

This section is to relate to you more about who I am, where I come from, and therefore, how I am situated within this work, opening myself up to you in the spirit of vulnerability and honesty so that we might understand one another more deeply. Shawn Wilson in his book *Research Is Ceremony* reminds me that locating oneself in the research process by giving a detailed account of one's background is "required by Indigenous axiology and methodology of relational accountability."[131] The concept of *relational accountability* is the

[130] I am grateful to Dr. Sharon Blackie and her husband David Knowles for generously inviting me to send them what I wanted to say, and who assisted me with this translation. David went to the added trouble of including within what he sent me several teachings of our word's deeper meanings as well as a recording so I could hear and practice the pronunciation. When I hear my ancestral language spoken, I get very emotional. I know not what it stirs deep within me every time I hear the haunting and lilting melody of my ancestral language, but I suspect it has to do with the profound longing I feel for a deeper connection to my ancestors and for an enduring and ethical sense of belonging and home. Marjolaine and I discussed how hearing our Indigenous languages can be emotionally profound.

[131] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony,* 10.

foundational principle of my work and my life. Relational accountability is important to me personally and to the paradigm of Indigenous research set out by Wilson and others, as it contains inherently the values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. Respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are the values that guide my intentions on this journey of inquiry. Wilson echoes the sentiments of Eber Hampton (1995) when he states that, "it is not possible to be accountable to your relationships if you are pretending to be objective."[132] It is not my intention, therefore, to be objective in this research process, but rather to dedicate myself with integrity to a better understanding of myself and to my place in this research. From this place of understanding, I seek avenues to greater accountability, justice, understanding, and unity with all my relations, whom I consider to be all beings on this planet including Water, Trees, Stones, as well as those unseen Beings who live in the realm of Spirit or the Otherworld.[133] My aim is primarily to be sincere in my dedication to challenge my own concepts in the context of those of others and to speak with the truth of my heart and spiritual knowing.

Celia Haig-Brown relates that "the physically embodied and historically located self of the researcher is always an integral part of any research s/he conducts."[134] As Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel state, "this self-location exercise is a political practice." Furthermore, Jeff Corntassel makes the following point about the importance of understanding and stating one's positionality and relationship to land when he writes:

> What does it mean to acknowledge the Indigenous territory you're on? Are you coming to community, place-based relationships as a settler or as an Indigenous person? Additionally, how are you entering Indigenous homelands – as an invited guest, uninvited, trespasser, visitor, resident, immigrant, refugee etc.?[135]

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[132] Wilson, 101.

[133] The story in the Prologue of this thesis hints towards the all-encompassing importance of the Otherworld to the Irish worldview. In Chapter 4, I explore this in more depth.

[134] Haig-Brown, "Decolonizing Diaspora," 13.

[135] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," 4.

I am writing as a third generation Settler Canadian woman of Irish ancestry who has lived her entire life on Anishinaabeg territories in the Nayaano-nibiimaang Gichigamiin (the Great Lakes) region.[136] My family on both sides are Irish descendants who originally came here (on my father's side) as refugees of the English-imposed Great Famine, and (on my mother's side) as very poor immigrants fleeing the continued colonial-induced violence and poverty in our homelands. My maternal grandfather, grandpa Peter, arrived here in 1914 from Dublin in his mother Francis' womb. As far as I know, having been chimneysweepers for several generations in the English-established Dublin slums, they were fortunate enough to be able to escape and to come to these lands in order to start a new life. My great-grand parents, with their children, settled in the London area, in Nishinaabeg territory, home to the Chippewas of the Thames Munsee-Delaware Nation, however, it is not clear if they understood or were even aware that they had moved to the traditional territories of Indigenous Nations who were being subjected to genocide by the Canadian government.[137]

How the Land has Shaped Me

As Leon and Nadeau write, "identifying our social location and genealogy in relation to land is a first step in a decolonizing process."[138] I have begun to relate my understanding of my social location and genealogy in this chapter and this is something I explore further throughout my thesis. One of the main threads woven throughout this story speaks to the vitality of understanding myself in relationship to the earth beneath my feet, to the land I live on every day. The idea of an embodied, meaningful, and reciprocal relationship to land, and the general lack of such a living relationship on the part of settlers seems to speak to an opportunity, a place of possibility, to begin/continue the work of transforming settler consciousness by inviting a deeper sense of

[136] Decolonialatlas, 2019.

[137] I explore more of this story and its implications for my sense of identity and responsibilities in Chapter 4, *Footprints and Echoes of my Ancestors*.

[138] Leon and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence," 60.

connection to and respect for place and how land shapes, nurtures, teaches, and holds us.[139] In relating a tragic story of a man who had no connection to natural places, Kimmerer invites us to consider, "what is the place that you understand best? That you know best and knows you in return?"[140] Similarly, Blackie, in her work on deepening our intimate, reciprocal connection to the earth beneath our feet, encourages us to ask 'how has place impacted us individually?'

In the fall of 2018, I travelled to the Rowe Center in Massachusetts to spend a weekend listening to Blackie share her work. Much like Kimmerer does in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Blackie poses questions, shares stories, and offers activities that encouraged me to reflect on how land has shaped me and to consider the implications of my relationship with the lands that I have called home. I gathered her questions as gifts, as invitations, in my metaphorical basket, which I took home with me to ponder further. One exercise included *mapping my places of significance* and telling my own story of becoming to myself through the lens of *centering the land* and reinforcing my understanding that the landscape is alive, with agency, in co-participation with me and my meaning-making. This is something that I have always understood intuitively since childhood and have been fortunate enough to nurture in myself and others through my work as a wilderness guide and outdoor educator, and my lifelong journeying as a dreamer, singer, and writer.

I was raised on the territory of the Aayadowaad "people who live in long houses," in a settler town known as Newmarket, Ontario. As Elder Gidigaa Migizi Doug Williams relates, the Huron-Wendat people "were good friends and allies of the Nishnaabeg"[141] who were permitted to live on Nishnaabeg lands. They eventually became part of the Mississauga Nishnaabe nations with whom the government signed Treaty 3 in

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[139] Again, as I explore across all chapters in this work, this sentiment is *not* to be construed with 'naturalizing settlers to the land', something that is one of the main goals of settler colonialism, and which necessitates the erasure of Indigenous peoples.

[140] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 125.

[141] Gidigaa Migizi Doug Williams, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This is Our Territory*, (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2018): 37.

1805 and the Williams Treaty in 1923. I also lived and went to school for many years in their territory, now known as Toronto. In 2011, I moved to the northwestern shore of Anishinaabewi-gichigami[142] and lived for five years in the territory of Fort Williams First Nations. It was here that I deepened my understanding of myself and my responsibilities through the relationships I had with Anishinaabeg and Cree people. I minored in Indigenous Studies and had the opportunity to learn from Indigenous scholars, Elders, and friends in my community. As part of my undergraduate course work, I was fortunate to conduct research with and for First Nations on several occasions along the north shore of Lake Superior and learned much through our conversations and collaborations. I participated in many Indigenous-led community actions, walks, and demonstrations, as well as art installations, film festivals, cyclical feast days, work on the land, and sweats offered to the public. I was hired by Bruce Beardy and Dr. Sandra Wolf to support the Odaminowin language and culture camp run by the Aboriginal Education department at Lakehead University, where I first met Liz Osawamick, and I completed my teaching placements for my Bachelor of Education in classrooms where the majority of students were from First Nations communities. My time in Thunder Bay taught me many, many things and although it may be impossible as well as inappropriate to list them all here, I can offer three particular insights that endure, and which are relevant to the development of this thesis.

One: There is a significant awareness and knowledge gap on the part of white Settler Canadians regarding Indigenous people. Indigenous peoples and nations are vibrant, strong, and resilient; despite a centuries-long effort on the part of the settler state to oppress, dispossess, and eradicate them, they have retained a vast store of their identities, wisdoms, languages, and lifeways. Furthermore, they have held fast to their spirits and their original instructions, and the kindness and respect that many continue to hold out to me, zhaaganaashikwe though I may be, is profoundly humbling. Many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are extremely skilled doctors, lawyers, scholars, politicians, teachers, filmmakers, designers, farmers, hunters, artists, venture capitalists, writers, and any number of things that the mainstream media and public education seem to largely ignore. Indigenous peoples deserve my utmost respect and admiration.

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[142] Decolonialatlas, 2019.

Two: That being said, there are many Indigenous communities and individuals who are hurting and who have been horribly wounded by ongoing colonialism. In many places, their presence has been deliberately erased, or forgotten. Racism, ugly, horrible, violent, and sometimes deadly racism against Indigenous peoples continues to exist. In witnessing an array of examples of racism perpetrated by police, by certain teachers, by 'average' citizens, both first hand and through the stories of some of my Indigenous friends, I learned that racism is *much* more prevalent and insidious than I previously understood, and seems to be predicated on sheer ignorance, profound fear, and inherited notions of superiority on the part of (mostly white) Settler Canadians. In Thunder Bay, where most northern community teens must come in order to attend high school, the colonial divide and the chasm of privilege between settlers and Indigenous peoples is apparent.[143]

Three: It is upon me to take up my responsibility to continue to educate myself and to educate others about the reality of our shared history and ongoing realities here. It is upon me to do my duty to listen and to engage in actively supporting Indigenous voices, peoples, and agendas in the way that I am invited to and expected to by the nations on whose lands I am living my life. It is upon me to recognize and acknowledge how much hurt and loss have occurred here as a result of contact between our peoples, to feel my way through the very upsetting and uncomfortable feelings that come up when I let myself grasp this, as I learn what I must learn, and do what I must do. It is upon me to contribute in every way I can to our collective healing process.

In 2016, after completing my undergraduate degree and Bachelor of Education, I moved here where I currently live in Nogojiwanong, in the territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, which Gidigaa Migizi teaches "means the people that live at the mouths of rivers." As he writes, "the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg have been here in Ontario for a long, long, time and are descendants of the people that were living here in the time of glaciation, 8,000 years ago and beyond."[144] The place I am currently living in is covered by Treaty 20 and the

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[143] For an unsettling account of part of this ongoing story, see Tanya Talaga's *Seven Fallen Feathers*, as well as her 2018 CBC Massey Lecture series *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward.*

[144] Gidigaa Migizi, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg,* 30–31.

Williams Treaties, both of which were devastating to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, their lands and way of life, and which were the result of extremely unjust intimidation and starvation tactics on the part of the Canadian government.

In each of these places that I have called home, I have been and continue to be an uninvited guest. I acknowledge that to many, as a person who is not Indigenous to Turtle Island, I am seen as part of the continued colonial occupation of Indigenous homelands here. In truth, I am, although I very much wish not to be. My sense of identity and belonging on these lands and my understanding of what my responsibilities are continue to deepen as I listen to Indigenous voices and their understandings of our treaty relationships, and to non-Indigenous teachers who have spent more time than I listening in such a way.

The Haudenosaunee Nation also holds vast traditional knowledge and teachings that have become central to my own understanding of treaties and my responsibilities on this land.[145] "Haudenosaunee' is a word which means 'people who build,' and is the proper name of the people of the Longhouse." In reading the Haudenosaunee Basic Call to Consciousness,[146] listening to Elders and teachers including Jan Kahehti:io Longboat and Dan Longboat, as well as reading the work of such scholars as Evering, 2016; Kimmerer, 2013; Mackey, 2016; Starblanket, 2008, and others, I have come to recognize how The Kaswentha or Two-Row Wampum Treaty and the Silver Covenant Chain Amendment provide me with direction and instruction on how to behave as part of the Sailboat people in this place, in my relationships with this land and its original caretakers. Gidigaa Migizi teaches that, "a wampum is an agreement or a pact between individuals or nations. It is symbolized by beads that tell a story. The story is carried as long as the agreement remains alive. It should be told and retold on an annual basis."[147] In his book, *This is Not a Peace Pipe*, Dale Turner cites the words of

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[145] The area of southern Ontario in which I have lived includes the presence and history of the Haudenosaunee peoples. My thinking and understandings continue to be influenced by friends and acquaintances who identify as being of the Six Nations confederacy, as well as Elders and scholars whose teaching and writing I encounter; as such, it is important that I include this here.

[146] Akwesane Notes. Basic call to Consciousness. Summertown, Tenn.: Native Voices, 2005.

[147] Gidigaa Migizi, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg,* 37.

Grand Chief Michael Mitchell of Akwesasne and these words he offered on one of the founding peace and friendship treaties, the Two Row Wampum:

> When the Haudenosaunee first came into contact with the European nations, treaties of peace and friendship were made. Each was symbolized by the Gus-Wen-Teh or Two Row Wampum. There is a bed of white wampum which symbolizes the purity of the agreement. There are two rows of purple, and those rows have the spirit of your ancestors and mine. There are three beads of wampum separating the two rows and they symbolize peace, friendship and respect. These two rows symbolize two paths or vessels, traveling down the same rivers together. One, a birch bark canoe, will be for the Indian people, their laws, their customs and their ways. The other, a ship, will before the white people and their laws, their customs and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel. The principles of the Two Row Wampum became the basis for all treaties and agreements that were made with the Europeans and later the Americans.[148]

I have been heavily influenced by Mackey's writing on Indigenous theorizations of treaties. She offers that they are "visions that help people trying to enact the kinds of transformations of 'epistemological shifts' necessary in order to decolonize. […] They are invitations to be(come) responsible, by learning how to listen and respond appropriately as partners in particular treaty relationships."[149]

Although the majority of the treaties that Canada made with Indigenous nations were done so with disrespect, mal-intent, and coercion, and have resulted in devastation and continued injustices, they remain a legal indication that Indigenous peoples were (and still rightfully are) sovereign, independent nations who existed here on their territories before settlers arrived, and therefore, they retain rights to their land. I understand myself to be a treaty person with privileges and therefore obligations under these treaties. The original spirit and intention of our treaty relationships was one of Respect, Trust, and Friendship.[150] It was predicated on an ethic of non-interference, of autonomy, and on our commitment to live respectfully with the land. "The Elders

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[148] Grand Chief Michael Mitchell of Akwesasne, cited in Dale Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe : Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division) 2006, 48.

[149] Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization*, (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2016), 133.

[150] For a detailed analysis of our treaty relationships and how, through honouring the original spirit and intent of our treaties, settlers might find an ethical way to be here, see: Michael Asch, *On Being Here to Stay: Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada*. (University of Toronto Press: 2014).

understandings of Treaty are peace and friendship agreements not land surrender agreements. These peace and friendship agreements provide for two parallel legal systems that were intended to co-exist, each party respecting the authority of the other."[151]

I understand that the settler signatories of our treaties and the ensuing Canadian governments have never fully upheld our responsibilities and commitments to our treaty relationships. Because I am a treaty person and my life is built upon the privileges gifted to me through our treaty relationship, it is my responsibility to use my privileges and contribute my gifts to righting this wrong. Jeff Corntassel reminds me of the following:

> How you situate yourself and your level of awareness about colonial occupations of Indigenous homelands brings new responsibilities to the forefront. Awareness of colonial realities requires us to go beyond a simple acknowledgement of the Indigenous nations and peoples of the territories you are visiting. It is a call for justice and the return of stolen lands/waterways to the Indigenous peoples who maintain special relationships to these places. Ultimately, what we are arguing for is a responsibility-based ethic of truth-telling to identify and act upon new pathways to Indigenous resurgence.[152]

My work here hopes to be in service of this responsibility-based ethic of truth-telling. Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge and understand more deeply what it means to have both white and other dominant privileges. I have white skin and English is my first language. I am able-bodied and have had a predominantly middle-class upbringing. I am also cis-gendered and have had the opportunity to pursue higher education. The chapters that follow are my attempt to move beyond the simple acknowledgement of my privilege and the Indigenous territories and nations on whose lands I find myself, and to instead grapple with what it means to take up my embodied responsibilities to them. I also hope that you, the reader, may come along with me on this journey of truth-telling, and that the sharing of my story may inspire you as well to reflect on or deepen your own journey of decolonization and healing in the trilogy of our relationships.

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[151] Tamara Starblanket, "Treaties: Negotiations and Rights," Our Legacy, University of Saskatchewan Archives, accessed February 13, 2018, http://digital.scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/exhibit_treaties.

[152] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," 4.

Liminal Points in my Decolonizing Journey thus far

Critical turning points in transforming settler consciousness, as Hiller writes, are "pivotal moments that spark or mark [a settler's] shift into a decolonizing praxis in relation to Indigenous sovereignty and rights – as well as the discourses, cultural repertoires, metaphors, and symbols that they draw upon in their narratives and activist practices."[153] I use the term *liminal points* as I am making use of this concept from transformational education theory, but they are essentially the same concept. I relate one of the most profound liminal points in my decolonization journey here.

In 2008, in Toronto, I met Danny Beaton at a healing circle I had been asked to be a part of by a friend. After our meeting, Danny invited me to attend The Circle of All Nations, a four-day gathering on the territory of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg in Quebec. Grandfather William Commanda, a visionary and leader in his community, had been hosting this event for many years, the manifestation of his dream of uniting all peoples and of creating a forum for the sharing of healing, wisdom, and community. Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo said of Grandfather, "he was a truly unique and exceptional man who dedicated his life to building bridges between people of all nations and all generations."[154] It was here that I learned more of the unifying Indigenous prophesies from all four corners of the globe. The four days I spent there were profound and transformational. I participated in sunrise ceremonies and sat in the grass with countless others as Algonquin, Hopi, Eastern European, and other Elders spoke, both in English and their Indigenous languages. I learned about the Warriors of the Rainbow Prophesy of the Hopi People and of the Seven Fires Prophesy of the Anishinaabe. [155] A group of women invited me to learn how to build a sweat lodge and I took my first sweat

[153] Hiller, "Tracing the spirals of unsettlement," 4.

[154] AFN, "AFN and First Nations Mourn the Passing of Algonquin Elder 'Grandfather' William Commanda, an Inspirational Leader, Teacher and Activist."

[155] I have encountered Nishnaabeg teachings on the Seven Fires Prophecy from various sources since meeting Grandfather William Commanda. Elder Dorothy Taylor and Elder Shirley Williams have also shared with me

with them, led by an Abuela (grandmother) from South America. We spoke our names and the names of our ancestors and sang power songs to keep us grounded and strong as the heat from the stones challenged, cleansed, and nurtured us. As we emerged, we were re-born from the earth, shimmering, red-faced, new, and bathed ourselves in the life-giving waters of the lake. I volunteered in the outdoor kitchens and helped to make fried bannock, learning some of the cyclical teachings woven throughout all that is done in a good way. I contributed to, and was invited to participate in, a community-wide feast, and a great giveaway where everyone present was invited to enter the circle and choose a gift as a thank you for our presence, participation, and contributions. I chose a wonderful pair of handmade deerskin moccasins and remember feeling a deeply emotional and surprising healing as a I began to believe what was being reflected to me: that I was worthy, my contributions and energy were valued, I deserved to partake in this bounty that was freely shared. I was gifted a beautiful pair of earrings from the woman I befriended while working with her in the outdoor kitchen, as well as a bracelet from one of the Elders. I left feeling so profoundly humbled and grateful. In truth, I don't have words to adequately describe how humbled I was by the kindness and generosity I was shown there. Nor do I have words for how inspired I was to learn of, and from, so many people who were embodying a way of living that spoke to my deepest held values and longings.

On the long drive home, I heard a report on CBC radio about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I was aware of the commission's work and had been educating myself for a while in a vague sort of way. But this time, I was listening and hearing differently. This time, it felt personal. I had to pull the car over as I was so overwhelmed with grief that I cried my heart out by the side of the road. I was so deeply moved with grief and outrage for the separation and division, the cruelty and injustice that has gone on in this country and in our world that I wept hard for a long time. My heart broke open somehow and spoke to me clearly that day. As I wiped away my tears, I felt a resolve in my very bones. It was a sense of clarity and conviction that I had found a purpose, what I was to dedicate my life to. I felt then and continue to feel now a deep loss, a profound pain, a

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certain stories of this as well. See: Leanne Simpson, Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence.

recognition that what has happened and continues to happen to First Nations people and their land and waters here on Turtle Island is a profound, egregious violation, a violation of what it means to be human.

Furthermore, what has happened on Turtle Island also happened to my ancestral people in Ireland, and has and continues to happen the world over. The destruction of Indigenous cultures, languages, spirituality, and a living understanding of our connection to our earth family is an ancestral soul wound of which I am acutely aware. My own ancestral culture, traditions, and place-based wisdoms have been all but lost to me generations ago. The English colonization of Ireland, the horrors of the burning times in Europe, Christian domination and demonization of the indigenous traditions of my people and so many others, as well as the mass migration of the Irish people to the colonial 'new worlds'/ the Irish diaspora, have effectively destroyed that ancestral link, while simultaneously making me complicit in the continued colonial oppression of First Nations peoples.

In one of our conversations, Georgie Horton-Baptiste asked me to reflect on my intentions for doing this work. Her poignant question is an important one to understand for myself, an invitation to engage in *critical self-reflection*, something that Marjolaine LaPointe also emphasized with me. This invitation to both clarify and state my intentions is something that I think is important. I am committed to the work that I do because I understand that my liberation is bound up with the liberation of Indigenous peoples[156] and all peoples, both human and more-than-human.[157] We share this planet and while our struggles may differ, our fates are bound up together, now more so than ever. The foundations of this understanding are threaded throughout the narrative of my thesis, articulated in various ways in various chapters. Part of this thesis journey for me is learning how to better articulate what is in fact a spiritually self-evident understanding. As I listen and learn and engage and

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[156] I began to think in this way more clearly after reading Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed in 2014. I have since been introduced to the work of Australian Aboriginal leader Lila Watson and her now-famous quote: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

[157] My more-than-human relations include all other creatures with whom we share this planet Earth. It makes sense to me, as I have been taught by Indigenous Elders and writers, that these other creatures are their own nations or peoples, deserving of just as much consideration and respect as humans are.

reflect, I learn how to communicate in ever expanding circles of relationship, to enter into respectful and productive conversations about *Taisce* - that which matters most. As Kimmerer writes, "in our oldest stories, we are reminded that this was a question of profound concern for our ancestors. When we rely deeply on other lives, there is urgency to protect them."[158]

Guiding Lights for my Journey Ahead

Spirit at the Centre: In one of our conversations, Elder Dorothy Taylor expressed something that my mother has often said to me: we are spiritual beings having a human experience. Greg Cajete, in his book *Native Science,* writes about how in Indigenous ways of knowing, true understanding occurs when all four aspects of our being are engaged: mind, body, emotion, and spirit."[159] This work is my focussed attempt to understand myself more fully in the trilogy of my relationships and thus, to understand what my roles and responsibilities are to all of Life. This work is my soul work.[160] It is an extension and culmination of my own lifelong searching and as with all spiral paths, it will continue long after I have completed this project. I am at the center of my research and at the center of myself is Spirit. I believe, as did my ancestors, that each human being carries an inner flame of inspiration that exists prior to and after each lifetime. This belief connects to my understanding of the inherent and inalienable connection between all aspects of creation. We are inextricably interdependent, and we are affecting one another in every moment whether we realize it or not. I believe in the sanctity and personhood of all Beings, including the earth herself. I endeavour to become fluent in the grammar of

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[158] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* 177.

[159] Greg Cajete, Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence, 1st ed. (Santa Fe, N.M: Clear Light Publishers, 2000).

[160] The Merriam-Webster dictionary offers that soul is the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life; and the spiritual principle embodied in human beings, all rational and spiritual beings, or the universe (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/soul, 2020). The diffuse nature of any definition of what soul or soul work is makes me hesitant to reference or attempt to articulate what this means to me personally. But for some academic explorations of its constellational meanings, see for example, Jung 1933, 1969; Hillman, 1996; Plotkin, 2008; Dirkx, 1997; Rabbin, 2009; Montgomery, 2008.

animacy[161] once again, as my ancestors were. Spirit is everywhere; it is who we are and where we have our being. Therefore, it is my highest calling to recognize and honour this – the effervescent union beneath and between all things. It is this unity that I long to return to and through my work, my words, my life, I endeavour to be of service. This work can also be seen to be a form of soul retrieval[162] – of calling back and reintegrating essential parts of myself that I have lost along the way, due to the trauma of forgetting in this lifetime and through my ancestral line. It is my hope that it may also shed some light on the path for others who are on their own journey to the same place - *home*.

Research as Ceremony: Wilson writes, "the purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. [Such] a ceremony allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Let us go forward together with open minds and good hearts as we further take part in this ceremony."[163] Denise Nadeau states that "all of life is ceremony; all life involves enacting and recommitting to the rights and responsibilities of relationship."[164] And Kimmerer reminds that, "ceremonies are the way we remember to remember."[165] She calls for the re-creating of ceremonies that are acts of reverence, which serve to reconnect us to an "active, reciprocal relationship with the more-than-human world."[166] This research journey has been a deeply personal, transformative, and healing one for me. It is an academic assertion of my most fervent prayer and an expression of my spiritual longing for an ethical sense of identity and belonging to earth community which informs my recommitment to the rights and responsibilities of

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[161] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

[162] Elder Shirley has spoken to me in our conversations about going back and finding that little girl, that part of herself that she left in residential school and she instructed me that that is a vital part of the decolonizing journey – going back and collecting parts of ourselves so that we can reconstruct who we truly are.

[163] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony,* 11.

[164] Leon and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence," 65.

[165] Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, 5.

[166] Kimmerer, 251.

relationship of which Nadeau speaks. Wilson also notes that, "the choice of research topic and methodology reflects researcher bias."[167] My bias is that spiritual capacity is a fundamental relational ability to being human and to living in a good way, in respectful, reciprocal (accountable) relationship with one's self, others, and the natural world.

Trauma-sensitive Practice: My experience as an educator in both the public and private school systems, at the postsecondary level, and my work with youth and adults in the wilderness field, as well as my years in the yoga and wellness industries have shown me that *so many* people are dealing with some form of trauma. I personally continue to work on my recovery from CPTSD, having grown up in a family that has been affected to one degree or another by abuse, addiction, mental illness, suicide, displacement, and inter-generational trauma. I am speaking from this perspective and through my experience of the many years I have spent on my own healing journey, which has included self-and-co-created ceremony, fasting, on occasion, Indigenous-led sweats, dancing, dreaming, singing, writing, time on the land, as well as therapy and extensive reading. As such, I take a trauma-informed approach to my work as an educator and academic. Georgie Horton-Baptiste has expressed to me in one of our early conversations (which was formative to my research direction), "*I sometimes forget that settlers have trauma too*." I endeavour to always center and privilege the perspectives of Indigenous voices and have been deeply influenced in this work because of how the sharing of their experiences of inter-generational trauma at the hands of Settler Canada has affected me. I think it is crucial that we also take into account that wide-spread, pervasive trauma is present across the colonial divide and consider trauma-sensitive approaches to relationship renewal at both the personal and institutional levels.

Some trauma theories hold that when we experience trauma, part of our soul, or an essential part of ourselves splits off, fractures, and goes into hiding.[168] As a society, I believe we are suffering from soul loss, from a loss of essential connections that feed our individual spirits and our collective consciousness. Paulo

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[167] Wilson, Research is Ceremony, 16.

[168] Mate, 2004; Middleton-Moz and Dwinell, 2010; van der Kolk, 2015; Brown, 2010.

Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* writes about how oppression is dehumanizing for both oppressor and oppressed."[169] Settler Canadians have dehumanized themselves in dehumanizing Indigenous peoples. Within the trauma model, in order to heal, we must come to face, acknowledge, and accept what has happened to us and what we have been witness or party to. In order to do that, we need to talk about it. We need to admit it to ourselves and to others in safe spaces and process the uncomfortable -sometimes terrifying and overwhelming- emotions that are inherent in this healing journey. We need support; we need to come together to a certain extent in order to do this. We need to be seen. We need to be reminded of our worthiness and to have it reflected back to us.

First Nations communities are doing this brave and hard heart work as they recover from the intergenerational trauma caused by ongoing genocide perpetrated by the Canadian state and the continued colonial violence towards their lands and peoples. From my necessarily limited knowledge of this process, it involves re-connecting to culture and language, truth-telling and stories, ceremony, self-care, re-connecting to the land, and community. There is deep wisdom in this. While settler society cannot and must not attempt to co-opt the narratives, suffering, or healing ways of Indigenous peoples,[170] we can acknowledge that some of our pain and our history are inter-connected. The way forward will be to some extent, shared; at the very least, some degree of collective action, cooperation, and mutual understanding seems necessary. We as settlers can learn from the wisdom, resilience, and examples of Indigenous resurgence on so many levels in appropriate and non-appropriative ways. It takes humility, a willingness to be open and self-reflective, and a profound respect for healthy boundaries. To heal from trauma, humans need to feel both safe and a sense of belonging. The complexity of finding this sense of belonging while being cognizant of and accountable to the fact that as

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[169] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

[170] Nishaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is particularly prolific in her work on Indigenous resurgence in this territory. See her books: *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations* (2008); *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (2011); and *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017).

settlers, we are complicit in and benefitting from the suffering and oppression of First Peoples here is something that I explore in this work through a pedagogy that is trauma-informed and which seeks to create safe and yet unsettling spaces for settlers to transform into. We need to scaffold our learning of how to do this and to build on our successes. We also need to believe that it is possible; as Marjolaine notes, "*if we can't allow space for growth, then we're doomed, really. I kind of feel like if we don't allow space for that settler transformation and if settlers don't allow that space for themselves - I mean they have to believe that they can. And I know that they can because I've seen it happen*."

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It's a conversation
A quilt stitched together with stories, both yours and mine
I am writing an open letter to Canada
my friends, family, colleagues,
An open letter as if in heartfelt correspondence
This is my love letter to our shared humanity
I have been listening
"I understand how you could have that perspective…"
I hear you
I have been listening
Here is what I have learned
Here are some teachings that I have been given
Here is what seems to make sense to me
Here is what I have been thinking about
What I have been hearing
This is how I feel
This is what some say
are saying
have said
This is a vision of beauty
These are some of the possibilities
…possibilities…
We share more than we understand
Some understand more than others
This is an invitation
an invocation
Here is where we need to begin
Here is one piece, one step, and why
Here is what it might look like, feel like, smell like, taste like, sound like
To begin on the journey
Home
Somewhere where we all belong
This is what I pray for
This is what I sing for
This is why I sing.[171]

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[171] Aleyah-Erin Lennon, 2018.

Chapter 3: Peering In the Mirror

> "*I believe the majority of non-Native peoples in our country want to be fair and caring, not just replicating a history full of mistakes and some malefaction. Native peoples, a dynamic and engaging peoples, also take exception to being restricted to colonial models or experience. Nevertheless, our encounter is informed by colonization*."[172]

Settler Colonial Landscapes

Canada is a white supremacist, settler colonial state. The society and country I was born into are settler colonial structures. Settler colonialism not only permeates every aspect of my life, it is the very foundation of my existence here in this place. It has defined, to a large extent, my identity and sense of belonging. It has been formative – whether I have been aware of it or not – in shaping my relationships (or lack thereof) to the land beneath my feet, to my community(ies), and to the original inhabitants and caretakers of this place, this place known to many as Turtle Island. Given the ubiquity of settler colonialism in my life, it behoves me to seek to understand what it is exactly and to grapple with the very uncomfortable realities this journey to understanding entails. This grappling with uncomfortable realities in order to seek awareness and understanding is, as I will explore in this chapter, only half of the journey for a settler such as myself. Knowing and understanding our continued colonial reality is one thing; enacting this understanding is another. It has been demonstrated time and time again, that many a well-intentioned settler often gets it wrong in efforts to bring about positive change. We can often be guilty of re-creating colonial power imbalances and ultimately, of doing more harm than good.[173]

In attempting to decolonize my sense of identity and belonging within a settler colonial system such as Canada, I am required to develop a greater awareness of my complicity in oppression, an understanding of the legacies of violence and unearned privilege that I have inherited, and a deepening realization of all that has been both lost to me and stolen from others. This awareness must translate into meaningful action; action to confront

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[172] Emma LaRocque, *When the Other Is Me: Native Resistance Discourse, 1850-1990*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 14.

[173] Carol Lynne D'Arcangelis, "The Solidarity Encounter Between Indigenous Women and White Women in a Contemporary Canadian Context" (PhD, University of Toronto, 2015). In chapter six, I further explore the solidarity encounter and discuss my current understanding of my roles and responsibilities in alliances.

settler colonial constructs both within and without and to work towards dismantling the systems of structural inequality, institutionalized racism, and dispossession, which are the foundation of what the architects of this system called 'the new world'.

As I will explore in this chapter, the ingrained and often unconscious attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and subsequent patterns of responses that have been instilled in us as settlers - and specifically, as *white* settlers - since birth, and reinforced throughout our lifetime, must be interrogated. When we take the time to dig deeply into the conversation around settler colonialism and whiteness, how these structures and logics operate and are maintained, and endeavour to sit with an enduring consideration of how our own thoughts, deeds, aspirations and actions are entangled with and complicit in the ongoing settler colonial project, we can perhaps begin to listen and learn differently. This chapter is my attempt to get clearer on this side of the abusive relationship of which Simpson speaks, to peer into the mirror and to look my complicity in the face as best I can, and to narrate the complexities and affective nature of this journey. I endeavour to summarize a foundation of learning about settler colonialism, settler as identity and settler epistemologies, whiteness, white fragility, Indigenous resurgence and decolonization, as theorized by Indigenous voices in order to locate myself in relationship to these understandings.

What is settler colonialism?

Settler colonial studies is a relatively newer field in academic discourse, although Indigenous people have been theorizing this phenomenon since its beginning here in their territories centuries ago. Rowe and Tuck have provided this recent definition of settler colonialism:

> The specific formation of colonialism in which people come to a land inhabited by (Indigenous) people and declare that land to be their new home. Settler colonialism is about the pursuit of land, not just labor or resources. Settler colonialism is a persistent societal structure, not just an historical event or origin story for a nation- state. Settler colonialism has meant genocide of Indigenous peoples, the reconfiguring of Indigenous land into settler property. In the United States and other slave estates, it has also meant the theft of people from their homelands (in Africa) to become property of settlers to labor on stolen land.[174]

[174] Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck, "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance," *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies* 17, no.1 (2017) 4.

In settler colonialism, colonizers come from abroad to stay; this permanent settlement changes the dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized significantly. In his 2011 work entitled 'Introducing Settler Colonial Studies', Lorenzo Veracini distinguishes settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism and argues the case as to why we needed a new way of understanding and of analyzing the fundamentally different relational patterns available in a settler colonial system. He describes colonialism as having "two fundamental and necessary components: an original displacement and unequal relations." Whereas "both colonisers and settler colonisers move across space, and both establish their ascendancy in specific locales," the similarities between colonialism and settler colonialism end there.[175] Similarly, Tuck and Yang distinguish *external colonialism*: "the expropriation of fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings" from *internal colonialism:* "the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the 'domestic' borders of the imperial nation." They also demonstrate how *settler colonialism*, as operationalized in Canada, for example, includes both internal and external colonial practices since "there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony."[176] As Veracini puts it, "whereas colonialism reinforces the distinction between colony and metropole, settler colonialism erases it."

When colonizers or imperial invaders come to stay and settle themselves on the land, they have a need to disavow Indigenous presence. This disavowal of Indigenous presence is why Veracini posits that the colonial encounter is mirrored by a settler colonial non-encounter. The drive to eliminate Native alternatives[177] is due to the fact that "[settler colonialism] is characterised by a persistent drive to ultimately supersede the conditions of its operation."[178] In order for settlers to feel they 'belong' in their new 'homeland', they seek to naturalize

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[175] Lorenzo Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011) 1.

[176] Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society 1, no. 1 (2012) 4–5.

[177] Patrick Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3-4, (2013).

[178] Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies," 3.

themselves and therefore erase Indigenous peoples, whose existence threatens this sense of settler sovereignty.[179]

What are the conditions of settler colonialism's operation? In the simplest of terms, settler colonization is theft of land.[180] It is a structure and an ongoing process rather than an event[181] built upon "an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave."[182] "Within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land […] Land is what is most valuable, contested, required."[183] In order to 'naturalize' settlers to the land,[184] and to secure the ascendancy and permanence of settlers on the land, settler colonialism requires the displacement and eventual erasure of the original inhabitants.[185] As Hiller puts it, "the raison d'être of settler colonialism itself remains the imperative to clear, claim, settle, and assert jurisdiction and sovereignty over Indigenous lands."[186] The settler colonial project seeks to diminish Indigenous claims to the land, to extinguish their natural title and inherent sovereignty. One of the most efficient ways settler states have found to extinguish Indigenous claims to their lands is to extinguish Indigenous peoples themselves; Land becomes property and a resource to be exploited and therefore, "Indigenous peoples must be erased."[187]

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[179] Lynne Davis, Jeff Denis, and Raven Sinclair, "Pathways of Settler Decolonization," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 4 (2017).

[180] Adam Barker, "An Open Letter to My Settler People," Cultivating Alternatives (blog), 2013.

[181] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism," 2013.

[182] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 1.

[183] Tuck and Yang, 5.

[184] Davis et al., "Complicated Pathways," 2017.

[185] Veracini, "'Settler Colonialism': Career of a Concept," (2013); Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" (2006); Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement: Euro-Canadian Narratives of Coming to Grips with Indigenous Sovereignty, Title, and Rights" (2017); Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," (2012); Rowe and Tuck, "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance," (2017).

[186] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 3.

[187] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 6.

In Canada, as elsewhere around the globe, this has been systematically implemented through various forms of legislated cultural genocide including, but not limited to, state-sanctioned massacre, residential schools, the sixties scoop, the numbered treaty process, and the Indian Act.

How is Settler Colonialism Maintained? Hiller describes the colonial present as being maintained by "an ever-evolving and shifting continuity of practices that displace Indigenous peoples, both symbolically and materially, in order to reiteratively emplace non-Indigenous people – most notably white settlers – as the supposed owners, occupiers, and arbiters of the land."[188] Rowe and Tuck offer this poignant definition of land in the settler colonial context:

> Land is at the crux of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers in settler societies. Ongoing occupation and settler pursuits of land are often made natural, logical, or invisible in settler societies. Settler societies often regard land only in the constructs of property or natural resource. Indigenous understandings of land predate and have codeveloped alongside and in spite of settler constructions of property. For Indigenous societies, land is peoplehood, relational, cosmological, and epistemological. Land is memory, land is curriculum, land is language. "Land" also refers to water, sky, underground, sea.[189]

In order to seize the land, ongoing settler projects include "the "disappearance" of Native peoples, the theft and privatization of land for profit, and the ongoing genocide of Indigenous people."[190] The settler colonial agenda is furthered by ongoing invasion of Indigenous territories through extractive mining and land development, often aided by military or police force (e.g. Standing Rock, Unist'ot'en). This agenda is also furthered through various and shifting political means of assimilation, defined by Wolfe as primarily an elimination of Indigeneity through "a range of strategies intended to separate individual Natives from their collective sovereignties and merge them irrecoverably into the settler mainstream."[191] Wolfe goes on to describe how settler states offer indigenous peoples 'a recurrent cycle of inducements': "Allotment (held out as personal

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[188] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 3.

[189] Rowe and Tuck, "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies," 5.

[190] Rowe and Tuck, 7.

[191] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism," 258.

endowment), citizenship, tribal enrolment, termination (held out as individual freedom), and self-determination – each of which has sought to present domination as empowerment and thereby assert Natives' consent to their own dispossession."[192] The politics of recognition, as defined by Veracini involves "a settler-controlled conciliatory rhetoric that does not discontinue settler colonial substantive attack against indigenous sovereign autonomy." Rather, "the politics of indigenous recognition and reconciliation institute a framework designed to manage and neutralise indigenous difference, the new dispensation primarily promotes the domestication of indigenous sovereignties for the benefit of the settler state."[193]

Injustice lies at the heart of our relationships in the colonial state. This is evident in its definitions, symptoms, and modes of control. In settler colonial systems, the settler colonial "demand for labour and a demand to go away (and a determination to resist and to survive), define possible patterns of relations"[194] between settlers and Indigenous peoples. "The disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation."[195] Tuck and Yang describe the symptoms of colonialism to be "poverty, dispossession, criminality, premature death, cultural genocide,"[196] and its tools of oppression or modes of control to be those of "segregation, divestment, surveillance, and criminalization, are both structural and interpersonal," operationalized through "prisons, ghettos, minoritizing, schooling, policing - to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its white elite."[197] As they explain, "capitalism and the state are technologies of

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[192] Wolfe, 259.

[193] Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies," 8.

[194] Veracini, 4.

[195] Tuck and Yang, 5.

[196] Tuck and Yang, 23.

[197] Tuck and Yang, 5.

colonialism, developed over time to further colonial projects."[198] "Settler colonialism involves the subjugation and forced labor of chattel slaves, whose bodies and lives become the property, and who are kept landless."[199] As Lowman and Barker remark, "it is impossible to discuss capitalist exploitation, racial oppression, or settler colonialism separately from each other."[200]

Settler Identity and Logics

As settlers in a settler colonial society, we have inherited this colonial legacy of violence, structural inequity, and Indigenous dispossession, which, in order to continue the settler colonial project, requires our ignorance and denial. We are kept (and keep ourselves) decidedly uninformed of our complicity in this oppressive system, or even the fact that the system is oppressive in the first place. This is what Tuck and Yang describe as "the invisibilized dynamics of settler colonialism."[201] Barker reminds settlers that, "all of us - every person who lives on and benefits from the theft of Indigenous lands – is a Settler. We all live on someone else's lands, and almost all of us do so illegally."[202] Tuck and Yang write how settler "describes a set of behaviours, as well as a structural location, but is eschewed as an identity."[203] Similarly, Battell Lowman and Barker state that "disavowal is a key part of the Settler identity and marks Settler people as benefitting from the dispossession and destruction of Indigenous peoples while at the same time vehemently denying complicity in the events and processes that make that happen."[204]

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[198] Tuck and Yang, 4. In Chapter 4, I further explore the genesis of capitalism and empire in Europe.

[199] Tuck and Yang, 6.

[200] Battell Lowman and Barker, *Settler,* 37.

[201] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 2012.

[202] Barker, "An Open Lettr to My Settler People," 2013.

[203] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 7.

[204] Battell Lowman and Barker, *Settler,* 15–16.

Battell Lowman and Barker do a remarkable job of summarizing the *settler problem* and delineating the reasons for adopting the term *Settler* as an identifier in order to shift our individual and national focus "onto our relationships with systems of power, land, and the peoples on whose territory our country exists."[205] As they put it, "it is important to interrogate some of the common ways the Settler identity functions in order to very intentionally try to shift how we think about ourselves and our relationships with the wider world."[206]

The term settler is unsettling; that is its powerful point. In invoking it as an identifier, settlers can continuously be aware of our structural location within the settler colonial project and thus, begin to work against the 'invisibilizing dynamics of settler colonialism'. As Corey Snelgrove writes:

> The term "settler" and the reason for its use, which brings forth the intimate and affective relationships to ancestral, social, cultural, economic, and political histories and presents which shape this world, necessarily leads not to pride, but rather to shame, frustration, alienation, and anger towards myself, other settlers, as well as the structures of settler colonialism."[207]

It is important for settlers to interrogate and understand our settler logics in order to open up potential avenues to change them. Battell Lowman and Barker argue that, "how we think about the world and our place in it must change as part of our efforts to change our material conditions and cultural conditioning."[208] Tuck and Yang offer this picture of settler epistemologies and their consequences born out in settler colonialism:

> The settler, if known by his actions and how he justifies them, sees himself as holding dominion over the earth and its flora and fauna, as the anthropocentric normal, and as more developed, more human, more deserving than other groups or species. The settler is making a new "home" and that home is rooted in a homesteading worldview where the wild land and wild people were made for his benefit. He can only make his identity as a settler by making the land produce, and produce excessively, because "civilization" is defined as production in excess of the "natural" world (i.e. in excess of the sustainable production already present in the Indigenous world). In order for excess production, he needs excess labor, which he cannot provide himself. The chattel slave serves as that excess labor, labor that can never be paid because payment would have to be in the form of property (land). The settler's wealth is land, or a fungible version of it, and so payment for labor is impossible. The settler positions himself as both superior and normal; the

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[205] Battell Lowman and Barker, 1.

[206] Battell Lowman and Barker, 13.

[207] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," 597.

[208] Battell Lowman and Barker, *Settler,* 19.

> settler is natural, whereas the Indigenous inhabitant and the chattel slave are unnatural, even supernatural.[209]

Various narratives of conquest reinforce the imagination that we as settlers belong.[210] Eva Mackey has made an invaluable contribution to my understanding of settler epistemologies as they relate to land, property, identity, and belonging. As she describes, *settler epistemologies of mastery* underlie the *settler fantasy of entitlement* to (Indigenous) land.[211] Hiller likewise points to what scholars have termed 'settler colonial spatial technologies' amounting to a form of 'cultural pedagogy', which:

> school our imaginations as settler subjects, rendering as well as enforcing the given-ness of our place here, and shoring up the legitimacy of our claims to be the true inhabitants of the land. This imagined yet never fully accomplished possession of Indigenous lands runs to the very heart of settler identities, cultures, and social and political formations.[212]

As Settler Canadians, we are caught up in structures that encourage specific relationships to Land and discourage others. These are structures "of feeling, of power, of culture and narrative,"[213] and the various institutions in this settler colonial system are quite good at enforcing consequences when we try to step outside of or to work against them. It therefore takes not only courage, but consistent striving, critical self-reflection and interrogation to continue to work against them.

Binary Thinking: An interesting and notable feature of settler epistemologies involves binarism.[214] Mackey describes settler 'dualistic and binary models of home, belonging, identity, and property':

> Land is either owned fully as individual property, not owned at all, or belongs to the crown who as a recognized state can own land in common; identities are bounded and homogenous, fixed and non-negotiable, one either is or isn't American; homes are perceived as completely safe because they contain

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[209] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 6.

[210] Rowe and Tuck, "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies," 2017.

[211] Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization,* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2017).

[212] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 3.

[213] Adam Barker, personal communication, August 2020.

[214] Wolfe, 2013; Veracini, 2011; Mackey, 2016.

> no difference or conflict, or they are seen as deeply threatened by differences that cannot be assimilated. Such oppositions and boundaries animate judgements of superior and inferior labour and personhood.[215]

These 'static and bounded' conceptualizations of "autonomy, personhood, community, and nation" which Mackey illustrates undergird settler expectations of mastery and entitlement, preclude a willingness to conceive or consider Indigenous ways of approaching relations to land. And yet, like the settler identity itself is disavowed, the binarism inherent in settler epistemologies is also denied. Wolfe wonders, "could it be that the repudiation of binarism represents a settler perspective? […and that] the denial of binarism may itself constitute an instrument of conquest."[216]

In our conversations, Marjolaine LaPointe in particular had insights to share on the binary settler habits of mind and how these prevent us from imagining other ways of being in relationship. As she puts it:

> *We have been so infected with this binary thinking that we think it's either/or and we don't think of harmony instead, right? What would a harmonious society look like rather than a communism society or a capitalism society, for example. Communism obliges you; capitalism obliges you. And the idea that you have to have one or the other and there are no alternatives is I think is one of the facets of settler thinking that is the most difficult to get through. That binary thinking all the time*.

Marjolaine also spoke to fact that our settler ways of thinking remain largely invisible to ourselves and offers that a way out of these binary habits of mind is to cultivate flexible thinking.

> *By and large, in the work that I do, a lot of the difficulties that I find in engaging with transforming settler consciousness is - it's so difficult. I kind of liken it to being in the middle of the ocean. Settlers are in the middle - settler consciousness is the middle of an ocean; it is the ocean. And it's so hard for it to recognize itself. Self-reflection and self-recognition and its own recognition of being is the most difficult thing that I find that impedes settler consciousness from arriving at a process of decolonization. It's completely*

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[215] Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 133. Here is one small example to illustrate this point: I encountered this kind of dualistic and binary thinking about property and home recently in a conversation I witnessed between two non-Indigenous teacher-candidates, an example that I think is extremely salient to settler epistemologies and decolonization. I will mention here that both individuals care about Indigenous sovereignty and want to be a part of the change that brings about a more fair and just society, but as shared in this chapter, it is this liberal well-intentioned stance that is often also the site from which colonial narratives are reproduced and reinforced. After being 'called out' by his colleague for 'flaunting' his cottage and being offered the suggestion to give 'back the land', this person remarked with exasperation, "What! Am I supposed to be homeless just because I care about reconciliation?!" This comment articulates the binarism inherent in settler epistemologies; one either owns property or is homeless.

[216] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism," 598.

> *invisible to them and because it's invisible to them and because they haven't needed to be flexible in their ways, flexible thinking is very difficult*.

As a settler, I have a responsibility to interrogate what is going on here and what I am complicit in. Collectively, we cannot begin to heal a problem we do not acknowledge we have and we cannot hope to heal or reconcile our damaged relationships if we do not fully address and amend the systems and structures of settler colonialism that settler epistemologies create and maintain.[217] We need to become aware of this and accept that it is our collective reality in order to be able to act to change it. Again, Marjolaine offers that to do this, settlers must become more adept at self-reflection:

> *So the folks that I've had the best luck in these [decolonizing] conversations with are folks who have an easier time with flexible thinking and being open minded and self-reflective. Self-reflective practices I think are vital. And true self-reflection, not just surface stuff, but digging into the way down deep corners of your soul and being like, why am I doing the things that I'm doing? Why am I thinking the way that I'm thinking? It's incredibly difficult but it's incredibly necessary. And I think it's high time that this country started being a little more self-reflective.*

Doing the hard heart work and critically interrogating our thinking in order to engage with and embody anti-colonial work is essential for settlers wishing to transform this binarism that can define settler logics. It is important to note however, that at the same time as we are caught up in these systems which encourage the bio-reproduction of a colonizing settler subject, the binary construction which posits that an Indigenous way of relating to Land is balanced whereas the Euro-western way is destructive is not accurate enough. As Adam Barker has pointed out, "this binary construction leaves Settlers nowhere to go to achieve balanced place-relationships except self-indigenization, which is the desired 'vanishing end point' of settler colonialism to begin with."[218] This is one paradox of many on a decolonizing journey for settlers. While holding ourselves accountable for these systems, and in recognizing the ways in which we participate in and benefit from them,

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[217] I feel it perhaps necessary here to mention, for any fellow settlers who are reading alongside me on this journey, that perceiving this to be the case is a recurrent challenge for many of us. Its invisibility (to settlers) is part of how settler colonialism is operationalized and maintained. As I continue to elaborate on in this chapter, the shape-shifting ways in which settler colonialism reproduces itself and remains hidden from settler consciousness is bound up with both its ubiquity and the nature of settler epistemologies and moves to innocence.

[218] Adam Barker, personal communication, August 2020.

we must also work within the collective to dismantle them and co-create spaces of possibility that invite more respectful place-based relationships.

Settler Moves to Innocence

What is called for is not just change, but rather, transformation. This transformation is what Tuck and Yang describe as decolonization, a process that is not just discursive but necessarily material. As I continue on my journey of transforming my settler-colonial consciousness and of decolonizing my sense of identity and belonging here on this land, I must beware of the ways in which the 'settler imagination' tries to evade a sincere accountability with the reality of my continued benefit from colonialism. To this end, Tuck and Yang have made an invaluable contribution. In their article, *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, they describe how "directly and indirectly benefitting from the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples is a difficult reality for settlers to accept. The weight of this reality is uncomfortable; the misery of guilt makes one hurry toward any reprieve." They delineate therefore the "set of evasions, or *settler moves to innocence*, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity."[219]

It is not enough to simply be made aware of the horrific realities of our shared history as settlers here on Indigenous lands. The process of learning what we are complicit in and how we continue to benefit from this history, can produce profoundly uncomfortable feelings of guilt and shame, and these feelings can culminate and persist as *settler anxiety*. Tuck and Yang succinctly name what is at the root of settler anxiety: "the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self." This anxiety of having harmed others just by being one's self, as the authors explain, often leads settlers to easily adopt decolonization as a metaphor and to seek to reconcile with Indigenous peoples prematurely – without moving to truly change anything about our settler colonial positions and realities. As they put it, "the desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is

[219] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 9-10.

a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore."[220] Decolonization is about returning the land that has been stolen through ongoing settler colonialism.

As we are examining in this chapter, this 'Indian' problem[221] is in fact a settler one; the settler and the settler colonial project are the problems here.[222] Attempting to reconcile with Indigenous peoples can and does seem to many settlers as a lovely idea, born of our individual and collective goodwill as well as an admission of our guilt and remorsefulness for the terrible legacy of colonialism. And yet, it does not in fact address the heart of the issues we face, does not adequately address the ongoing cultural genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples under settler colonialism, and does not invite us as settlers to truly interrogate ourselves in a way that transforms the order of things. Reconciliation is not decolonization. As one research participant noted, "we are not there yet. Settlers aren't ready."

Thomas Berger in his book *Long, Terrible Shadow: White Values, Native Rights in the Americas,* describes how settlers, even ones sympathetic to the plight of Indigenous peoples, point to "the intractability of our economic arrangements" as an excuse for not being able to do anything to change structural inequality and oppression.[223] Mackey cites a specific example of this from the United States when she writes about the court and citizen opinion in the lands rights case of the Onondaga. The courts state their inability/unwillingness to honour the Onondaga's rightful claims to their land because "so much time had passed since the 'historical injustice' and because long-delayed claims would be disruptive to the 'justifiable expectations' of the people

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[220] Tuck and Yang, 9.

[221] I use the term Indian problem as do Tuck and Yang, because it is the historic term conceived of and employed by the Canadian government in its various documented policies of cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples.

[222] Battell Lowman and Barker, *Settler,* 2015.

[223] Thomas Berger, *Long and Terrible Shadow: White Values, Native Rights in the Americas, 1492-1992*, (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre ltd., 1991).

and entities far removed from the taking of the lands."[224] The contradiction, hypocrisy, and unacceptability of this argument should be blatantly obvious. It simply isn't good enough.[225]

Recalling here Simpson's characterization of the settler-Indigenous relationship in Canada as abusive, the country's current era of reconciliation is likened to the abuser stating that they are sorry and expecting their abused partner to gratefully accept such an apology as the abuse continues. Settler society has not yet done the hard heart work to understand our abusive dynamics. We aren't ready to really sit with the very discomforting idea that we are abusive, so we do not yet see the need to do things differently. How can we then be trying to reconcile? We cannot expect to have a healed and healthy relationship without first becoming healed and healthy ourselves, nor without being able to acknowledge and accept that we have been far from both in our relationships here. While healing our abusive relationship is indeed urgent, we cannot rush this process, for in rushing, we are extremely liable to attempt to vault over the very tough terrain of facing our complicity and of embracing the ways in which transformation will need to occur. Remaining vigilant to the ways in which our settler anxiety prompts us to (however unconsciously) move to innocence is an important part of our responsibilities in this healing work. Again, settler moves to innocence, as Tuck and Yang explain, "are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all."[226]

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[224] Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 164 footnote 7.

[225] There are countless examples of this kind of injustice on both sides of the colonial boarder. Canada's Indian Act had historically prohibited Indigenous peoples from becoming lawyers in order to prevent people from taking these land claims to court.

[226] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 10. For purposes of space, I have omitted a more thorough analysis of these various moves to innocence here, but I encourage a close read of their work. Settler moves to innocence include: *Settler Nativism, Fantasizing Adoption, Colonial Equivocation, Conscientization, At risk-ing/Asterisk-ing Indigenous peoples,* and *Re-occupation and urban homesteading*. As I will explore in chapter four, part of the process of naturalizing ourselves as settlers on this land has involved, I believe, a relinquishing of a need to truly know our ancestry. We don't need to know where we have come from because to the settler imagination, 'we have always been here'. It is also important for us as settlers to be aware of how powerful and shape-shifting the inclination can be to disavow our settler identity and to crave rather an identity that seems to have more legitimacy, meaning, and belonging. This inner discontent with what 'settler as identity' has to offer us is extremely valuable, and it must be critically and continuously interrogated to keep us

Decolonization and Incommensurability

"Incommensurability is an acknowledgement that decolonization will require a change in the order of the world."[227]

Tuck and Yang argue for *an ethic of incommensurability* as a means to ensure that decolonization is not co-opted as a metaphor, thereby rendering it innocuous, or more palatable and comfortable to settlers (settler moves to innocence). As they put it:

> An ethic of incommensurability, which guides moves that unsettle innocence, stands in contrast to aims of reconciliation, which motivate settler moves to innocence. Reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future. Reconciliation is concerned with questions of *what will decolonization look like*? *What will happen after abolition*? *What will be the consequences of decolonization for the settler*? Incommensurability acknowledges that these questions need not, and perhaps cannot, be answered in order for decolonization to exist as a framework. […] To fully enact an ethic of incommensurability means relinquishing settler futurity, abandoning the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Natives peoples. […] The Native futures, the lives to be lived once the settler nation is gone – these are the unwritten possibilities made possible by an ethic of incommensurability.[228]

Statements like the one above can seem quite daunting to a settler such as myself. When I first started to let these words sink into my consciousness, I experienced profound sadness and fear, a desperate throwing-up-of-hands state in which I thought, *is my only hope for ethical existence here to cease to exist*?! As I sat with this,

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accountable to a decolonial praxis. My work here may serve as yet another example of the complexities and uncertainty, indeed, the fragmentation, that is characteristic of the settler colonial condition, even on this (white-settler) side of the colonial divide. However, it should be evident with my choice of research topic that I certainly do suffer from the anxiety of settler un-belonging of which Tuck and Yang write. And to avoid therefore, the appropriation of pain and co-opting of suffering that can accompany settler moves to innocence, especially perhaps in my work, speaking as I am about having my own experience with intergenerational trauma, it is important that as a settler, I always bear in mind that my suffering and my pain is not commensurable, from a structural standpoint, with the suffering of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, as I hope to make clear throughout my thesis, in exploring the issue of my own colonization, I seek to center the unsettling and de-occupying of Indigenous lands so as not to erase "the sweeping scope of land as the basis of wealth, power, law in settler nation-states," (Tuck and Yang, 19) or to "conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege," (21).

[227] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

[228] Tuck and Yang, 35-36.

and endeavoured to listen more deeply to Indigenous voices on the topic, I have come to hear an answer: *in a way*, *yes*. Consider Jeff Corntassel's words:

> There is an urgent need for settlers to change their current relationships with the local Indigenous nations on whose territory they reside. If this is not the relationship one wants to embody, whether as yonega or hwunitum or any number of Indigenous terms for settler, then the impetus is on the settler to change the nature of the relationship by taking direction from Indigenous nations themselves. The ultimate goal is to create the need for a new word or phrase to describe positive features of a settler-Indigenous relationship.[229]

Knowing what I do now of settler as identity, settler epistemologies, and settler colonialism, and the violence, arrogance, and disconnection inherent in each, I don't find it difficult, at least theoretically, to abandon the hope of a settler futurity or to imagine a future in which 'the settler nation is gone'. These settler systems of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy are destructive, devastating, and oppressive to most – certainly foremost, to Indigenous peoples, and to racialized and marginalized people, to the poor, to the elderly, to all 'othered', to women, and to the earth herself. But even while benefitting from my structural location within these systems, I also suffer within them in a myriad of ways. As one poignant example of this collective suffering, Onondaga Tadodaho Sidney Hill writes:

> No one is happy when they do not understand those around them. No one can live in peace when the waters are poisoned, the land contaminated, fish too toxic to eat, and the air too polluted to breathe. […] Our neighbours were also wounded by actions that most of those living nearby today have no knowledge of. You were robbed of the chance to live side-by-side in harmony with a culture that is different from your own; a culture that understood and cared for this land for centuries before your ancestors arrived. And we were all robbed of the opportunity to learn and grow together.[230]

What I long for is to become an immigrant to Indigenous sovereignty, to be 'beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands' I am living in.[231] As Wolfe states, there are:

> alternatives, ethical futures that can be nourished by 'heeding the voices of Native scholars, writers, critics, and intellectuals who are imagining reconfigured social, cultural, economic, and political relations'…ways that are neither utopian nor self-defeating but performative, versed in internal critiques

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[229] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, 17.

[230] Sidney Hill, "A Time to Heal," *Onondaga Nation: People of the Hills* (website), March 20, 2006, https://www.onondaganation.org/news/2006/a-time-to-heal/.

[231] Tuck and Yang, 2012.

> of colonialism but taking their alternative visions from sources and experiences that colonialism is unable to contain.[232]

The decolonized alternatives to the settler society that Indigenous teachers have been holding out to us are only incommensurable to the extent that settlers refuse to embrace them! What lies at the heart of this refusal is most often the binarism of settler epistemologies and certainty. As Hiller states:

> Given the ways in which colonizing responses to Indigenous sovereignty and rights and relations to land are so deeply woven into the fabric of settler societies and cultures, any meaningful re-cognition of these relations – one that acknowledges and addresses on-going histories of Indigenous dispossession and settler dominance – will profoundly rock the very foundations of such settler societies, cultures, and identities."[233]

Whiteness

As a white woman living in a settler colonial society, I have found it necessary to grapple with what it means to be white, especially as my work, both professionally and academically, as well as my personal inner work and my work within my community, focuses on anti-colonial praxis and supporting Indigenous resurgence. Many scholars and activists have indicated the need to examine whiteness, much like the settler colonial project, as an institutional and structural set of processes.[234] Through reading and listening to these thinkers and others, I have come to understand that Canada is a white supremacist society. It was founded upon a Euro-centric, specifically an English-protestant and/or French-Catholic worldview and is designed to perpetuate itself for the explicit benefit of white people. Many white settlers believe the term white supremacy refers to an extremist position held by a minority of white radicals or to be a historical phenomenon, but Bonds and Inwood define white supremacy as a materially grounded set of practices that are "the foundation for the

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[232] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism," 275.

[233] Hiller, 4.

[234] Tuck and Yang, 2012; Rowe and Tuck, 2017; Wolfe, 2013; Nicoll, 2004; DiAngelo, 2011; McIntosh, 1990; Bonds and Inwood, 2016; Biss, 2015; Ariel, 2017; Ahmed, 2007.

continuous unfolding of practices of race and racism within settler states."[235] White supremacy and settler colonialism are inextricably linked. As Wolfe points out:

> Since most of the world has been colonised – or, more specifically, settler-colonised – by White people, it is only to be expected that the critique of settler supremacism should converge with the critique of White supremacism as consistently as the two converge in practice. In addition to benefiting from dispossession, White settlers also benefit from race, the two colonial privileges being fused and mutually compounding in social life.[236]

Rowe and Tuck state that, "whiteness must be more fully interrogated as a settler project."[237] An understanding therefore, of what whiteness is and how it operates is an essential foundation for white settlers such as myself who seek to decolonize in ways that are meaningful and accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and in order to co-create an equitable, sustainable society. It is vital to deconstructing our white settler identities and to attempts at re-authoring ourselves along more relationally accountable lines. In this section, I investigate phenomena such as whiteness, white supremacy, and white fragility from diverse BIPOC[238] and critical whiteness studies perspectives with the aim of informing my own decolonizing praxis and embodied spiritual practice. I also offer certain personal accounts of how these discourses relate to my own life with the hope of illuminating the importance of this *learning/unlearning*[239] for decolonizing my sense of identity and belonging in relationally accountable ways.

Tuck and Yang explain how whiteness extends beyond phenotype and constitutes "an exceptionalized position with assumed rights to invulnerability and legal supremacy."[240] Echoing this as well as the work of

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[235] Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwood, "Beyond White Privilege: Geographies of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism," Progress in Human Geography 40, no. 6 (2016) 715.

[236] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism," 264.

[237] Rowe and Tuck, "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies," 7.

[238] BIPOC stands for 'Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.' While discussions of decolonization must not be construed with wider social justice and anti-racist movements (Tuck and Yang), most of the learning I am doing in regards to whiteness is applicable to other urgent issues such as the Black Lives Matter movement.

[239] Hiller, 2017; Davis et al., 2017.

[240] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 18.

other critical whiteness studies scholars, DiAngelo defines Whiteness as a "constellation of processes and practices rather than a discrete entity (i.e. skin colour alone)."[241] The processes and practices of whiteness include, "basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people."[242] As DiAngelo stresses, whiteness is a location of structural advantage within a system that has been built upon and is perpetuated by white dominance over racialized 'others'. She states that "whites hold social and institutional power over others" and describes how "the larger social environment insulates and protects whites as a group through institutions, cultural representations, media, school textbooks, movies, advertising, dominant discourses, etc."[243]

Peggy McIntosh illuminates how this protection and privileging of whiteness is systematically instilled in white people to be invisible, how we are educated since birth to be unaware of it. As she puts it, we "have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence."[244] White privilege is ingrained into the fabric of white supremacist societies and yet, "at the same time that it is ubiquitous, white superiority also remains unnamed and explicitly denied by most whites."[245] Eula Biss describes how "the word 'privilege', composed of the Latin words for private and law, describes a legal system in which not everyone is equally bound."[246] Layla Saad succinctly sums up the importance of white people interrogating whiteness and white privilege:

> White privilege is the reward that white and white-passing people receive in exchange for participating in the system of white supremacy. In order to dismantle the system, you need to understand how much white privilege is a key aspect of your life, how you benefit (whether knowingly or unknowingly) from your

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[241] Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," International Journal of Critical Pedagogy 3, no. 3 (2011) 56.

[242] DiAngelo, 54.

[243] DiAngelo, 55.

[244] Peggy Mcintosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Peace and Freedom, July/August (1989).

[245] DiAngelo, "White Fragility," 64.

[246] Eula Biss, "White Debt: Reckoning with What Is Owed - and What Can Never Be Repaid - for Racial Privilege," *The New York Times*, December 2, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/06/magazine/white-debt.html

> whiteness, what that means for people who do not receive that same benefit, and how you can dismantle it. You cannot dismantle what you cannot see. You cannot challenge what you do not understand.[247]

In her article, *The Phenomenology of Whiteness,* Ahmed describes Institutional Whiteness as an invisible background to social action,[248] a self-replicating habit born out of a dominant orientation to the world that assumes itself as a universal subjectivity. Both Ahmed's and DiAngelo's work point to certain ways in which white people experience discomfort and respond with a range of avoidance tactics when confronted with such information about whiteness, similar to settler moves to innocence described by Tuck and Yang. Ahmed delineates how White Institutional desires for 'good practice' and signs of equity and diversity as proof that racism has been overcome are in fact 'technologies of concealment'.[249] Much like the 'politics of recognition' or 'rights-based discourses' are employed by settler states towards Indigenous Peoples, which are positioned as inclusivity but really serve an extermination agenda, these technologies of concealment serve to re-invisibilize whiteness and thereby, ensure that racism continues. Similarly, DiAngelo points out that, "in a white supremacist context, white identity in large part rests upon a foundation of (superficial) racial toleration and acceptance."[250] Questions posed by white people such as, *what can white people do?* or, *if whiteness is a habit, what might it be replaced with?,* are problematic, however well-meaning, according to Ahmed, insofar as they serve to "reposition the white subject as somewhere other than implicated in the critique." She goes on to explain how "the desire for signs of resistance can also be a form for resistance to hearing about racism. If we want to know how things can be different *too quickly*, then we might not hear anything at all."[251] This caution echoes the work of Indigenous resurgence and settler colonial scholars who advocate for the importance of

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[247] Layla Saad, "Me and White Supremacy Workbook," (2018) 60, https://www.meandwhitesupremacybook.com/

[248] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007) 165.

[249] Ahmed, 164.

[250] DiAngelo, 64.

[251] Ahmed, 165.

uncertainty and discomfort in decolonial praxis. Indeed, DiAngelo's work on white fragility, detailing the various defensive moves that white people often take when confronted with the fact of their racial privilege, advocates for white stamina-building in racial contexts, since "a continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement in a culture infused with racial disparity limits the ability to form authentic connections across racial lines, and results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place."[252]

White Fragility

As DiAngelo defines it, white fragility is born out of white racial privilege, which "builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress." Often, when white people are confronted with the fact of their racial privilege and internalized dominance, white fragility manifests as "anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance,"[253] as a dismissal of 'already knowing this' or as "confusion, defensiveness, and righteous indignation."[254] As Saad puts it, "in essence, white fragility looks like a white person taking the position of victim, when it is in fact that white person who has committed or participated in acts of racial harm."[255] Both Saad's as well as DiAngelo's work are exceptional in detailing the ways in which certain interruptions to white racial comfort and familiarity challenge white supremacy and whiteness.[256]

DiAngelo also offers insight as to the factors which inculcate white fragility, namely: segregation, universalism and individualism, entitlement to racial comfort, racial arrogance, racial belonging, psychic

[252] DiAngelo, "White Fragility," 66.

[253] DiAngelo, 55.

[254] DiAngelo, 67.

[255] Saad, "Me and White Supremacy," 62.

[256] For an examination of the potential forms of these interruptions and what aspect of whiteness they challenge, see (DiAngelo, 2011, 57).

freedom, as well as "the constant messages that we are more valuable-through representation in everything."[257] It is significant that segregation is at the top of this list, as segregation has been an institutionally imposed legal and historical reality as well as a continued lived *non*-experience for most white people in North America. As a result of living primarily segregated lives, both in terms of representation of and information from Indigenous and people of colour, the majority of white people "receive little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically."[258]

In my own experience, I have found the concepts of universalism and individualism to be salient barriers to white people, myself included, understanding whiteness in more complex and meaningful ways. Similar to Ahmed's illustration of whiteness as institutional habit and white solipsism, which assumes a universal subjectivity, DiAngelo characterizes white universalism as a belief in objectivity, that whiteness is an unracialized identity, which "allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience"– in other words, 'we are all the same'. In denying difference, universalism, like individualism, obscures both the significance of race and the fact of white privilege. A seeming contradiction, individualism– 'we are all unique' – "erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today." As DiAngelo puts it:

> The disavowal of race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society at large, is necessary to support current structures of capitalism and domination, for without it, the correlation between the distribution of social resources and unearned white privilege would be evident.[259]

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[257] DiAngelo, 59-63. It is beyond the scope of my thesis to extrapolate on each of these factors but I encourage any reader unfamiliar with her writing to engage with DiAngelo's body of work on whiteness as I have found it to be both accessible and profound to my own learning, as a 'white' person, on this topic.

[258] DiAngelo, 58.

[259] DiAngelo, 59-60. Understanding whiteness thusly makes me think that this may be another reason why remembering our original instructions and beginning to re-author an identity that includes recognizing ourselves as diasporic subjects on stolen Indigenous lands - of doing, again as Georgie Horton-Baptiste calls it, the hard heart work of reclaiming cultures lost or shed to colonization - can make whiteness and colonization more visible.

Another factor in inculcating white fragility and perpetuating white supremacy is what Saad terms *White Exceptionalism*:

> White exceptionalism is particularly rampant in progressive, liberal, spiritual white people because there is a belief that being these things makes you exempt or above it all. You're not. And the belief that you are makes you dangerous to BIPOC because you can't see your own complicity. If you believe you are exceptional, you won't do the work. If you don't do the work, you will continue to do harm. You are not an exceptional white person. Meaning, you are not exempt from the conditioning of white supremacy, from the benefits of white privilege and from the responsibility to keep doing this work for the rest of your life. The moment you begin to think you are exceptional, is the moment you begin to relax back into the warm and familiar comfort of white supremacy.[260]

People who hold white privilege saying they 'do not see colour' is violent, says Saad:

> because it erases the identities of BIPOC, thereby also erasing our lived experiences with racism. It minimises these experiences. And it asks BIPOC to minimise these experiences too. It asks BIPOC to act as if the world is set up that way - as if institutional racism and racial prejudice don't exist. It is also a form of gaslighting because it simply isn't true. You do see colour. You're choosing to pretend you don't so that you don't have to face the elephant in the room - your white privilege and your complicity in white supremacy.[261]

And yet another salient aspect of white fragility is the 'discourse of victimization' and the concept of 'reverse racism'. DiAngelo describes the self-defensive moves of white people who invoke the discourse of victimization to: "position [themselves] as morally superior while obscuring the true power of their social locations; blame others with less social power for their discomfort; falsely position that discomfort as dangerous; and reinscribe racist imagery." She discusses how the discourse of victimization co-opts, perverts, and reverses the reality of racial danger: "slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization and medical experimentation to mention a few—becomes profoundly trivialized when whites claim they don't feel safe or are under attack when in the rare situation of merely talking about race with people of color."[262]

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[260] Saad, "Me and White Supremacy," 70.

[261] Saad, 75.

[262] DiAngelo, "White Fragility," 64-65.

DiAngelo explains how reverse racism cannot exist, since in fact, "only whites can be racist because the term refers to holding social and institutional power."[263] Carlson reiterates this when she writes:

> Settler colonialism in lands occupied by the Canadian state, as a system of inequality and oppression, does not support colonial discrimination against white settlers. This is not to say that we are not currently emotionally and morally harmed by settler colonialism even as it structurally benefits us. But we are not colonized here.[264]

While there are very important reasons to counter white discourses of victimization and understand the fact that reverse racism cannot exist, this does not negate the reality that disparaging and even unfair remarks can be made towards 'white people' and that white people can and do feel hurt, confused, and/or marginalized by them. My attempt to grapple with the intersecting complexities of this is something that I discuss in the following section.

The Poverty of Whiteness

The subtitle I chose for my thesis *'Critical Spirituality and the Poverty of Whiteness'* has been in part informed by the work of Eula Biss. In her 2015 New York Times Magazine article *White Debt: Reckoning with what is owed — and what can never be repaid — for racial privilege*, Biss centers the uneven distribution of wealth and unearned racial privilege in her discussion of whiteness. She writes, "Whiteness is not an identity but a moral problem," and explains how:

> Whiteness is not a kinship or a culture. […] What binds us is that we share a system of social advantages that can be traced back to the advent of slavery in the colonies that became the United States. ''There is, in

[263] Robin DiAngelo, "Why Can't We All Just Be Individuals?: Countering the Discourse of Individualism in Anti-Racist Education," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 6, no. 1 (2010).

[264] Carlson, "Anti-colonial Methodologies," 501. I have encountered many such 'white objections' to the idea of white privilege, most frequently on social media, where much of these discourses are increasingly playing out. It is important that we understand the difference between white privilege and class privilege. As we are discussing, the systems of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalist patriarchy all intersect and are interwoven. Economic disparity and poverty are on the rise (inherent in capitalist systems, where wealth is generated, accumulated, and hoarded increasingly by a privileged few) and white people are not at all immune. However, it is important for white people to understand that our whiteness is not a factor in our economic insecurity; we do not face structural barriers due to the colour of our skin. And that is white privilege. For more nuanced discussion on the topic of whiteness, see the work of Stuart Hall on privilege and identity, as well as the work of Aileen Morton Robinson on racial entanglements and power.

> fact, no white community,'' as Baldwin writes. Whiteness is not who you are. Which is why it is entirely possible to despise whiteness without disliking yourself.

Biss goes on to state that, "when we buy into whiteness, we entertain the delusion that we're business partners with power, not its minions. And we forget our debt to ourselves," And she goes on to reflect: "I suspect whiteness is costing me, as Baldwin would say, my moral life. And whiteness is costing me my community."[265]

Baldwin in his turn explains how no one was white before they came to the Americas – that scores of Italians, Irish, Swiss, Polish, Jewish peoples had to agree to and learn how to become 'white' in order to gain a foothold in the 'new world order'. As he puts it, "it bears terrifying witness to what happened to everyone who got here, and paid the price of the ticket. The price was to become 'white.' No one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country."[266] He explains how becoming 'white' meant by definition, becoming complicit in Black subjugation and remarks of 'white' people: "because they think they are white, they do not confront the ravage and the lie of their history"; "they do not want to know the meaning, or face the shame, of what they compelled—out of what they took as the necessity of being white."[267]

My conception of the poverty of whiteness stems in part from my understanding that whiteness *is not* a culture; it is devoid of culture, of spirituality, of ethical identity. Whiteness, as the authors above have demonstrated, is simply a social location of structural advantage, which is premised upon the oppression and eradication of others; my whiteness is paradoxically both a privilege and a terrible, isolating burden, what Biss has called a moral problem. Noel Ignatiev, the author of *How The Irish Became White*, and co-founder of the e-

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[265] Biss, "White Debt," 2015.

[266] James Baldwin, "On Being White...and Other Lies," in *Black Writers On What It Means to Be White*, ed. David Roediger, (New York: Schocken Books, 1998) 177.

[267] Baldwin, 180; 179.

zine *Race Traitor* reflects thusly, "imagine the loneliness of those who, born to a group they regard as unjust and oppressive and not wanting to be part of that group, are left on their own to figure their way out."[268]

The isolating effect of my whiteness has been born out in my experience. Through the course of my life, I have been exposed to writers, thinkers, bloggers, academics, colleagues, and friends, both people of colour as well as fellow 'white' people, who make various cracks and disparaging remarks about white people, and I do admit that at times, these remarks have felt deeply personal and confusing. I here cite several examples of this, with the intention not to center my own experience or engage in a display of white fragility, but rather to demonstrate the intricacies, responsibilities, and challenges of decolonizing my sense of identity and belonging in a white supremacist settler system. In sharing these short anecdotal stories which are by their very nature uncomfortable things to talk about, with humility and vulnerability, it is my hope that they might serve to demonstrate the need for white settlers such as myself to more consciously adopt a 'pedagogy of discomfort'[269] and of the importance of doing the hard heart work as we move forward on a path of decolonization and supporting Indigenous resurgence.

Personal Anecdotes:

In the fall of 2018, I was fortunate to attend the CIARS Decolonizing Conference at OISE in Toronto. CIARS is a gathering of academics, students, educators, activists, and community members who come together to learn from one another about how we might dialogue, decolonize, and live well together – how we can confront, refuse, and dismantle the oppressive systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism, which are destroying our very existence, and which have for so long marginalized, oppressed, exploited, and sought to eradicate Indigenous peoples and People of Colour. Listening in these rooms to the discussions and sharing, I am inspired and excited; these are the people whom I most admire, agree with, and want to work alongside. I share their vision and values and I feel so grateful that these conversations are happening, that community and momentum is being created and grown for this work, which so vital to the continuation of all Life.

There were several instances on panels and plenary discussions, when a speaker would, in the midst of sharing incredible insights about Indigenous ways of knowing, stories about the importance and hardship of

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[268] Personal communication cited in Biss, 2015. I would note here that I do not think we are on our own to figure our way out. As this chapter will hopefully demonstrate, there are numerous BIPOC voices who continue to generously share their insights as to how white people can begin this *hard heart work*.

[269] Megan Boler and Michalinos Zembylas, "Discomforting Truths: The Emotional Terrain of Understanding Difference," in *Pedagogies of Difference: rethinking education for social change*, ed. Peter Trifonas, (New York, London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003).

reclaiming language and spirituality, or visions of how we can reconceptualise our ideas of wealth and success, suddenly make a joke about 'all white people' and the audience would laugh, as if in on a shared disparaging joke. The implication was always akin to 'white people don't/cannot understand what we are talking about; they are bent on destroying us – they are the enemy'.

As a white woman sitting there in these moments, I admit that I was jarred. I felt sad, grieved, unrepresented and misunderstood; and depending on my own level of self-care (e.g. how overwhelmed, anxious, tired, or hungry I was), these uncomfortable feelings could sometimes devolve into frustration and annoyance). I felt unfairly judged and rejected outright based solely on the colour of my skin; I felt that I didn't belong, made all the more painful by the fact that these are the very spaces that I so want to be a part of – spaces of collective decolonization and coalitions centering equity, Indigenous resurgence, and the continuation of all Life.

I also understood in these same moments, that these feelings are somehow wrong and that it would be inappropriate to voice them in these spaces; no one wants to hear them – don't be guilty of white fragility or of yet again centering a white woman's hurt feelings (white women's tears as weapons). A Black woman made a very good point when she remarked on a panel that this is how People of Colour feel all of the time in whiteness – unfairly judged and disparaged for the colour of their skin, made to feel uncomfortable or unsafe, like they don't belong. She indicated that it is the responsibility of white people to grapple with these similar feelings (they are not the same, however, as People of Colour have to also contend with the very real fear of being physically harmed or killed) in the uncomfortable yet fleeting moments when white people experience them.

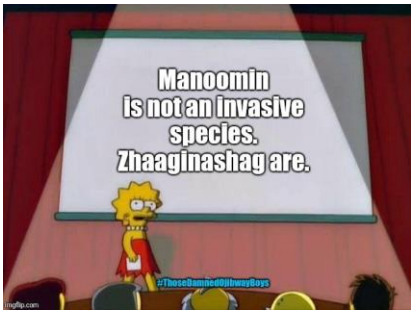
During a particular session, when it was opened up for questions and comments, after listening to others share their thoughts on the discussion, despite my knowing so much about the importance of white people listening more and consciously endeavouring to take up less space, I was moved to share my own budding understanding about the colonization of Ireland, about my ancestral wisdom tradition, and the intergenerational trauma that is also carried in my body, the colonial fragmentation that I too, experience. My intention in that moment was to add to the hope and the vision being discussed and to locate myself within it in a way that implicated my responsibility. And yet, I immediately felt that I had mis-stepped. I could feel the disapproval in the room and I felt ashamed. How did I dare speak here in a space that was not meant for me? How could I be so arrogant as to attempt to narrate myself into a relational understanding with these discourses? Although the panellist from Africa addressed me as Sister, and I was so grateful to hear some compassion and the absence of derision in his response, he stated that he is 'done with white people'. With a burning self-conscious anxiety, I understood what he meant - our issues are not his and he has no responsibility to consider or address them.

In the winter of 2018, in the wake of yet another shameful verdict acquitting a white man of the murderer and Indigenous youth, an Indigenous acquaintance of mine posted that they were 'done with all white people'. This post received many likes and loves and 'hahaha' responses from others. Although I could perceive and empathize with their outrage, grief, and frustration at this, yet another clearly unjust verdict emblematic of the white supremacist settler colonial system, I found myself wondering, how does this public proclamation affect my relationship with this person. Since I am white, are they done with me? I made the mistake of asking this and the response was swift: "ALL WHITE PEOPLE", followed by several admonishments from white folks on the thread: "Instead of policing this person's grief, why don't you work on yourself and seek to dismantle the white supremacy that you are responsible for!" Again, I felt ashamed; scared of the rejection and perhaps irreconcilable harm I had done by having had the audacity to say anything.

Social media is increasingly where these discourses play out and are experienced, perpetuated, and negotiated. The following image is a meme that was posted:

The post was a generous nod on their part to their white allies, and was heartening for me to see as I was, at that time feeling particularly overwhelmed with the emotionality of my own decolonization process, grappling as I was/am with the implications of my whiteness. The thread included a white person who 'loved' this image of a white person bloody and shot through with arrows. They commented, "target practice – I laugh because its not untrue!" The impression I received was that this person felt compelled to make light of a depiction of graphic violence – to get in on the joke - in order to feel accepted – to pass - in solidarity with Indigenous resurgence.

Another social media encounter is this poignant and powerful meme highlighting the current issue in my community of manoomin and the ongoing colonial opposition on the part of local cottagers to this sacred and traditional Nishnaabeg food:



This meme is clever and I understand it, in fact, I agree with it, which is my point in sharing it in the context of my discussion of the poverty of whiteness. Even as the white woman on the aforementioned thread illustrates, many white people are aware of and disgusted by the fact of our inherited and ongoing legacy of white supremacy and settler colonialism. Many, myself included, live with the internalized metaphor of ourselves as a cancer, a pervasive blight on the wellbeing of the earth and its inhabitants. For those of us who have even dimly begun to perceive that, as settlers, we are a part of and benefit from the capitalist industrial complex that is wreaking havoc on all Life, we are, we know, an invasive species, complicit in a genocidal, oppressive, and by all definitions, psychotic impulse at the root of a destructive system. And yet, as we are reminded again and again, we don't have any culture, identity, or spiritual capacity in which to retreat from our whiteness, to find ethical alternatives for ourselves. As white people, this is who we are, and increasingly, who we are perceived to be.

This idea was illuminated to me, again during an experience at the CIARS 2018 conference. The last panel of the weekend was on 'Spiritualities and the Land', a topic dear to my heart. The last speaker, Dr. Njoke Wane, in narrating her experience of returning to Africa to study her ancestral wisdom, was attempting to

describe the state of having one's bare feet on the earth and was searching for a word to denote the kind of insight/information/revelatory knowledge that is received when a human being plants themselves in this way. She asked us, "What is the word in English?" Many attendees of all positionalities offered suggestions: 'astral projection', 'betwixt and between', 'transfigured', 'transported', etc. And then, a fellow white person made this sarcastic comment: "Transported-what, by bus? We don't have a word for it." They said this with what seemed to me to be a sense of shame and self-accusation, as if to give voice in a disparaging way to the emptiness and unworthiness of those of us who are 'white' and 'English-speaking'. The white-self-accusation was we don't have any word for (and therefore no concept of) the kind of wisdom, insight and connection to be received from standing on the earth with our bare feet.

The idea that 'white western people' have no ability to truly understand or, specifically, to ethically claim our own spiritual concepts of relationality is also perpetuated in academic discourses. Dei, in putting forth his argument for the place of spirituality in transformative learning seems to preclude *all white people* when he states, "let me say from the outset that what I spell out as African views of spirituality may well be shared by other indigenous, non-Western peoples of the world."[270] This exclusion points to such a truly impoverished state of white being; this is the poverty of whiteness. It is one of the many facets of our crisis of disconnection in settler colonial systems. More and more 'white people' are endeavouring to learn, to listen, to educate ourselves and others, to refuse these destructive systems in whatever ways we can, forming and joining coalitions, seeking forms of self-care and orienting spiritualities in order to enact 'rituals of renewal', with ourselves, with each other, and with the land and waters on whom we understand ourselves depend. The very real psychosocial challenges of continuing to be seen as emblematic of 'the root of all evil', both by those we admire and respect, as well as by each other and ourselves should not be simply dismissed or ignored. Acknowledging the poverty of our whiteness, and learning to grieve our own colonial wounds of disconnection and fragmentation while also continuing to hold ourselves accountable for our complicity and privilege, I believe, is an important entry-point for us – the colonized colonizers – to begin and continue our part in the work of decolonization.

In my meditations on the poverty of my whiteness, I am beginning to become better able to understand what white fragility is and what it is not, as well as how to more productively and appropriately process my feelings of discomfort in decolonizing spaces. It is a continual struggle – for me, a 'white' person - to remain truly cognizant of the 'invisibilized' fact of white supremacy and therefore, to be able to readily understand

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[270] George J Sefa Dei, "Spiritual Knowing and Transformative Learning," *NALL Working Paper #59,* (2002) 4.

BIPOC voices who speak in terms that call out 'all white people'. But when I can keep forefront in my mind the ongoing fact of cultural genocide and racial oppression (and my concomitant white privilege), it really shouldn't be an issue for me to make my feelings take a back seat; after all, it is not and has not been my 'white' life that is systematically threatened. In instances like the ones I have shared above, my uncomfortable feelings are not wrong or shameful, rather, they are a natural emotional response to the isolating fact of our institutionalized differences and colonial fragmentation. These emotions are a part of the necessary emotional or affective labour that is required as part of the work of decolonization. And importantly, they are not the responsibility of racialized people to deal with – BIPOC have enough on their plate as it is. DiAngelo reminds:

> Since all individuals who live within a racist system are enmeshed in its relations, this means that all are responsible for either perpetuating or transforming that system. However, although all individuals play a role in keeping the system active, the responsibility for change is not equally shared. White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people.[271]

It is my responsibility to find appropriate places to process my feelings; ideally, with fellow white people, so that we might keep the conversation going about how to de-center and dismantle whiteness in a way that does not further burden BIPOC. As Nicoll reminds, "ultimately the aim of critical whiteness theory should be to unsettle white subjectivity rather than create opportunities for individual confession, catharsis and redemption."[272]

Embracing Discomfort and Uncertainty

Boler and Zembylas's *pedagogy of discomfort* can inform the work of white settlers such as myself to confront and refuse our complicity in whiteness, as it speaks to the emotionality inherent in critically understanding the cultural and social construction of difference. With the ultimate aim of opening up new possibilities of dismantling hegemony (read here to mean whiteness and settler logics), the authors discuss the

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[271] DiAngelo, "White Fragility," 66.

[272] Fiona Nicoll, "'Are You Calling Me a Racist?': Teaching Critical Whiteness Theory in Indigenous Sovereignty," borderlands e-journal 3, no. 2 (2004) 33.

ambiguity and emotional labour involved in identity (de)construction, and argue for adopting a pedagogy of discomfort "as part of the radical work of changing social relationships." As they write,

> Inhabiting [this] ambiguity can be very discomforting and demands substantial negative emotional labor such as vulnerability, anger, and suffering. To tolerate this ambiguity, one has to dismantle old habits and replace them with new ones and this involves considerable emotional and intellectual risk. However, emotional labor in the context of inhabiting ambiguity can produce favorable results, including self-discovery, hope, passion and a sense of community. For example, issues of oppression (racial, gender, sexual, or otherwise) are frequently dealt with by silence and omission that stem from ignorance and feelings of discomfort for what is different. The reductive binary model of innocence vs. guilt is the one in which many of us might subscribe. This model constrains plenty of possibilities. However, through learning to see how one is emotionally involved in such issues, one is likely to develop accountability for how he or she sees one's self and question cherished beliefs and habits. If this takes place in an emotionally open and safe environment—that nurtures emotions of anger or guilt but challenges them with compassion and courage— there will be possibilities for mutual exploration that also nurture hope and a sense of community for initiating change.[273]

Furthermore, Nicoll states, it is "important to resist a tendency to try to 'resolve' our discomfort at the recognition of whiteness into individual(ising) affects of shame and/or guilt."[274] It is helpful to understand and accept that the work of decolonization and solidarity will involve emotional labour and discomfort. As Davis and Shpuniarsky have found, coalitions around confronting something "as intense and deep as colonization" are often a site of pain; "during this process feelings can be hurt as people struggle with the concept and reality of colonization."[275] Untangling our sense of identity and belonging in relation to others is a very challenging and complex task; it is inherently messy, emotional work.

The nature of the affective labour of settler decolonization can evolve and spiral back on itself. From my own experience, processing feelings of guilt, outrage, grief, and un-belonging can lead to feelings of unworthiness and self-conscious insecurity in racial contexts. I have learned that there is an ocean of difference between being *humble* and being *insecure*; *humility* is not even close to being the same thing as *insecurity*. As

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[273] Boler and Zembylas, "Discomforting Truths," 124.

[274] Nicoll, "Are you Calling me a Racist?" 30.

[275] Lynne Davis and Heather Shpuniarsky, "The Spirit of Relationships: What We Have Learned about Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Alliances and Coalitions," in *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships,* ed. Lynne Davis, (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 343.

Baldwin reminds me, I can learn ways to reject my whiteness without rejecting myself and, importantly, without denying the fact of my white privilege.[276] I can recognize the horror of settler colonialism and accept that I am complicit and implicated in it without taking on the shame that would tell me I am a bad person, even when it seems like that is the message I am receiving. When white settlers go into Indigenous and Black spaces rife with insecurity and shame or with something to prove, these feelings cloud our ability to connect, to be present and clear, and they make people uncomfortable. When I have been in such spaces in these states, I took up too much space, I detracted from what we were trying to accomplish, or at the very least, I could not adequately share my gifts. I didn't feel I had any gifts to give or that whatever I had to offer wasn't good enough, not welcome, or would just be 'too much'.

CONTINUING SPIRALS OF CONVERSATION

In sharing conversations together about these issues, the Anishinaabekweg who have supported me on this learning journey shared their insights into the settler colonial system and whiteness. As Marjolaine LaPointe said plainly, "*This entire system harms settlers too*." Whereas white settlers can be largely unaware of the ways in which these systems of oppression and disconnection harm us too, any notion of entitlement and security are ultimately delusion. As Marjolaine blithely observed, "*They're in the middle of the ocean and they can't see that they're drowning too - they think that they're on a yacht. Darling, your yacht will run out of gas fairly soon*." She and I spoke about how self-reflection is necessary as a first step for white settlers to begin to awaken to the shackles of our binary and entitled thinking. Marjolaine also offered that sometimes it can be an experience of personal trauma that creates the capacity for this kind of critical self-reflection:

> *When you have to be self-reflective, then you become acutely aware of your positionality all the time. And when you go through difficult things, you become aware of your positionality and then it becomes a habit of mind, kind of all on its own. And those habits of mind are to my way of thinking are key to transforming settler consciousness.*

[276] Baldwin, "On Being White...and Other Lies," 1998.

Interestingly, Marjolaine also spoke about how the binary thinking characteristic of settler logic is precisely what precludes us from imagining a humble and meaningful way out of our current crisis of disconnection:

> *But that way of thinking is so deeply embedded into the fabric of western society. It's the core of it. And the inability to remember I think is systemically deliberate. Like, this power of totalization - this Windigo beast/spirit that is at the heart of all these things - that deliberately keeps them asleep. This Christian embedded notion of original sin doesn't allow for growth and development, and engagement and relationship.*[277]

Georgie Horton-Baptiste shared with me how for a large part of her upbringing, she lived with white Christian people, whom she considered very kind and credits with offering both her mother and herself a safe refuge. And yet, what she learned from them was what a 'white' way of thinking teaches: *"Everyone should have a job, be self-supporting, don't expect anything from anyone. You're your own best friend*." This dog-eat-dog, survival of the fittest and most willing to go it alone/take what's theirs/earn everything they have is very much the logic that runs this imperial white supremacist capitalist, patriarchy. As Elder Dorothy Taylor related, this kind of mentality has only lead to suffering:

> *When we had that gathering in 2014, one of the Indigenous peoples that came from South America, they were the Wiwa people, but it was like a collective of nations among the Kogis, and um, they called themselves People of the Earth. They said those people who are the politicians and heads of corporations have become wild animals, they've become insects with no regard for life of this land to bring balance. They've become insane. Like, how can you even think about putting garbage, chemicals, sewage into the water?! So, it's just a state of mind and it is an unhealthy mentality. And it's up to us who are working towards balance and who have an understanding of the sacredness to either replace those people or to remind them of their responsibilities.*

Despite all the pain that has been caused by the white settler paradigm, the generous invitation is still being held out to us to awaken and right our ways. As Georgie Horton Baptiste said,

> *I fully recognize that no one regardless of what anyone says, that I am not asking for anyone to return to their point of origin; that's just impossible. And I'm sure our ancestors, had they, had things been different, I'm sure they wouldn't ask that either.*

[277] In Chapter 5, I take up the Anishinaabeg concept of Windigo that Marjolaine refers to here, as well as the issues of Christianity as it relates to decolonization.

My embodied spiritual practice as part of my decolonial praxis[278], which includes continually learning and engaging with content like this, helps me tremendously with processing the feelings of un-belonging, insecurity, isolation, guilt, and shame so that I can show up to solidarity work, into my relationships with my Indigenous friends and colleagues, as well as with the non-Indigenous people whom I teach, with more self-worth, a greater understanding of these interlocking systems, and how I am both a part of them and the ways in which I am – the ways in which we all are - more than these systems, too. Doing this 'hard heart work' reveals to me and clarifies my gifts, while also, importantly, teaching me when and how it is appropriate and not appropriate to offer them. As Kimmerer reminds me, each of us carries one particular original instruction that is the same: "use your gifts and dreams for good."[279] This synthesis of tending to my inner work – the 'hard heart work', my decolonial praxis as embodied spiritual practice, is the act of supporting myself in taking the next step, and then the next on a path revealing itself as I walk it with others, towards the possibilities of an alternative, ethical existence in which we *all* belong.

[278] This term is one I borrow from Young and Nadeau (2005) among others, whose work I engage with more fully in Chapter five.

[279] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 8.

Section II: SEA (*Muir*) - Honour

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Seashells from the Edge of the Universe

Maybe
just maybe
we can work this out.
Little steps,
so profound.
We found,
our way home…

Whispering
Go now
And I do
I follow you…

Penetrating mystery
Of sweet
Painful
Slow
Uncovery.

Dance your medicine.[280]

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[280] Aleyah-Erin Lennon, 2010.

Chapter 4: Footprints and Echoes of my Ancestors

Three candles that illuminate every darkness: Truth, Nature, Knowledge.[281]

We are not from here

In an article he co-wrote with Corey Snelgrove and Rita Dhamoon, Cherokee resurgence scholar Jeff Corntassel reflects on how Indigenous nations carry their community consciousness, sense of place, and responsibilities with them "even when we're not on our own territory." He writes:

> According to Cherokee Elder Benny Smith, when arriving at another nation's territory, you are to come in the calmest, gentlest state of your being. This exemplifies to'hi dyanisti, or a call to peaceful or healthy relationships. You only approach another Indigenous nation after you have thought it through, over and over again, and if there is willingness on the part of the host nation(s) to include or accept strangers. How do our ancestors recognize us as Cherokee or Indigenous even when we're not living on our homelands? Ultimately it's about how we honor our place-based responsibilities and live our values and principles, as Tsalagi in everyday life, even when the land we're on does not recognize us. While the land may not recognize us, the goal is to be known not as strangers but as welcome visitors with accountability to the Indigenous nations and peoples of the territory."[282]

The relational wisdom in Corntassel's words can help to inform settlers as we attempt to comport ourselves with respect and accountability to the Indigenous nations on whose homelands and territories we are living. His question of *how do our ancestors recognize us even when we're not living on our homelands* I believe, is an important one for settlers to ask ourselves as well. Without a connection to our own homelands, as is the case for many (white settlers), and therefore, without an understanding of our own place-based responsibilities, of our own values and principles - indeed without even a sense of ourselves as part of a people other than the settler nation state we are now citizens of - we have become rootless. This disconnection in the settler consciousness from our own homelands and place-based identities has rendered most of us woefully ignorant as

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[281] Erynn Rowan Laurie. *A Circle of Stones: Journeys and Meditaions for Modern Celts.* (Citing the Irish Triads, Chicago, IL: Eschaton Productions, v).

[282] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 3*, no. 2 (2014): 4-5.

to how to appropriately approach the nations on whose lands we find ourselves. As settlers, we are not on our own territory - we are not from here - but through the settler colonial project, we have been made to forget even this basic fact. How might our consciousness shift, how might we transform ourselves into more accountable and oriented visitors to these territories if we were to endeavour to remember, not only that we are not from here, but the nature of who we were before we arrived?

Decolonizing Diaspora

In her master's thesis, Johanna Lewis responds to the call made by Chickasaw theorist Jodi Byrd, who, as Lewis writes, "argues that apprehending violent colonial histories is a crucial step towards imagining and working towards decolonial, Indigenous-centered futurities (229)." Lewis goes on to state that:

> Confronting, unpacking, and grieving (historical and ongoing) colonial violence is a project that needs to continue to happen on many levels and in many ways. Celia Haig-Brown offers one concrete methodology that aligns with this call, positing the pedagogical utility and transformative potential of writing "decolonizing autobiographies" ("Decolonizing Diaspora" 13). Such a practice of "tracing [colonialism's] roots through personal narrative and family history," she argues, is a "first step in the long journey of possibility for decolonization" ("Decolonizing Diaspora" 14).[283]

The transformative potential of writing decolonizing autobiographies and of decolonizing diaspora that Haig-Brown writes about is compelling. As the title suggests, her article *Decolonizing Diaspora: Whose Traditional Land Are We On?*, asks the question: "in diasporic theory, what does it mean to take seriously not only the land from which one comes, but the land and original people of the place where one arrives?"[284] Describing the way in which the blindness of diasporic studies in North America to the land and people of the places we have come reinscribes the cultural genocide on which this country has been built, Haig-Brown rightly points out that, "settler Canadians, in their schools and in their everyday lack of consciousness, create the conditions that allow

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[283] Johanna Lewis, "'Ask the Colonial Ghosts': Intimate Histories, Harmful Complicities and the Search for an Accountable Relationship with the Past," (master's thesis, 2016, York University), 3.

[284] Celia Haig-Brown, "Decolonizing Diaspora: Whose Traditional Land Are We On?," *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2009): 16. For a comparative analysis of Indigenous and diasporic cultural ties to land and territory, see also Daniel Coleman, "Indigenous place and diaspora space: of literalism and abstraction," *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, vol. 1, (2015): 61-76.

them the same possibility of forgetting their pasts and their relation to Indigenous peoples.[285] Through her work as an academic and professor in teacher education, Haig-Brown has found that having her students come to more critically understand themselves as diasporic subjects through writing decolonizing autobiographies can assist them in, as one student put it, becoming "able to learn how to listen and therefore learn differently." She writes:

> Through acknowledging family trajectories in the class, we have been able to prolong and deepen our discussions of race, colonization, Diaspora, class, gender and decolonization in ways that expand rather than shut down what we have to say to each other. We struggle to talk and listen to one another while never losing sight that no matter what the story, no matter how many generations of people of immigrant or diasporic ancestry have been here, beneath all our feet is land which has existed and does exist first of all in relation to Indigenous people .[286]

Recognizing ourselves as diasporic subjects has the potential to begin to shift settler consciousness into becoming more accountable within our relationships with Indigenous peoples on whose lands we are now living insofar as this shifted sense of self can serve to de-naturalize settlers from the land and instil the awareness that we are not from here. The journey of coming to know ourselves as diasporic subjects entails tracing our family histories and our relationship to, and complicity in, colonization. In her doctoral dissertation, Emily Root speaks to this concept of *self as displaced person* and urges settlers to "engage with [the] difficult emotions associated with our own loss of Indigeneity."[287] In speaking to the necessity of dealing with the grief of being ourselves displaced persons, she offers, "settler decolonizing requires us to recognize ourselves as disconnected and displaced from our own land so that we realize we are not from 'here,' an awareness that can be accompanied by fear, uncertainty, deep sadness, and longing.[288]

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[285] Haig-Brown, 12.

[286] Haig-Brown, 15.

[287] Emily Root, "Dis-Placing Myself: Decolonizing a Settler Outdoor Environmental Educator," (PhD dissertation, 2015, Lakehead University), 182.

[288] Root, 180.

The affective or emotional labour (fear, uncertainty, sadness, and longing) that is involved in coming to understand ourselves as displaced people is part of what can be transformative in settler decolonization. And yet, as Rowe and Tuck point out in their discussion of affective studies, "work in this field often presumes a universalized subject of emotion, unmarked by geography or even social location—and 'innocent' of any complicity to settlement."[289] They cite Clough (2007) in describing affective studies as a discourse, which deals with psychoanalytic treatments of memory, displacement, and trauma to produce "multiple subjectivities and multiple modernities expressed in new forms of history, often presented at first in autobiographical experimental writings by diasporic subjects."[290] They go on to point out that "while these writings productively interrogate conditions of knowability, representation, and memory, in the absence of *a framework that foregrounds geography and the relationship between experiences of trauma and the land*, they have no necessary relationship to decolonization."[291] I note this here to remind myself that we must center "questions of land, landedness, and Native dispossession" as we explore and re-author ourselves through decolonizing autobiographical work. Root also reminds me that settler decolonization involves:

> Increasing our own self-awareness and gaining knowledge and a deeper understanding of our own identity, culture, cultural heritage, family traditions and values, and ancestral origin(s). It also involves examining our complicity in ongoing settler colonialism and considering our positionality as members of the more-than-human community.[292]

My Family's Colonization Story

Although I have grown up with an awareness that my family on both sides is Irish, as I endeavoured to know more about who we are and who our ancestors were, it became clear that not many, if any, of my family members knew our own family's story or what in fact being Irish meant to us. Except for one or two elder great

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[289] Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck, "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance," *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies 17*, no. 1 (2017): 8.

[290] Rowe and Tuck, 9.

[291] Rowe and Tuck, 9, *emphasis my own*.

[292] Root, "Dis-placing myself," 175.

aunties whom I never really knew or saw, none of my extensive extended family seems to know how or when or who or why we came over from Ireland, or whom we might still know there. We are not alone in this *not knowing*; my experiences talking with fellow settlers, especially through my decolonizing work, has demonstrated to me that a great many of us seem to have forgotten exactly where we come from, who our ancestors are, and what that might mean for our sense of identity and belonging. Indeed, in the long absence of this knowledge of ourselves, many of us have concluded that it must not matter. This *great forgetting* is pervasive, and I believe was one of the costs of becoming settlers here; it is part of what perpetuates and maintains the settler colonial project to this day. As Thérèse Cator has said, "the price of our freedom here was to forget." [293] Remembering then, becomes one small (albeit incomplete) act of refusal of what the settler colonial project asks of us.

It is not my intention here to relate a complete account of my family's ancestry; my journey to uncover more of my personal, ancestral genealogy and story-archaeology has been beyond the scope of my time within the confines of this thesis work and it will of course, continue beyond it. I will, however, outline some of my findings and how they are transforming my sense of identity and belonging on my decolonizing journey.

In 1914, my maternal grandfather made his journey across the Atlantic Ocean from Dublin Ireland in my great-grandmother's womb. His parents and theirs before them had been chimneysweepers in the infamous Dublin slums for many generations as far as we can recall. Although they arrived here in steerage on one of the many steamer ships that departed Ireland's coasts and were impoverished, they immediately began to reap the benefits of the settler colonial project and Indigenous dispossession here in Canada. My great-grandparents settled in the London, Ontario area, beside the train tracks, dirt poor, and began to somehow make a life for themselves in farming and door-to-door sales. By the end of his life in 1987, my grandfather had built a successful distributing company, raised a family of 8 healthy children with my grandmother, met the pope, and been given the Order of Canada. Exactly how he did this is a story I am still learning more about, but it should

[293] Thérèse Cator, "Reclaim Your Magic Masterclass," 2018.

be clear how it might fit with the (white) settler myth of meritocracy[294]; namely, those stories settlers often tell that our grandparents came over with nothing and had to work hard for all they have, thereby rejecting the notion of our privilege. No doubt my grandfather did work hard, but he was afforded free movement, title to land, legal rights of autonomy and personhood, the ability to vote, to accumulate wealth and to then leverage that wealth to accumulate more, as well as all the benefits of being a white, cis-gendered male, Catholic - those same privileges that were systematically being denied Indigenous peoples. My maternal grandmother's settler roots go a bit deeper. Her family had been living in the Bruce county region and near Elora for three generations, her own maternal great-grandfather having been born 1826 in Alsace Germany and having died 1897 in Alsace France. I am told that this side of my family were shoemakers and shoe salesmen, but we seem to know little else.

My paternal side tells a similar tale of impoverished Irish Catholic immigrants, beleaguered from countless generations living through the violence, subjugation, starvation, and dispossession under English colonial rule in Ireland, arriving in North America a few generations ago to become small-scale farmers, front-line salesmen, and eventually, in the case of my paternal grandfather, a celebrated photo-journalist with the Toronto Star. His wife, my grandma Helen and my only living grandparent, tells me she had to convert from being a Protestant to become a Catholic so that he would marry her. She also indicated that some of her family had come to Canada from Ireland via the United States. It is this fact that weaves the threads of my Irish heritage and my family's immigration to North America within the larger fabric of the story encompassing Irish, American, and white settler colonial histories.

Leaving the tale of Irish slavery aside (see next section), the first Irish immigrants here were disease-ridden, starved, and impoverished refugees. Beginning in 1845, there was a blight that devastated potato crops in Europe. As Klein writes, "packed with nutrition and easy to grow, potatoes were the only practical crop that

[294] DiAngelo, 2011.

could flourish on the minuscule plots doled out by wealthy British Protestant landowners."[295] Furthermore, although Ireland was indeed producing a wealth of other food sources, these were shipped out to England under armed guard, and so, millions of Irish people starved in what has become known as *An Gorta Mór*, the Great Famine. "Typhus, dysentery, tuberculosis and cholera tore through the countryside as horses maintained a constant march carting spent bodies to mass graves." [296] It is estimated that approximately 1 million died and 2 million emigrated over the course of three years.[297] Klein vividly describes the horrors in a passage that brought me to tears as I read:

> A flotilla of 5,000 boats transported the pitiable castaways from the wasteland. Most of the refugees boarded minimally converted cargo ships—some had been used in the past to transport slaves from Africa—and the hungry, sick passengers, many of whom spent their last pennies for transit, were treated little better than freight on a 3,000-mile journey that lasted at least four weeks. Herded like livestock in dark, cramped quarters, the Irish passengers lacked sufficient food and clean water. They choked on fetid air. They were showered by excrement and vomit. Each adult was apportioned just 18 inches of bed space—children half that. Disease and death clung to the rancid vessels like barnacles, and nearly a quarter of the 85,000 passengers who sailed to North America aboard the aptly nicknamed "coffin ships" in 1847 never reached their destinations. Their bodies were wrapped in cloths, weighed down with stones and tossed overboard to sleep forever on the bed of the ocean floor.[298]

To give a little more context, Noel Ignatiev, author of the book *How the Irish Became White*, in an interview he gave in 1997 with Z Magazine, said the following of their oppression under British colonial rule from which the Irish were coming when they arrived on American soil:

> Ireland was governed by the penal codes for most of the 18th century and into the period where my study begins. Catholics were not permitted to vote or serve in Parliament or hold public office of any kind; they weren't allowed to practice law or serve in the military or civil service; they couldn't open or teach at a school, or serve as tutors; they weren't allowed to attend universities or send their children abroad to school; they weren't allowed to manufacture or sell arms, newspapers or books, or possess them; they couldn't own a horse worth more than a few pounds; they were barred from apprenticeships in most of the

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[295] Christopher Klein, "When America Despised the Irish: The 19th Century's Refugee Crisis," *History.com/ Stories*, March 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/news/when-america-despised-the-irish-the-19th-centurys-refugee-crisis.

[296] Klein, 2017.

[297] David Nally, "'That Coming Storm': The Irish Poor Law, Colonial Biopolitics, and the Great Famine," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers 98*, no. 3, (2008).

[298] Klein, 2017.

> trades; they were limited in the kind of land they could rent; they had no inheritance rights (a Catholic could convert to Protestantism and disinherit his father, in fact his entire family); priests were not allowed to travel in Ireland; Bishops were banned from the country; and the list goes on. I suppose it can be captured best by citing an 18th century Anglo-Irish Protestant judge who said that "the law presupposes no such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic"—which is parallel, of course, to Judge Taney's dictum in the Dred Scott case that "a Negro has no rights that a white man is bound to respect." In all important respects, the Irish Catholics were treated as an oppressed race in Ireland.[299]

In essence, "the Great Famine was shaped by a regulatory order willing to exploit catastrophe to further the aims of population reform."[300] As Nally writes, "the desire to break the pattern of small, subsistence-based landholdings and cultivate a tripartite division of labor among landlords, capitalist tenant farmers, and a landless pool of wage labor was well expressed and theorized prior to the Great Famine. Dispossession was the end game of this logic.[301] When the Irish (a quarter of the nation) arrived in America, it was "the largest-single population movement of the 19th century." Whereas many had fled the horrific conditions in their homelands by using all of their savings for passage, many were sent, possibly against their will by "British landlords who found it a cheaper solution to dispatch their tenants to another continent, rather than pay for their charity at home."[302]

In America, little over a decade before the outbreak of the Irish potato famine (1831-1833), the Choctaw Nation was enduring the Trail of Tears, a forced removal from their homelands under the new Indian Removal Act, in which thousands died and many more suffered horribly. Neglected by their inept army guides and exploited by the American settlers along their march, "as the Choctaw traveled west, dysentery, diphtheria, and

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[299] Noel Ignatiev, "Z Magazine: An interview with Noel Ignatiev," interview by Danny Postel, *Race Traitor Journal of the New Abolitionism*, (1997).

[300] Nally, "That Coming Storm", 714.

[301] Nally, 731.

[302] Klein, "When America Despised the Irish," 2017.

typhoid spread through the starving people."[303] Although, as Porter[304] points out, we should be very mindful of not misrepresenting the similarities, nevertheless:

> Parallels between the plight of the Irish poor and the suffering of the Choctaw people can clearly be made - whether loss of homeland, decimation of the population by hunger and disease, destruction of native traditions and culture, or the callous attitude of the respective governments and those assigned to care for the suffering poor. The Indian Removal Acts and the Gregory Clause and Famine evictions, although coming from different governments and with stated different goals, ultimately came from the same callous disregard for human life. Both the Choctaw and the Irish people were land-centered with their respective cultures and languages interwoven with the topography of their geographic space. To remove the people from their land was to sever their ties with their own cultural identity.[305]

And yet, in a stunning act of generosity and a shockingly little-known story, the Choctaw Nation, in 1847, upon hearing of the suffering Irish, sent aid in the form of a $170 donation to Ireland. Since 1990, these two nations have walked with one another on their respective territories, in their respective annual memorials of these tragic events. In 2015, the commemorative sculpture 'Kindred Spirits' was unveiled in co. Cork, Ireland and dedicated to the Choctaw people.[306] It should be noted here that there was religious and colonial pressure on the Choctaw Nation, whose forced removal from their homelands was signed by then US President Andrew Jackson, himself of Irish descent. Their generosity to the Irish people was met with condescension and colonial self-satisfaction by those who continued to oppress them.[307]

The generosity of spirit demonstrated by the Choctaw people was not paralleled in the treatment that the Irish Catholic refugees received from landed American (largely Anglo-Saxon/protestant/republican) settlers once they arrived on this side of the Atlantic. Vehement American nativist and anti-Irish sentiments were in full

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[303] Yvonne Garrett, "From the Trail of Tears to the Famine Road: The Choctaw Nation's Gift to Irish Famine Relief," (2015).

[304] Joy Porter, "The North American Indians and the Irish," *Irish Studies Review* 11, no. 3 (2003).

[305] Garrett, "From the Trail of Tears," 7-8.

[306] Frances Mulraney, "Irish Town Builds Memorial to Thank Native Americans Who Helped during Famine," *Irish Central*, (2015).

[307] Christine Kinealy, "Private Donations to Ireland during An Gorta Mór," *Seanchas ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagah Diocesan Historical Society*, 17, no. 2 (1998).

force and the Irish immigrants were met with intense, often violent, bestialized racial caricature and systematic discrimination. As Kenny writes of the social climate at the time: "the United States also presented a distinct racial and political context, one where chattel slavery survived until 1865 and where race, consequently, shaped the meaning of freedom and democracy in a direct and pervasive manner."[308] Stereotypes of the drunken, violent, savage, ape-like Irishmen became part of American imagination, borrowed in no-small part from the British, who had already been employing this form of dehumanization to further their colonial and capitalist aims at the expense of the Irish for centuries. It should be apparent to readers that this seems to be a tried-tested-and-true strategy of the colonial mentality, as similar tactics were used against Indigenous peoples long after the Irish gained acceptance in the new white supremacist settler colonial order.

In order to win their 'freedom' and escape the hellish nightmare of what they had endured, the Irish immigrants to America essentially decided to become 'white'.[309] In the 'dog-eat-dog' atmosphere of the frontier mentality, and from the bottom of the poverty heap in the cramped east-coast cities, as Kenny writes:

> Irish Americans quickly came to harbour strikingly similar sentiments against African Americans and Chinese Americans, lashing out at their use as strikebreakers and their apparent willingness to work for low wages. In the period up through the Civil War, Catholic Irish immigrants steadfastly opposed the abolition of slavery, convinced that it would lead to an influx of cheap black labor into northern cities, undermining their hard-won but still precarious niche in the economy.[310]

"No longer embedded on the lowest rung of American society, the Irish unfortunately gained acceptance in the mainstream by dishing out the same bigotry toward newcomers that they had experienced."[311] And yet, the Irish who had remained in their homeland, who themselves were still fighting the horrific colonial rule of the British,

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[308] Kevin Kenny, "Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth Century," in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, eds. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 370.

[309] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[310] Kenny, *Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment*, 372.

[311] Klein, "When America Despised the Irish," 2017.

urged their kin across the ocean to stand up for what was right and to uphold the dignity of all human beings in their actions, remembering how inhumanely they themselves had suffered:

> In 1841, the Irish political leader (in Ireland) Daniel O'Connell—he was some- thing of a combination of Martin Luther King and Gandhi, the most popular figure among Irishmen throughout the world—issued an appeal—he and 70,000 others in Ireland—to the Irish in the United States, calling upon them to join with the abolitionists in America, to join the struggle to overthrow slavery. Treat the Negro everywhere as your equal, your brother, he said, and in doing so you will bring honor to the name of Ireland. O'Connell was speaking from a situation where Catholics in Ireland were members of an oppressed race. He was the leader of their movement to overturn that kind of subjugation. So he naturally reached out for alliances with the struggle against racial injustice everywhere. The Irish in America rejected him. He went so far as to say if you don't do this, then we won't recognize you as Irish. They thought about it and concluded, okay, if you force us to choose between our love for Ireland and our attachment to the institutions of our new country, then it's South Carolina forever. What they decided to do was integrate themselves into American life as citizens, invoking the privileges of whiteness. Having fair skin made the Irish eligible to be white, but it didn't guarantee their admission. They had to earn it.[312]
>
> And earn it they have; Irish Americans have made it as far as the White House. The Irish had, in a few

generations, essentially seamlessly assimilated within the white supremacist structures of North America. We became 'white', and consequently, we largely forgot who we were. I believe, we lost an essential part of our souls when we dropped our stories (and what they told us about the value of life, the importance of our humanity, our relationship with Land) in exchange for whatever form of survival and then privilege we could find in this 'new world'. When I think about the cataclysmic amount of turmoil, suffering, violence, and death at even just this thin slice of time in history, I am left aching. What was being experienced by Indigenous peoples as their lands were invaded and seized, their Nations and ways of life subjected to genocide, by Black people who continued to be enslaved and subjected to horrific dehumanizing violence and exploitation, and by my own Irish ancestors who faced institutionally sanctioned oppression, violence, starvation, and death in their homelands or being shipped by their landlords (or the choice to flee) to a foreign land that was already wrought with the same things for others, is truly abhorrent. My heart aches for the hideous choices that were made, for the sheer scale of it all, for the mind-bending complexity and yet heart-wrenching simplicity of the whole saga. And without adequate words of my own, I am reminded of the words of Thérèse Cator, Black author and transformational educator, whose healing work on Reclaiming centers the systems of colonialism, patriarchy,

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[312] Ignatiev, "Z Magazine: An interview," 1997.

and capitalism: “In the past, our ancestors had to make choices. Some may have made many out of fear or ignorance or both. Today, we get to make a new choice.”[313]

The Colonization of Ireland and The European Genocide

Journal Entry, October 2018.

The centuries-long European genocide and hostile takeover of our Commons - land tended and used in common, by the people, vast lush forests and meadows where our Wise Women gathered medicines and shepherds grazed their sheep...This was perpetrated by the church and the monarchy in order to confiscate land and monopolize resources by the privileged elite. It saw the torture, mutilation, and murder of millions (mostly, women) and used Christianity to terrorize and shackle hearts and minds with guilt and fear. It thoroughly forced upon our ancestors a colonizing and strangling religion that cut us off from each other, our bodily wisdom, and from the earth herself. It was done on purpose with calculated cunning. And we have all but forgotten it. The echoes of it reverberate, especially at this time of year, when costumed witches with green faces and missing teeth abound...But this is a part of our heritage as white settler people. This is a part of our history, and for many, the trauma still lives in our bodies and in our families and in our ‘culture’. The effects of this invading worldview are evident in our 'western' systems and continued structures of oppression...We have become complicit in it happening here, to the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island, where we now live. We have inherited this legacy. How can this truth, this knowledge, help us to face the call to decolonize? Our role in reconciliation? Our current crisis of disconnection? The impending climate disaster? How can we remember 'our original instructions' and come home to ourselves? How can 'going back' into our histories help us to rediscover and re-create our own medicines in order to ‘move forward’ together?

To my settler fellows of European heritage(s): It started in our ancestral homelands, and we turned around and became complicit in the same problem here on Turtle Island. This happened to us in our homelands and then we fled here and became perpetrators of or tacitly complicit in virtually the same thing. As Lyla June, so movingly writes:

> When and how did this egalitarian, earth-loving, woman-honoring culture, become the colonial, genocidal conquerors that washed upon American shores? Could it be that our beloved Indigenous European ancestors were raped and tortured for so many thousands of years that they forgot who they were? Could it be they lived in a pressure cooker of oppression for so long that conquer-or-be-conquered is all they knew? Yes, I believe so. Our task is to shake the amnesia. To not be ashamed of our European-ness, but to reclaim our beautiful grandmothers, to reclaim our venerable grandfathers, to reclaim our lost languages, our lost ceremonies, our lost homelands and become one with the Great Sacred Motherland of Europe once again. The European diaspora is spread all throughout the world, searching the planet for something that lives inside.[314]

[313] Cator, “Reclaim Your Magic Masterclass,” 2019.

[314] June, “Reclaiming Our Indigenous European Roots,” 2018.

Shaking the amnesia and doing the work of reclaiming that June speaks about is important to decolonizing the European diaspora; remembering our own colonization stories, I believe, can provide us with many liminal points along the journey to transforming settler consciousness and to realigning ourselves with our own pre-colonized consciousness.[315] In attempting to pinpoint the ancient shift in consciousness that occurred to allow such a brutalizing departure from our original earth-centered and place-based wisdom traditions, Blackie writes:

> I've been studying those indigenous Western traditions – the ancient Greek philosophers, the oldest literature and folklore in the Celtic countries of my ancestry – for a long, long time now. Followed the golden thread all the way through the centuries, examining the places where it frayed, where it knotted itself in the wrong places, where it actively snapped. And it's very clear, all the way down the line, that *one of the key places where we went wrong* – and we can easily trace this all the way back to Plato and his fellow philosophers – *was in valuing the rational, intellectual and transcendent to the absolute exclusion of the 'natural'. In valuing only the possibility of some disembodied afterlife, and looking down on this world, this life, this human incarnation*.[316]

The history of Europe is far too vast a subject to treat within the scope of my thesis. And yet, it is important, I believe, to understand something of the more recent large scale domestic European genocide, sanctioned and perpetrated in tandem by the Catholic church and the monarchies, that occurred in order to bring about the privatization of lands once held in common, the monopoly of resources by a privileged few, the rise of capitalism, and international colonization projects.[317] From the centralized and far-reaching power and ordered *colonia* of the Roman Empire, through the Anglo-Saxon 'barbarian' invasions, to the coalescence and rise of the English and other European monarchies, the thread of rationalized thought and departure from the land as sacred can be traced. This departure, reinforced by the enforced spread of Christianity through, not least the means of

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[315] Little Bear, "Jagged Worldviews Colliding," 2000.

[316] Sharon Blackie, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous Roots," *The Art of Enchantment* (blog), March 17, 2019, https://sharonblackie.net/reclaiming-our-indigenous-roots/.

[317] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, (London and New York: Verso, 2003); Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, (Brooklyn New York: Autonomedia, 2004); Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016); Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, (London: Zed Books, 1986).

genocide, deliberately sought to eradicate our earth-centered and balanced relationships with and within place and replace it with an entire dogmatic worldview of superiority, domination, isolation, and elitism.[318]

It is hard for me to imagine the possibility of over-emphasizing the importance of understanding the impact that the European Witch Hunts has had on modern western society and yet, this is largely ignored, dismissed, or entirely forgotten. The centuries-long propaganda, fearmongering, rape, mutilation, torture, and execution of thousands, if not, millions of women accused and condemned as witches was a colossal state-sanctioned endeavor to overthrow village life and indigenous wisdom traditions in order to seize control over land, bodies, minds, and markets. And yet, despite all this, historians tend to either blame the victims of this mass genocide or to all together overlook this profound part of European history. Silvia Federici, author of *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation,* writes on the importance of grappling with the historical context and far-reaching impacts of the witch trials:

> Yet, the dimensions of the massacre should have raised some suspicions as hundreds of thousands of women were burned, hanged, and tortured in less than two centuries. It should also have seemed significant that the witch-hunt occurred simultaneously with the colonization and extermination of the populations of the New World, the English enclosures, the beginning of the slave trade, the enactment of "bloody laws" against vagabonds and beggars, and it climaxed in that interregnum between the end of feudalism and the capitalist "take off" when the peasantry in Europe reached the peak of its power but, in time, also consummated its historic defeat.[319]

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[318] Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, 2003.

[319] Frederici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 2004. For a concise and accessible overview of the historical background and description of the trials as well as their causes and effects, see *Burning Women: The European Witch Hunts, enclosure and the rise of capitalism*, published by Past Tense Publications. In describing the consequences of the trials, their continued impact on our psyches, and the role of both in ongoing oppression and exploitation, this pamphlet states: *The witch trials enabled the enforcement of the gender division of labour, the enclosure of land, and alienation from our bodies and especially from our reproductive bodies. They enabled the imposition of an assumed norm of women as the weaker sex, and the exclusion of women from social, economic, cultural and political spheres of influence. They introduced gender divides within the working and peasant classes, thereby helping crush class resistance to emerging capitalism. […] Stereotypes are created and backed up by the terror of violence to enable the expropriation of land, resources, bodies or time. The resultant deep-rooted sexism or racism remains in our psyches to continue to justify on-going exploitation and oppression. The social, economic, and political exclusion enforced during this phase echoes on in the present. […] We need to bring this subject to light in order to understand where we are today - in order to understand the gendered origins of capitalism, and the capitalist origins of this current form of patriarchy. We can use the knowledge to make us*

As she notes, it was only in places where land enclosure was on the agenda that these burnings occurred. Witch Hunts didn't happen in Ireland or the Scottish Western Highlands "likely because a collective land-tenure system and kinship ties still prevailed in both areas that precluded the communal divisions and the type of complicity with the state that made a witch-hunt possible."[320] And yet, enclosure did shortly thereafter come to these places as well, but by then, it was through other economic and colonial means.

Meiksins Wood, in her book *Empire of Capital,* traces the philosophical and political shifts that were to give rise to imperial capitalism. As she writes, "in 1516, Thomas More became, in his classic Utopia, the first major English writer to revive the ancient Roman concept of *colonia* to designate the settlement of foreign lands."[321] More's thesis was essentially about increasing, indeed, maximizing, the economic value that one could make the land produce. Indigenous communities who were subsisting in balance with their lands were seen to be wasting the potential of this maximum productivity, and therefore, their lands were forfeit to the English, who would civilize both these peoples and their land. Tuck and Yang write: "in the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage."[322] And this is exactly what was done, firstly in the English countryside, and then, in brutal fashion, as England sought to expand and workshop their new concept of empire, in Ireland. Meiksins Wood explains:

> This, then, was the logic of agrarian capitalism, which was gradually enveloping the English countryside; and with it came new principles of imperial expansion. The history of early agrarian capitalism - the

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stronger in the fight against ongoing repression, and in celebration of those women who stay strong and fight back, past, present, and future, (24-25).

[320] Frederici, 171.

[321] Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, 74.

[322] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 5.

> process of domestic 'colonization', the removal of land from the 'waste', its 'improvement', enclosure and new conceptions of property rights - was reproduced in the theory and practice of empire.[323]

The Anglo-Saxons who were to become the English, and eventually the British Empire, had already been running roughshod in Ireland for quite some time. This history is as heart-wrenching as it is fascinating, but it is beyond my scope and purpose. Suffice it to say that the impulse for expansion and domination and their penchant for brutality was one the English had long exercised. But, as Meiksins Wood relates, by the late sixteenth century, "the policy now was a wholesale transformation of agrarian relations, even, or especially, in areas still dominated by indigenous social relations and practices."[324] To this, Nally adds, "these 'visionary geographies' implied a radical transformation of the Irish land structure from an indigenous[325] system based on the *rundale* and *clachan* scheme to one cornered around the new ideology of 'scientific' farming and agricultural rationalization.[326] Meiksins Wood cites the words of Sir John Davies (1610), whom she names as one of the principal architects of English imperialism in Ireland, as he expresses a quintessential tenet of settler colonial logic: "it stands neither with Christian policy nor conscience to suffer so good and fruitful a country to lie waste like a wilderness when his Majesty may lawfully dispose it to such persons as will make a civil plantation thereupon." As she writes about Davies' full letter of appeal:

> This passage is reminiscent of Thomas More, but it already goes a significant step beyond even More's fairly uncompromising justification of colonial expropriation without the agreement of local authorities, let alone the old Roman principle of res nullius and the right to claim unoccupied land. The criterion for Davies is not simply the lack of occupation, or even the lack of cultivation. The decisive issue is *value*, understood in a specifically English sense. Irish lands can be expropriated, not because they are unoccupied (which they are not), nor even because they are uncultivated (which they are not), but because they are not fruitful and profitable by the standards of English commercial agriculture. Their value is less

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[323] Meiksins Wood, 78.

[324] Meiksins Wood, 80.

[325] Small 'i' indigenous is used here to indicate that there were land-based relationship models, languages and cultures existing prior to this invasive contact and colonial exploitation. In citing scholars who make reference to this fact, I at the same time acknowledge that there is currently a growing contingent of white supremacists in European countries using the concept of indigeneity to further their oppressive and elitist agendas.

[326] Nally, "'That Coming Storm,'" 731. The *rundale* and *clachan* schemes to which Nally refers were varieties of native settlement or traditional townlands systems. For accounts of this, see:

> than one tenth of what it would be by means of English-style improvement. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of this conceptual move. It testifies to the new principles of property already introduced into the English countryside and now invoked as a justification of empire.[327]

Indigenous scholar Sandy Marie Grande has said that "there is no future in capitalism,"[328] and I could not agree more. Knowing our histories and our own relationships to colonialism reveals the brutality of the means by which capitalism became, and all around us we are witnessing its devastating ends. Practiced and perfected in Ireland by the English, "the new mode of appropriation created wholly new needs for military violence, not least in pursuit of colonial settlements - and capitalism has continued ever since to spawn new forms of war and generate new reasons for it."[329]

Religion was and continues to be one of empire's most pointed tools to terrorize, divide, and conquer Indigenous peoples in order to serve colonial and capitalist ends. I find it ironic that the colonizing Christianity that was brought to Ireland first with St. Patrick and proceeded, through waves of evangelical invaders, to essentially wipe out our wisdom traditions, ways of life, and relationships to Land, became the very aspect, which once forced to be embraced by the Irish people, was then used to oppress, divide, humiliate, and subjugate us under the English. All of these religious politics were designed to serve power and to isolate it in the hands of the powerful, who were, for a significant part of Irish history, the English. Very much in the same way as Christianity and its various sects have been deployed to disempower, dispossess, and assimilate the First Peoples of Turtle Island, most notably through residential schools, which were a part of the Canadian state's genocidal policy towards Indigenous peoples, the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland were residential state institutions, run by the Church, to which countless Irish women were sent, and many, if not most, never

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[327] Meiksins Wood, 81-82.

[328] Sandy Marie Grande, "Engaging Indigeneity and Indigenous Concepts of Living Well: Panel Discussion," (CIARS Decolonizing Conference, UOIT, November 8, 2018).

[329] Meiksins Wood, 88.

returned.[330] In describing survivor accounts of their time in the laundries as being characterized by "abuse and starvation, and whipping and beating," Yeager and Culleton write,

> Life in the laundries was characterized by silence, prayer, and hard labor. […] At the laundries they were under constant surveillance and deprived of privacy, education, leisure, and rest; deprived of their identity, they were assigned new names, their hair was cut, and they were provided with uniforms.[331]

Complicity between Church and state to recruit inmates to the laundries and to there, exploit them for free capital labour, to cover up the ubiquity of sexual abuse and the many mass unmarked graves, tells much the same tale as do the Canadian residential schools. These Irish asylums operated from 1922, the last one closing in 1996, the same year that the last Canadian residential school did. This is yet another almost forgotten part of our complicated histories[332] that tell the sordid tale of these forces of power and systems of oppression – the "imperial, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" of which bell hooks speaks, and to which I would add 'Christian' that are still ruling the world in which we live. And yet, it was not always like this. As we have seen, massive amounts of energy have gone into the sustained and ongoing assaults on Indigenous lands, lives, bodies and minds, both on this side of the Atlantic and the other. I for one, like so many others, am called to resist, and in resisting, to reclaim what it is that these forces tried so vehemently to wrest from my ancestors, tried to render me ignorant of and complicit in. I am called to remember, and in my remembering, to embody, all that continues to stand in opposition to empire; to stand with and for, Indigenous land and life.

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[330] Clara Fischer, "Gender, Nation, and the Politics of Shame: Magdalen Laundries and the Institutionalization of Feminine Transgression in Modern Ireland," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 4, (2016); James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment,* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[331] Jennifer Yeager and Jonathan Culleton, "Gendered Violence and Cultural Forgetting: The Case of the Irish Magdalenes," *Radical History Review* 126, (2016): 137.

[332] Our histories are indeed complicated. Many with Irish heritage also have English in their lineages, for example, and many Irish (who on this side of the Atlantic have white privilege) are counted in the family trees of some First Nations people. I do not illustrate the similarities of the brutality of settler colonialism in Ireland and Canada to abdicate my responsibilities and complicities in white supremacy. Rather, it is to illuminate how deeply insidious and globalized these destructive forces of empire have been and still are. This history is also offered up as a potentially liminal point for our settler (un)learning. It is my hope that it might open up a space in our consciousness with which to accurate perceive how our economic value systems are destroying Life as well as the models of relationships that sustain it.

Remembering My Original Instructions

"…a constant star in the constellation of teachings we call the Original Instructions. These are not 'instructions' like commandments, though or rules; rather, they are like a compass: they provide an orientation but not a map. The work of living is creating that map for yourself. How to follow the Original Instructions will be different for each of us and different for every era."[333]

As I set out to write this chapter, I have found it necessary to clarify for myself why I want to write about my understanding of my Celtic original instructions. What is my intention for this work in the context of anti-colonial work? I am using my Celtic Irish heritage and epistemology as a strategic exemplar of the kind of cultural heritage(s) that many of us have which can be a source of important knowledge and lessons about belonging and care for Land. What I have found in my search for my ancestral knowledge teaches me about a balanced, place-based identity and practice that can offer inspiration to other settlers who are likewise on a journey of healing and anti-colonial struggle.

I want to write this here to open more places of possibility for settlers (specifically here, for settlers of Irish ancestry) to transform into, to remind ourselves of who we were before we forgot. I want to help us to remember who we are as human beings, of our beauty and worth, of our magical and earth-loving heritage. I want to show us how we have a story that is more ancient and more true than who we have become under the systems of oppression, patriarchy, Catholicism, capitalism, and settler colonialism, which stripped us of our ancestral wisdom, languages, ceremonies, and ways of living in right relationship with the earth and waters. I want to help us reclaim a sense of ourselves that can assist in the re-authoring process, to give us something perhaps we have been missing without really knowing it, something with which to transform our consciousness. I want us to remember and to reclaim our ancestral wisdom traditions because they can help us in healing ourselves and our relationships with the Land and with others on whose lands we are now living as settlers.

Re-enchanting ourselves again by remembering what we have been forced to forget about ourselves and the world which we inhabit, I believe, will assist us in building the spiritual stamina to refuse these systems and

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[333] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 7.

logics of settler colonialism and provide us with some foundation of identity on which to stand as we work towards decolonization and healing in the Trilogy of our Relationships. "Like Creation Stories everywhere, cosmologies are a source of identity and orientation to the world. They tell us who we are. We are inevitably shaped by them no matter how distant they may be from our consciousness."[334] Although my people do not have one creation story, but rather many place-based ones, as Blackie asserts:

> The truth is that the old forgotten pre-Christian mythologies and philosophies of the West – from the Otherworldly stories of Celtic Ireland, to the magical Finnish sagas, or the soul-centred myth-tellings of Plato in ancient Greece – really are quite rich, complex and beautiful. They offer up not just a planet, but an entire cosmos in which everything is alive, and has purpose of its own. They speak of a world to which each incarnated soul chooses to come, for a reason: to fulfil its own unique calling, and to offer up a gift, which can only be expressed through relationship with and participation in that animate world.[335]

I want to know these stories! And I believe these cosmologies and the identity and orientation to the world that they can offer are important now more than ever for us to reclaim and embody. June, in writing about remembering and reclaiming her own European ancestors, shares her vision of the great work of our time:

> Our task is to remember that we are those beautiful Earth People. The ones whose love and prayers were so strong that they could carry 25-ton blue stone monoliths for miles and miles and build the sacred place of prayer known as Stonehenge. That is who we are. When we remember this, the healing of our lineages comes full circle. When we remember this, we will no longer need to borrow spiritual practices from other cultures.[336]

Not only will we not need to borrow spiritual practices from other cultures, we will be able to listen and relate that much more respectfully to them, because we know our own. When we are connected to ourselves, our histories, and to an understanding of how our own stories are braided up with as well as how they stand parallel to the stories of others, we can come together in a new and hopefully, more productive way.

Beware of Fakelore

As I set out to remember and reclaim my Celtic ancestral traditions and stories, it is helpful to be aware that there is a mountain of unreliable, falsified, and entirely made up material online and in print pertaining to

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[334] Kimmerer, 7.

[335] Blackie, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous Roots", 2019.

[336] June, "Reclaiming," 2018.

the Celts and our ancient European traditions. Spiritual Capitalism, the New Age, and innumerable sects of Neo Paganism and Wicca have propagated and proliferated over the last 70 years or so such that it can seem a daunting task to sort through what is accurate and what is 'fakelore'.[337] Lawless writes that it is through "the unfortunate combination of fakelore, cultural appropriation, and cultural diffusion" that erasure of actual indigenous spiritual traditions, "not just the Native American ones, but even the European ones" occurs. She goes on to note that "the body of fakelore from neopaganism is now so large that all the real indigenous folk religions and cultural traditions are almost completely buried under its weight." Furthermore, "neopagans are largely consumers to a capitalist industry they are unaware they're a part of."[338]

The longing for a core spirituality to fill the black hole that occurs for so many when one is disconnected from any sense of faith, culture, songs, or community, is so very real and must not be discounted – it will not go away. For those of us with European heritages, it is possible to rediscover and reclaim something of our ancestors, of our own original cultures and traditions, but it requires a lot of 'hard heart work' and even more discerning research, for much of who we once were has been deliberately stolen, demonized, burned, and forgotten. In its place, there has arisen an entire spiritual industry that seeks to capitalize on this human longing and need for meaning and belonging.

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[337] The term fakelore was coined in 1950 by American Folklorist Richard Dorson in order to distinguish it from traditional folklore. For compelling academic discussions of this phenomenon, see for example: Ellen Badone, "Folk Literature and the Invention of Tradition: The Case of the Barzaz Breiz," *Journal of American Folklore* 130, no. 516 (April 1, 2017): 204–51; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Bénédicte Coste, "Late-Victorian Paganism: The Case of the Pagan Review." *Cahiers Victoriens and Édouardiens (Online)*, no. 80 (2014): 2–12.; Amy Hale, and Philip Payton, eds. *New directions in Celtic studies*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000). A succinct overview of some of the contentions in this contemporary conversation is offered by Anthropologist Amy Hale in her blog, "On Paganism, Fakelore, and Tired Conversations about Authenticity" found here: https://medium.com/@amyhale93/on-paganism-fakelore-and-tired-conversations-about-authenticity-10ab0c9537d0.

[338] Sarahanne Lawless, "For Sale: Neopaganism, as Is," *sarahannelawless.com* (blog), November 11, 2018. Accessed March 3, 2019 from http://sarahannelawless.com/2018/11/12/for-sale-neopaganism-as-is/. This blog site is currently down, but the influence of Lawless' writings is indicated by the fact that some scholars have responded to it online. See Amy Hale's blog, referenced above.

Further to the concept of 'fakelore' is the unfortunate amount and nature of the historical record that has come down to us of who the Celts actually were and what they believed, as well as how this record has been interpreted even among scholars. As Peter Beresford Ellis notes, the fact that "the bulk of the 'Classical' observations consist of the anti-Celtic propaganda of the Roman Empire," and that "by the time the Celts themselves came to commit their knowledge to writing, they had become Christianized, […] their portrayal remains an extremely biased one." Furthermore, Ellis states that, "when some of the 'gentlemen antiquarians' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries felt that they could see the Druids in a more sympathetic light, they romanticized them out of all recognition to what their role in Celtic society originally was."[339] Indeed, there is an 'Ancient Order of Druids' and even certain authorities calling themselves such things as the 'Chief Druid of the Druid Order' who have "nothing to do with ancient Celtic philosophy, but sadly, Druids are commercially acceptable in the new wave of esoterica and alternative religious thought."[340] Given these troubling facts, Blackie asks:

> [H]ow can we find our way back, pick up the threads in the places before they got tangled and knotted, learn to weave with them again? Because we're like children in this work. It's so easy to go wrong. To replace old dogma with new, and never to understand that it was the concept of dogma that was the problem all along, not always its precise content. To create empty ceremony; to focus on decorating the container rather than tending to the sacred liquid that it holds. And I believe that the way forward is not about what we say or what we do, or about trying to reconstruct the past. It's about learning to perceive the world differently. Learning to live differently in it. Learning safe, respectful and authentic ways of approaching that Otherworld which is threaded through each and every one of our ancient European traditions. Because we've forgotten who we are, today. We've forgotten the one thing that all our ancient traditions tell us: that we're embedded in a world that is just as alive and full of soul as we think we ourselves are.[341]

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[339] Peter Berresford Ellis, *A Brief History of The Druids*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994): 11.

[340] Ellis, 13.

[341] Blackie, "Reclaiming our Indigenous Roots", 2019.

With the knowledge of the prevalence of 'fakelore' and the phenomena of cultural diffusion, appropriation, romanticising, and forgery, in our attempts to reconnect with our ancestral wisdom traditions, it is immensely helpful to have some informed guidance on reliable sources of Celtic folklore, stories, and beliefs.[342]

My Celtic Ancestors and our Landscape of Stories

In their profoundly influential article, *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, Tuck and Yang offer that, "Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place - indeed how we/they came to *be a place*. Our/their relationships to land comprise our/their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies"[343] The Celtic Irish, from whom I am descended, also have an ancient oral tradition that has preserved stories of how we came to *be our place* and how the Land is the mother of our unique epistemology, ontology, and cosmology. As Blackie writes,

> We have our own guiding stories, and they are deeply rooted in the heart of our own native landscapes. We draw them out of the wells and the waters; beachcombing, we lift them out of the sand. We dive for them to the bottom of deep lakes, we disinter them from the bogs, we follow their tracks through the shadowy glades of the enchanted forest. Those stories not only ground us: they show us what we might once have been, we women, and what we might become again if we choose. ... If women remember that once upon a time we sang with the tongues of seals and flew with the wings of swans, that we forged our own paths through the dark forest while creating a community of its many inhabitants, then we will rise up rooted, like trees.[344]

Ours was/is a sacred oral tradition and although the pre-Christian Celts certainly could write, there were mores against writing down our stories, "in order that such knowledge should not fall into the wrong hands"[345]

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[342] To this end, I have found Blackie's work to be an excellent resource. Her newly designed website has an extensive resources page, pointing to other academic and culturally relevant sources (https://sharonblackie.net/celtic-folktales/); she has an accessible and thought-provoking podcast (https://sharonblackie.net/podcast/), and offers several Celtic Studies distance courses (https://sharonblackie.net/celtic-studies-myth-and-tradition/), all of which feature academically rigorous and synthesized content.

[343] Tuck and Yang, 6.

[344] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 18-19.

[345] Ellis, *A Brief History of The Druids*, 13.

Moreover, our society was structured such that the storytelling work of our Poets and Bards was revered and played a central role in community life. In describing how our language and stories are intimately connected to our landscapes and our understanding of our place in creation, Blackie writes:

> Once upon a time, Celtic women knew that we are the land, and the land is us. Once upon a time, we spoke with the moral authority of the ancestors and the Otherworld. Once upon a time, before the coming of the Wasteland. Before the forces of the patriarchy systematically stripped us of that knowledge and of our power. Before the great patriarchal religions and the men who spoke for their misogynistic gods systematically rewrote our stories.
> Once, we were native to our own places; once, we belonged. There is a Gaelic word for it, and like so many Gaelic words, coming from a language which rises out of a deeply connected, animistic worldview, it is not easily translatable into English. These are the languages of root and leaf, of field and stone, of seaweed and salt. These are words whispered in our ears by the land as if by a lover; the languages which tell us that we and the land are one. In Irish, the word is *dúchas*; in Scottish Gaelic, *dùthchas*. It expresses a sense of belonging to place, by ancient lineage and ancestry, in the community which has a responsibility for that place. In Welsh, the word *cynefin* has a similar meaning. This is the way our ancestors lived.
> Early Gaelic and Welsh literature paints word-pictures of a culture in which there was little separation between plant, animal and human. A culture whose coexistence with and co-dependence on the rest of the natural world was a given, founded on the principle of taking no more than the local land could support. In Ireland the *dinnseanchas*, the stories and lore of place, were the foundation stones both of personal and communal identity, and of moral obligations to the land and the tribe. There was no dualism in this culture; the everyday world and the Otherworld were woven together in a shimmering web of complex, interdependent entanglements.[346]

At the 2018 Decolonizing Conference in Toronto, I listened to Marie Battiste speak about the importance of understanding our creation stories, of "how our people awoke to the world," to give us the spiritual strength with which to approach decolonization and to overthrow the cognitive imperialism of settler colonialism.[347] As Ellis notes, there is " a veritable treasure trove of Irish material which remains near to the original pre-Christian source,"[348] and a bounty of our folk stories are still being told among those who remember. I have collected many of these stories and listened to them over and over, but there remain so many more that I am still discovering and committing to heart. Again, it is beyond my scope to adequately treat with

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[346] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 355-356.

[347] Marie Battiste, "Cognitive Justice and Transsystemic Change: Indigenize the Academy," (keynote address, CIARS Decolonizing Conference, UOIT, Toronto, CA, November 9, 2018).

[348] Ellis, *A Brief History of The Druids*, 21.

the vast riches and wonders of my ancestors' landscape of stories. I will instead include a mere gesture of passages, which offer something of an overview of how my people awoke to the world.

"Celtic creation stories tell us that the land was shaped by a woman."[349] We do not have simply one creation story, for Celtic nations were (and are) a diverse peoples and very much place-based. And yet, the *Cailleach* - the Old Woman of the World, is everywhere present in our landscapes. She is the original shaper of the land and its eternal guardian. As Max Dashu writes, "She is connected with rocks, mountains, boulders, rivers, lakes, wells, the sea and storms; with megalithic sanctuaries and standing stones; with deer, cows, goats, sheep, wolves, birds, fish, trees, and plants," and she can shape-shift at will for her various purposes. The Cailleach has "cast her name across the landscape in hundreds of place-names, all with stories of an Old Woman of great cultural antiquity, who is more ancient than the present form of the earth."[350]

The oldest fragment of a tale we know of speaks of a Great Mother Goddess of the Sea, giving birth to twins who came then to live among the people.[351] "The Celtic divine female in her various incarnations was deeply grounded and rooted in place, indivisible from her distinctive, haunting landscapes."[352] Some of our oldest tales tell the epic and age-long histories of how we came to live in the Emerald Isle. As Goodwin writes, there are:

> Irish descriptions of a mythical "tribe" who came to Ireland in the distant, misty past. This tribe was called *Tuatha de Danann* (pronounced "thuey de du-non), which translates as "the tribe/kin of the goddess Danu/Anu." Danu/Anu was the mother of the Irish gods and members of this tribe/kin group are many of the gods and goddesses that are worshipped by the pre-Christian Irish, including the triad of goddesses often called the Morrigan (Mor-EE-gan), who may actually be another name for the great goddess Danu/Anu. […]The *tuath* arrived on the island of Ireland by ships over the Western Sea […] It was considered to be a supernatural realm of wondrous technology and eternal youth, a place where heroes and mortals might find themselves lost for many years, only to return with the world changed forever.
> The names for this original "homeland" for the *Tuatha de Danann* were varied. Sometimes parts of this

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[349] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 14.

[350] Max Dashu, *Witches and Pagans: Women in European Folk Religion, 700-1100,* (Richmond CA: Velda Press, 2016), 175.

[351] Patricia Freeman, *Celtic Mythology: Tales of Gods, Goddesses, and Heros,*

[352] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 58.

> mystical realm were referenced by a specific location within the land, indicating a kind of inner-geography. In Gaelic, the more general names are: *Tír nAill* (The Other Land), *Tir na nÓg* ("The Land of the Young"), *Tír Tairngire* ("Land of Promise"), *Tír na mBeo* ("Land of the Living"), *Emain Ablach* ("The Isle of Apples"), and *Tír fo Thuinn* ("Land under the Wave"). Specific places within this mythical land are: *Mag Mell* ("The Plain of Delight"), *Mag Findargat* ("The White-silver Plain"), *Mag Argatnél* ("The Silver-cloud Plain"), *Mag Ildathach* ("The Multicoloured Plain"), *Mag Cíuin* ("The Gentle Plain"). There is also an additional otherworldly realm called Tech Duinn ("The House of Donn/The Dark One"); this land is sometimes identified as an island toward which the souls of the dead departed westwards, to the land closest to the setting sun, over the western sea.[353]

Ours is a triune cosmology of Earth, Sea, and Sky (*talam, ocus muir, nem*) and the number 3 or 3x3 is an instructional motif seen in countless aspects throughout our mythologies. The element of fire, or the sacred flame, is harboured within each individual and is seen to be central to aspects of life (i.e. the hearth). As MacLeod relates, through linguistic scholarship of Old Irish as well as our oral tradition, we know that the Irish understand our origins to be from the deep, dark, waters of the Otherworld.[354] We view the day as beginning in dusk, and all things to originate in darkness, thus our feasts and holy days begin at sunset. Ellis notes that, *Keltoi*, "was a Celtic word used to describe themselves meaning 'the hidden people'"[355]; indeed, even the oldest words for the Cailleach have to do with the word for 'veil'.[356] We embrace the mysterious and we respect that which we cannot know. We also have rather detailed teachings about the horizontal cosmos, the four cardinal directions and the fifth, a sacred center, as well as the names and the associated colours and gifts of the various winds.[357]

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[353] Marie Goodwin, "Not Here: Irish Words for Places of Mystery," *The Otherland: A Novel* (blog), February 21, 2019, https://www.theotherlandbook.com/?fbclid=IwAR1zjVEw9-QVVYyCzKa_Kn8vFcsUkuYPIDmeY6i40Z0I1uwqyTM2K1SdoZI.

[354] Sharon Paice *MacLeod, Celtic Cosmology and the Otherworld: Mythic Origins, Sovereignty and Liminality*, (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2018): 13–14.

[355] Ellis, *A Brief History of The Druids*, 14.

[356] Dashu, *Witches and Pagans, 2016*.

[357] MacLeod, *Celtic Cosmology and the Otherworld*, 2018.

The Celts are "a metaphorical peoples, in contrast with the practical English."[358] Our poems, songs, stories, and language grew up out of the land and reinforced both the literal and transcendental nature of our conscious. Our concept of the living Otherworld, which runs parallel to and intersects our own all across landscapes both within and without, which is understood in a myriad of ways, whose gifts and dangers are both real and magical, demonstrates that my people do not see any meaningful distinction between our world and the world of Spirit. Our stories tell us how the world is alive with Spirit, and they instruct us in how to engage with this Otherworld and its multiple beings in respectful, appropriate ways, thus maintaining balance and prosperity. "Every hill, knoll, valley, dell, wood, river, lake, brook, well, bay, or rock seems to have had its spirit; and sea, sky, winds, and clouds were imagined to be enbued with a certain amount of consciousness."[359] Respect, compassion, courage, imagination, and the transformative power of both word and emotion are guiding principles for the Celts. "Think of the Grail legends, where only a knight who understands the meaning of compassion – who understand the necessity to gently ask the question 'What ails thee?' of the wounded Fisher King – can hope to attain the Grail and help restore the Wasteland."[360]

The female aspect of creation was revered, and women were seen as spiritual leaders and knowledge holders, who especially had the responsibility of protecting and speaking for the Water; they were not barred from any office or leadership role, but rather were part of the learned class of Druids, which had a religious function, but which also consisted of "philosophers, judges, teachers, historians, poets, musicians, physicians, astronomers, prophets and political advisors or counsellors.[361] Female Druids were called by many names, one of which was the Bandrui. As Goodwin writes:

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[358] Lenka Pokorná, "Celtic Elements in Yeats's Early Poetry and Their Influence on Irish National Identity," (master's thesis, Masaryk University, 2018).

[359] Hector Maclean, "Gaelic Mythology," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 9, (1880):168.

[360] Blackie, "Reclaiming our Indigenous Roots," 2019.

[361] Ellis, *A Brief History of The Druids,* 14.

> There is an abundance of textual evidence that the Bandrui lived and thrived in the earlier part of the first millennium in Ireland. For instance, we see Fedelm in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*; Bodhmall in the Fenian Cycle; Bé Chuille, Dub and Gaine in the *Metrical Dindshenchas;* Relbeo from the *Book of Invasions;* Eirge, Eang, and Banbhuana are bandrui in the *Siege of Knocklong;* and of course Tlachtga, the daughter of the great blind Druid Mug Ruith, in the Lebor Gebála Érenn. These are only a sampling, and there are many, many more tales that come down to us from not only Ireland, but Scotland, Brittany, and the Celtic mainland as well. The Romans, complicated witnesses though they were on these matters, were fascinated with these women.[362]

Robin Wall Kimmerer has observed that, "cautionary stories of the consequences of taking too much are ubiquitous in Native cultures, but it's hard to recall a single one in English."[363] That may be because English has become the language of conquerors (and capitalists), but in Native Irish and other Gaelic languages, these stories abound. As just one of countless examples, in relating just some of the vast history of the Cailleach, Dashu says of one particular story of the *Glas Ghaibhleann* (Cow Woman - a most ancient and sacred guise of the Calliach), "the stories say she disappeared after some greedy and selfish person tried to confine and exploit her, or wasted her milk, or otherwise failed to respect her generosity."[364] Although, after contact with Christians, "a thousand attempts were made to mythically kill off the deathless Cailleach, and the pagan past along with her,"[365] she persists even to this day, indomitable and ever-present. In another example of her ever-bright teachings on how to live in a good way upon the land, the *Lament of the Cailleach Bhéara*, a poem written in the time when Christianity and its attendant patriarchal values were already beginning to transform our Indigenous relationships to the land, relates:

> the Cailleach laments a cultural shift towards greed: "it is riches you love, and not people; when we were alive, it was people we loved. Beloved were the people whose lands we happily traverse; well did we fare among them, and it was little they boasted afterwards." The final line seems to refer to hospitality for its own sake, not for prestige or status.[366]

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[362] Goodwin, "Not Here: Irish Words for Places of Mystery," 2019.

[363] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 179.

[364] Dashu, *Witches and Pagans, 180*.

[365] Dashu, 193.

[366] Dashu, 192.

Hospitality was and continues to be a central value for the Irish and Celtic peoples. Classical accounts tell of how the Celts would only inquire of a stranger's identity and purpose after the important business of eating, drinking, and singing had been tended to. The story of the Well Maidens depicted in the prologue to this thesis highlights how this ethic of hospitality was an embodiment of our contract with the land, a reciprocal relationship of care-taking, of giving and receiving, in service to the land and life-giving waters, which issued from the Otherworld or from Spirit.

Three Cauldrons Cosmology and Power of Poetry

In contrasting the western (white man's) tradition of privileging the rational, mental and thinking aspects of our being, Tuck and Yang, state that "black feminist thought roots freedom in the darkness of the cave, in that well of feeling and wisdom from which all knowledge is recreated."[367] They cite Black feminist scholar Audre Lorde when she writes:

> These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.[368]

They go on to state that, "for Lorde, writing is not action upon the world. Rather, poetry is giving a name to the nameless, 'first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action'.[369] Importantly, freedom is a possibility that is not just mentally generated; it is particular and felt."[370] My Celtic ancestors held a similar view of the profound power of poetry and its relationship to creation, emotion, and liberation. The *filid* were "members of a highly trained learned class of medieval Irish poet-seers"[371] who practiced three types of

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[367] Tuck and Yang, 20.

[368] Audre Lorde, *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*, (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 36-37.

[369] Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 37.

[370] Tuck and Yang, 20.

[371] MacLeod, *Celtic Cosmology and the Otherworld*, 10.

divination involving poetry and song, *imbas forosnai, dichetal di chennaib and teinm laeda*.[372] The *fili* of Ireland "postulated an energy structure in the body, consisting of three internal 'cauldrons'. These cauldrons were *Coire Goiraith* – the Cauldron of Warming, *Coire Érmai* – the Cauldron of Motion, and *Coire Sofhis* – the Cauldron of Wisdom."[373] As Laurie relates of the *Cauldron of Poesy*,

> Through our poetry, we reach into the liquid fires of creation, the fire that arises from the Well of Wisdom. The fire fills us until we can hold no more, and then fills us even further. The creation of this true, fearful poetry is inherently ennobling, raising the poet from the basest of conditions into enlightenment.[374]

The cosmology and mysteries related to the Three Cauldrons, which our tradition teaches are present in every human being and correspond to places in the body somewhat similar to the Indian Chakra system, offer us teachings of the path of evolution that we all undertake throughout our lifetime – teachings which remind me of Kimmerer's words on the original instructions that each of us carry. The Cauldron of Poesy teaches that "we each have gifts that are given to us, and it is our sacred duty to take those gifts and hone them to a fine edge. In doing this, we show our divine origin as children of the Gods, becoming *aes dána, or* 'people of art.' Being able to feel, acknowledge, and work with the full spectrum of our emotions is a key ability for healing and liberation, and the art and skill of poetry is inherent in this work. As Laurie states:

> The creation of poetry is important. Being able to state what you perceive in poetic form is an important part of the process of working with the cauldrons and transforming their contents. The poetry itself generates a certain amount of magical power that should never be discounted. Poetry provides a context for information and power, and a matrix within which to work. It ritualizes the information and becomes the ritual through which power flows.[375]

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[372] Sharon Paice MacLeod, *Celtic Myth and Religion: A Study of Traditional Belief, with Newly Translated Prayers, Poems and Songs*, (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland and Company Inc., 2011), Kindle, 1656.

[373] NicDhàna, Vermeers, and Dhoireann, *The CR FAQ: An Introduction to Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism*, (Leverett, Massachusetts, USA: River House Publishing, 2007), 106.

[374] Erynn Rowan Laurie, "The Cauldron of Poesy," *The Preserving Shrine* (web), 2010, https://www.seanet.com/~inisglas/cauldronpoesy.html. Laurie provides an accessible overview with direct translations of the original text as well as academically grounded and spirited interpretations.

[375] Laurie, "The Cauldron of Poesy," 2010.

Land as Sovereignty[376]

Most important, in my opinion, to this discussion of what my Celtic ancestors believed and what our stories tell me about our original instructions, is an understanding of the Celtic relationship to Land and the concept of sovereignty. The concepts of both land and sovereignty are central to Indigenous resurgence and settler decolonization, and as such, it is vital that we keep them at the center of these conversations. The settler colonial concept of sovereignty, along with the capitalist notion of private property, stand in harsh contrast to Indigenous ways of knowing and relationships to land.[377] When Wolfe considers Veracini's inference that 'settlers bring their sovereignty with them', he states that this "enables Veracini to distinguish between settlers and immigrants, the latter being those who do not bring a sovereignty with them. On its own terms, this distinction seems questionable (where, for instance, does it leave White settlers of Irish descent?)."[378] I cite this here not to re-open any debate about volunteerism and its impacts on one's settler status. Tuck and Yang have concluded this matter for me – anyone who has come to live here on Indigenous lands, regardless of how we came to be here, is a settler. I cite this here rather, to contrast it with my Celtic concept of sovereignty.

For my ancestors, Sovereignty was the land Herself, and the Goddess of Sovereignty, everywhere, by whatever local name she bore, was the Land.[379] Through women, the Divine Feminine principle, the Cailleach, the various local Goddesses of Sovereignty protected and spoke for the land and all her creatures; the right to

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[376] Again, I reiterate my acknowledgement that the term 'sovereignty' is a complicated and much debated concept, especially in Indigenous contexts. I am using the word here to describe my Celtic teachings about the Land as having agency, voice, and the power of self-determination. In our stories, the Callieach, as an embodiment of the Land, routinely sets limits on how we can interact and take from her bounty, for example, and the consequences of superseding these limits were often swift and dire.

[377] Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 2016.

[378] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism", 258.

[379] Blackie, 2016; Dashu, 2016; MacLeod, 2018.

rule was appointed by Her and one was seen to be fit to rule only insofar as one safeguarded the Land. As Blackie writes:

> In the days when our native traditions predominated, the power of Sovereignty was also the power to determine who should rule the land. In the old myths, Sovereignty's power was paramount. If the power she bestowed was abused, then we invited disaster. During the reign of a king favoured by the goddess, the land was fertile and prosperous, and the tribe was victorious in war. But if the king didn't match up to her expectations, he didn't last long. And what she expected of him more than anything was that the king, and through his example, the people, would cherish the land. So it was that the ancient rites of kingship in Ireland included a ceremonial marriage, the *banais ríghi*, between the king and the land, and those rites lasted into the sixteenth century.[380]

Furthermore, the sacred marriage that the king entered into with the Goddess of Sovereignty, the Land, was a binding contract. This contract is one of mutual respect, of gift-giving and receiving, of care-taking and perpetual tending between the earth and her people. Again, Blackie offers:

> In this sacred marriage, the king swore to uphold the land and his people and to be true to both; in return Sovereignty granted him the gift which would help him keep his oath. Inaugurations might take place by a well; the new king would receive a drink from it to demonstrate his dependence on the Sovereignty goddess and to show that he recognized her as the source of the kingdom's life. But the source of life must be respected. While there is mutual respect between two partners – between the goddess and the king, between the land and the people, between nature and culture, between feminine and masculine – then all is in harmony and life is filled with abundance. But when the contract is broken, the fertile land becomes the Wasteland.[381]

The Celtic concept of Sovereignty as Land has embedded in it the values of living in sustainable, respectful, and reciprocal ways with the earth. It instils reverence and gratitude and humility. It demonstrates the understanding that we are dependent upon the land and waters for our very life and for the continued ability to thrive in our communities. This concept held world over and embodied in a myriad of place-based ways, but always teaching the same original instruction: *The land and waters are sacred. They are the ground of our life.* We must live our lives in an embodiment of celebration, respect, and gratitude for their continued gifts and blessing.

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[380] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 59.

[381] Blackie, 59-60.

Reciprocity, the act giving back, of co-participating in the natural gifting economy with the earth and her countless gifts,[382] is embodied in the Irish concept and practice of hospitality. John Wylie notes, "it is difficult to deny that genres of environmental writing and nature writing, certainly in the UK and the US, inherit a complex romantic legacy in which notions of land and life existing in reciprocal harmony play a significant, if contested part."[383] Our cyclical feast days and their attendant stories and ceremonies, which follow and honour the seasons of the year, grew up out of our landscapes and deep connection to and love of place.[384] There are over 3,000 holy wells in Ireland, sacred sites that have endured for millennia and which are still worshiped at to this day, as well as pilgrimages to sacred trees (*bili*), where votive offerings or *clooties* (tiny pieces of cloth tied to trees with prayer and intention) are left.[385] Spirit plates are offered and ancestors are honoured in a myriad of ways. My ancestors knew how to *be in place*. They knew who they were and how to live in relationship with the land beneath their feet. They knew how to 'court the world soul' through continual engagement, mutual enchantment, and embodied reverence and to pass on this sacred knowledge to their children and their children's children. [386] Who could we be here, now, if we remembered and reclaimed this heritage?

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[382] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2013.

[383] John Wylie, "Dwelling and displacement: Tim Robinson and the questions of landscape," *cultural geographies* 19, no. 3 (2012): 366.

[384] MacLeod, 2011, 2018; NicDhàna et al., 2007.

[385] Celeste Ray, "The Sacred and the Body Politic at Ireland's Holy Wells," *International Social Science Journal* 62, no. 205–6 (September 2011): 271–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12000.

[386] Sharon Blackie, "Enchanted Life Workshop Weekend," (presentation, The Rowe Center, Rowe Massachusetts, September 7-9, 2018).

CONTINUING SPIRALS OF CONVERSATION

'Use your gifts and dreams for good,' the same instructions we all carry.[387]

I have been in the process of trying to remember more about who I am and where I come from for as long as I can remember. This process of remembering and healing continues and will continue, I believe, for the rest of my life. It has involved, among other things, liberating myself from oppressive and colonizing monotheistic religion, excavating, remembering, reclaiming, and evolving my own ancestral traditions, and reconciling my past with my present reality. It has and will continue to involve reconstructing a new identity for myself. As Elder Shirley Williams told me when we spoke about this, *"We all have to reconstruct our own identity, our own being."*

Shirley tells me, "*in our philosophy, when creation took place, every nation was given instructions, their own instructions to follow. It is through these instructions many people change as they develop and grow…For the Anishinaabeg, they have never given up their own instructions. Although they were forced to, but they still hung on.*" Through the ongoing process of settler colonialism, and especially through the residential school era, Canada and Canadians tried to force Indigenous peoples to forget their original instructions. As I have touched upon throughout this chapter, the same thing happened to my people in Ireland. In discussing the various ways her people had been made to stray away from their first teachings, their ways of knowing and relating to their world, Shirley observes that,

> *Somehow, they got lost. So, they're lost in it now through the process. And those people that have been lost, have found something else and they believe this is what should be. And so, after wandering through different stages of life, they find that this wasn't part of them and so they've gone back to their own traditional ways. Which I think is what other nations are trying to do, but they can't seem to find their own - their own parts of their own identity.*

Shirley sees, as I do, that so many of us, regardless of which place on the colonial space that we may occupy, are seeking for this something we lost, to trace somehow where we got lost. As for settlers, she observes,

> *So now those people are trying to find their own original instructions, and they're having a hard time because it's been so long, that they're trying to get back. So now we have to – it's time now, I think*

[387] Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, 2013.

> *everybody's being awakened because of climate change and many people want to save the world and save themselves and they wanna change something for the better because they realize where they went wrong and they wanna reconstruct that. So, we all have to do that as people - we have to reconstruct.*

Being a residential school survivor, Shirley knows all too well how the education system attempts to take away one's sense of self and to mold and make one into something of use to the colonial system. In discussing this, we talk about how remembering can be transformative, and how for Indigenous peoples as well as for settlers here, doing so brings healing in the trilogy of our relationships: "*They made you forget. That's what they mean by you have to start with yourself.*" Remembering my original instructions and learning how the lineage and wisdom of my ancestors can inform my sense of self here in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg lands is part of how I am starting with myself, spiraling outwards into my relationships with others and with the land beneath my feet.

Blackie writes about how her own journey, which she defines as coming to understand "how deeply enmeshed we are in the web of life on this planet," was inspired in large part by reconnecting to and reclaiming "those Celtic myths and stories which showed me a way of belonging in my own native lands, and which offered an image that I hungered for of what it might be to be a woman."[388] And yet, what about those of us of Celtic decent who do not live on our own native lands; who, like me, have never set eyes on Ireland in this lifetime, and who in fact, live on stolen land, the land of the First Peoples of Turtle Island? How can settlers such as myself take up the work of remembering and reclaiming our own original instructions and sense of belonging to and responsibility for the Land in ways that are accountable to our positionality here? It is a wonderful notion that Blackie offers us when she says, "when we find our home in our distinctive, iconic Celtic landscapes, and connect there with our stories, it is from that strong place of belonging that we can begin to the unravelling of the Wasteland."[389] But that beautiful sentiment doesn't accurately apply to me as a woman of Irish ancestry living on stolen Indigenous land here in the nation state of Canada. How then, do I go about the

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[388] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 17.

[389] Blackie, 62.

hard heart work of decolonizing my sense of identity and belonging to the land beneath my feet? What are my roles and responsibilities to my relationships here in *this* place?

Similarly, Pegi Eyers, author of *Ancient Spirit Rising: Reclaiming Your Roots and Restoring earth Community*[390] ponders how, "the ambiguity arises when we no longer have proximity to the landforms that informed our original instructions. Do the old myths still hold meaning? Did they sustain the crossing? What is our relationship to the territories here on Turtle Island that are already alive with First Nations epistemologies?"[391] Even as I retrieve my own ancestral stories that grew up out of the Irish landscapes, I recognize that the land in which I am living already has its own stories - the stories of the Nishnaabeg. How can I bridge the gap between the stories of my ancestors and the stories of the land in which I have grown up here? I asked Marjolaine LaPointe about how, as a settler, I might integrate the stories of this place into my understandings of the land alongside the stories of my own ancestors. She had this to say:

> *I don't think you can. I think that's an in-conversation that we as Indigenous peoples need to have; where we need to start taking up our spaces. And I think it's incumbent on settlers to re-Indigenize themselves to their own ways. Right? Like, if you're German, find your German stories. If you're Norwegian, then read all the Valhalla stories. Do it. Like, dig deep. And not just Christianized versions of those things - go deeper than that. Go way deeper than that. And in doing that, then you're re-connecting again, rather than taking up the stories that are here.*

Re- indigenizing ourselves as settlers through digging deep into our own ancestral stories is a key part of the re-connecting and healing process within and between our peoples, as Marjolaine sees it. She went on to express that it is important that settlers be aware of the stories that are readily shared by Indigenous peoples, and how it is important that we hold them appropriately: "*So, knowing them is different than sharing them or incorporating them. Yep, so yes, we should know them. The problem is that we have a whole lot of kids that don't even know their own stories*." Her comment underscores the point that will be elaborated on throughout the rest of the thesis – that part of my responsibility is to work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples who are asserting their sovereignty and resurging their own systems of education, language, and nationhood.

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[390] Pegi Eyers, *Ancient Spirit Rising: Reclaiming Your Roots and Restoring Earth Community*, (Otonabee, Ontario, Canada: Stone Circle Press, 2016).

[391] Pegi Eyers, personal communication, 2018.

What about the people who do not or cannot know their ancestral lineage, or whose lineage is so diverse and intermingled that they do not know which one to explore further or which one they can ethically claim? These are questions I have been posed and which I hear being asked by fellow settlers as well as Indigenous people of diverse ancestry who resonate with the importance of retracing and reclaiming our roots. Georgie Horton-Baptiste, too, expresses her awareness of this contention as we discuss how she herself is learning how to decolonize:

> *In similar ways, you know, you're also asking the question - how can you as a Zaganashiikwe, decolonize? And part of that is that old teaching you know - go back to your own indigenous knowledge. But so many people say - what is it? I don't have it. I'm so far removed from my origins that you know; my people have lost it. I'm a mutt. I have no idea who my ancestors were. You know, so many people say that.*

There is such diversity in our own individual paths. Whereas I don't have many answers to these important questions, I believe that the questions are keys onto themselves – that the act of inquiry and uncertainty is part of this journey. And yet, what does seem clear to me is the space of possibility arising out of our current imperative: no matter our lineage(s), settlers can and must find ways to reconceptualize and co-create place-based relationships with other humans and the more-than-human world that are more ethical, respectful, and transformative. Celia Haig-Brown reminds me that no matter how we came to be here or where we come from, remembering and sharing our stories is important to the decolonization process:

> Their stories of being Indigenous or of coming to Canada—and their family's stories—are varied and they both historicize and complicate any notions of what it means to be part of a colonized country. What does it mean? For each person, the answer must be taken up in relation to their own coming to or being in this place. Again the simple binary distinctions of colonizer/colonized or Indigenous/immigrant fail to address the range of ways that people are a part of this country. We have stories of how we came to be here: we need to trace those stories and our place in the process of colonization—whether it is as entrepreneur, refugee, Indigenous person, adventurer, or any one of a myriad of possibilities. None of the players in these stories escape the effects of colonization, but in each case, one takes the time to think through what these effects are and what their significance is. Resonating with current theorizing around Diaspora, I say again there is nothing simple in any these stories.[392]

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[392] Celia Haig-Brown, "Decolonizing Diaspora: Whose Traditional Land Are We On?," *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2009): 14.

Throughout my journey of remembering my original instructions, I have come to recognize similarities between Celtic epistemology and ontology and other place-based or earth-centered worldviews. My understanding and thinking of this may very well continue to evolve, but it seems to me that the similarity includes an abiding sense of respect, wonder, and interdependent relationship with the worlds seen and unseen. Through the teachings of both my Celtic tradition as my learning from Nishnaabeg culture, I have learned that we each have a responsibility to celebrate and tend these relationships, through observation, deep listening, and through ceremony. The most salient things I can know about my Celtic lineage, according to Blackie, are:

> our ancestors honoured the physical earth and the Otherworld which is intertwined with it, and we know that a belief in living in harmony and balance with the land (and the seasons) was the central obligation of human society. We know that they honoured animals and trees and features of the landscape, and saw the divine in all of these. They were profoundly immersed in the ecosystem in which they lived, and in the spirit of their places. And service to the land and the community was more important than the individual.[393]

For settlers, remembering our original instructions and beginning to reclaim our ancestral ways of relating in place can be a direct act of resistance to the systems of white supremacy, as Marjolaine explains:

> *Getting people to start reclaiming their own indigeneities and connections to their ancestors, I think, I feel, will go a long way or part of the way to dismantling notions of white supremacy. Because these notions of white pride and white supremacy are not notions of Indigenous pride, of like European Indigenous pride. They're not. [While they can be fear-based reactions to maintaining unearned privilege here], what they are also is simply pride in not being brown. But that's not notions of your own pride in Irish ancestry or Irish Indigeneity or Welsh Indigeneity or Saxon Indigeneity. Those things, once you start delving into them, are antithetical to notions of white pride and supremacy.*

As different as we are, as far removed as we may have become from our roots, we remain connected; the wisdom, love, and stories of our ancestors remain within us. Georgie shares that:

> *There is that one connection, that we all are part of the greater human family. And so those tendrils that started from the center - whatever that is, from your heart - it goes out and sometimes when you dream at night, and if you ask for it, those things will come to you. And from what I've observed it's just listening really intently, listening with a wide-open heart. It is there. It's inside. That little bit of your ancestors, whether you have many or just a few (come from one nation or many), you each have a little bit of them inside.*

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[393] Sharon Blackie, "Module 12: Considering Authentic Contemporary Practice," *Celtic Studies: Myth and Tradition*, (The Hedge School, 2018): 5.

In grade one, I wrote a story that a wonderful school librarian published in our school's library. It was about *la petite sorcière* (the little witch) who was sad because everyone thought witches were mean and bad and dirty, but she was clean and kind and sensitive – she felt cut off, like she didn't belong. Even at that tender age, I was carrying an intergenerational truth about the horrors and disconnection of my ancestral past. And as Marjolaine agrees, blood memory and intergenerational trauma are real; these phenomena do not preclude those of us with European heritage(s). The horrors of genocide, the grief of the centuries of loss - loss of our homelands, loss of our ceremonies, our communities, our identities - the echoes of our songs, the fleeting feeling at the edge of our dreams that there is so, so much more to this life if only we could find it – these memories live within us, and they demand to be addressed and healed if we are to right our relationships within this world so in need of re-balancing. Far from displacing or de-centering the voices of Indigenous peoples here who are resurging their traditions, languages, and lifeways, coming to understand our settler selves in this similar way should be a liminal point with which to compel us to greater understanding, compassion, and active solidarity with First Nations peoples. When we do the hard heart work to gain both a deeply personal understanding as well as an eagle's eye view of how our European stories seeded and are bound up within this larger settler story, we begin to perceive how it is in all of our interests to re-author the script, and this time together. If we hope to transform these systems of oppression and destruction, we need to radically rethink how we conceive of ourselves and one another.

Kimmerer asks, "the stories that might guide us, if they are told at all, grow dim in the memory. What meaning would they have today? How can we translate from the stories at the world's beginning to this hour so much closer to its end? The landscape has changed, but the story remains."[394] Similarly, as Blackie points out, we seek our ancestral stories, "not to 'hark back' to some irretrievable, poorly imagined spirituality of our ancestors from two thousand and more years ago – but to learn from them, to derive a sense of genuine lineage

[394] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 8.

from them, and to bring those ancestral traditions to bear on the very different world we live in today."[395] The stories remain. It is up to us to remember them, to tell them to one another, and to find a way to integrate the wisdom they contain into our lives so that we can become as Marie Battiste urges, each one of us, "healers in a wounded space."[396]

[395] Sharon Blackie, "Finding the gods in our places again," *Place and Belonging* (blog), February 20, 2019, https://sharonblackie.net/finding-the-gods-in-our-places-again/

[396] Marie Battiste, "Cognitive Justice and Transsystemic Change: Indigenize the academy," (keynote address, *CIARS Decolonizing Conference*. Toronto, ON: UOIT, November 9, 2018).

Chapter 5: Critical Spirituality

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Woman,
See yourself reflected in the light that
Lands upon the ripples of my breath.
Love, The Ocean

Woman,
Know yourself upon the edge of my heights.
Love, The Mountains

Woman,
Find your soul in the expansiveness of my reach.
Love, The Sky

Woman
Hear your song in the depths of my darkness.
Love, The Whale

Woman,
Feel your body in the kiss of my whisper.
Love, The Wind

Woman,
Know your strength in the thirst of my roots.
Love, The Oaks

Woman,
Remember we are not separate.
Love, The Earth[397]

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[397] Sara Rogers, *Elemental Magic, Poetic Chapters Of Wild Self Love*, (publication forthcoming, 2021).

Remembering the Importance of Spirit

It occurs to me that the discussion of transforming settler consciousness and settler decolonization has so far neglected a fundamental and vital aspect of human identity, worldview, and consciousness, namely Spirit. Literature on transforming settler consciousness addresses the material and physical aspects,[398] the mental and educational aspects,[399] as well as the emotional and affective aspects.[400] And yet, there is a paucity of literature addressing the spiritual dimensions of decolonization for settlers. Furthermore, whereas there is some promising discourse as to the role of spirituality in transformational education,[401] these discussions seem to either preclude settlers, or do not take up the central importance of decolonization.

I suspect that the reason for this absence of Spirit in discussions and theorizations of decolonization and settler consciousness is two-fold. Firstly, spirituality can be a private as well as a very personal and diverse concept or experience. As such, spirituality can be a potentially sensitive and shape-shifting topic to address. Secondly, when it comes to (in particular, white settler) pursuits of spiritual seeking, spirituality continues to be a site of cultural appropriation and colonial violence in the New Age. Perhaps also, this points to the poverty of whiteness that I have discussed in chapter three, and to the fragmentation and loss of identity that settlers too, have endured to some extent within the settler colonial system. I also acknowledge that the spiritual can seem to run counter to most ontologies and methodologies of knowledge creation in the academy, and yet, that is precisely my critique and where I see an important gap. Centering matters of spirit, I believe, is central to decolonizing the academy and to transforming such spaces to be more transformative. Taking these potential reasons as a continued caution to myself, I assert that it is important to explore and address the potential spiritual dimensions of decolonization for settlers as well as the role that spirituality can play in the

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[398] e.g. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 2012.

[399] e.g. Davis et al., 2017; Hiller, 2017; Regan, 2005, 2010.

[400] e.g. Boler and Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas, 2015.

[401] e.g. Dei, 2002; Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, and Tyson, 2000; Shahjahan, 2005.

sustainability of decolonial praxis. What follows in this chapter is my attempt to describe what I mean by both, and to elaborate on why I feel that it is so. I begin by exploring various definitions of the spiritual, followed by an examination of some of the problems associated with operationalizing spirituality in settler colonial contexts. I end this chapter with a discussion of the value and importance of centering matters of spirit in anti-colonial work and in the decolonizing process.

Pluralistic Definitions of Spirituality

Ethically speaking, the term spirituality can have no fixed meaning or definition; it is by its very nature a subjective and pluralistic term. As McCarroll, O'Connor, and Meakes demonstrate, "spirituality can be discussed, experienced, recognized, and even defined from many different angles."[402] The authors point out that, in their field, "there is fear that if understandings of spirituality are standardized, it will become exclusive, and not be open to a diversity of experiences and perspectives."[403] Despite the importance of understanding and respecting difference and plurality in spiritual views and spiritual practice, however, multi-disciplinary literature on spirituality does seem to tend towards certain common aspects or themes. The authors of this study, through their comprehensive systematic reviews of pluralistic definitions of spirituality in the health care literature, present the results of their research in which eight common themes emerged. I list these eight themes here with a brief explanation, according to the authors of this study:

- **Meaning and purpose**: "Spirituality as meaning and purpose is seen to manifest itself in a quest towards self-actualization and the search for human integrity."
- **Connection and Relationships**: "Spirituality is understood to be manifested in and sustained by connections and relationships. […] These connections and relationships include those within the self and with others, the natural world, the cosmos, and/or a Transcendent Other. […] An individual's relationships with self, others, the cosmos, and god/God are understood to be reflective of and shaped by one's spirituality."
- **God/god(s)/Transcendent Other**: "some definitions in these review articles distinguish between spirituality and religion."

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[402] McCarroll, O'Connor, and Meakes, "Assessing Plurality in Spirituality Definitions," *Spirituality and health: Multidisciplinary explorations*, (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 48.

[403] McCarroll, O'Connor, and Meakes, 47.

- **Transcendent Self**: "In some instances spirituality is viewed as that which enables the transcending of emotional and/or physical pain. In other instances it is that which enables the transcending of the self so as to identify with the experience of another person."
- **Vital principle**: "The vital principle is understood as the creative, animating force in self and/or world and/or universe. In these definitions, vital principle transcends or integrates subject-object dichotomies. It is a non-personified, incorporeal, common element that 'vitalizes' the whole person and/or the cosmos."
- **Unifying force or integrative energy**: "The unifying force/integrative energy is a non-personified, incorporeal common energy that unifies reality."
- **Personal and private**: "spirituality is personal and private in nature. All of these emphasize the subjectivity of spirituality and the fact that it is judgemental and value-laden."
- **Hope**: "Hope is understood both as a will to live and as an ability to come through a crisis and/or loss of health. Some of these definitions closely connect hope with meanings and purpose […] with the explanation that it is a sense of meaning and purpose in life that gives hope."[404]

The above common themes echo my own understandings and can be useful in my attempt to discuss the role of spirituality in decolonization. I reiterate that it is not my intention to attempt to comprehensively treat the concept of spirituality - I doubt that such an endeavour is possible or even desirable. Respecting the scope and purpose of my thesis work, I offer that, for me, spirituality, at its most distilled level, is about *connection* and *interconnection*. Juyal and Dandona, in their article *Spirituality and Wellbeing*, offer this:

> If a single word best captures the meaning of spirituality and the vital role that it plays in people's lives, that word is "interconnectedness." Staying connected with the inner self and maintaining positive relationships enhances the physical and emotional aspect of life. Spirituality is a changing process and is constantly evolving. Our experiences in life will alter our concept of spirituality. Spirituality is the foundation for good health and a potent tool to eliminate stress.[405]

Similarly, Brené Brown's research offers that spirituality is a shared and deeply held belief, whose heart is connection. As she puts it, "Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that *we are all inextricably connected to each other* by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is

[404] McCarroll, O'Connor, and Meakes, "Assessing Plurality in Spirituality Definitions," 45-47.

[405] Shyam Lata Juyal and Anu Dandona, "Spirituality and Well-Being," in *Positive Psychology 2011* ed. Sunil Kumar and S.B. Yadav, (Global Vision Publishing House), 265.

grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning, and purpose to our lives."[406]

Spirituality does not necessitate a belief in God or Spirits; secular spiritualities may employ the concept of synergy – that the sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts. As Juyal and Dandona write, "secular spirituality denotes various attempts to recognize aspects of life and human experience which are not captured by a purely materialist or mechanistic view of the world, but without accepting belief in the supernatural." They go on to indicate that, "some atheists define 'spiritual' as nurturing thoughts, emotions, words and actions that are in harmony with a belief that the entire universe is, in some way, connected; even if only by some mysterious flow of cause and effect at every scale."[407]

At the root of spirituality, in my view, is an understanding of interconnection and interdependence with all aspects of Creation or Life. For me, this includes aspects both seen and unseen, or as Thérèse Cator has put it, my relationship with the natural world and with my allies, both natural and supernatural. In short, it denotes a focus on wholism, interconnection, and therefore, responsibility. As I operationalize the concept here in proceeding sections of this chapter, a *spiritual practice* therefore, takes as its foundation the fact of our interconnection and makes it conscious, valued, and embodied. The particularities and forms that spirituality and spiritual practice might take will be dependent upon the individual, their experiences, cultural understandings and locations.

Critical Spirituality

I first heard the term *critical spirituality* at the CIARS Decolonizing Conference, from 'Spiritualities and the Land' panel presenter Taq Bhandal, PhD candidate with the University of British Columbia. Bhandal's use of the term, as I understood her meaning, includes a concept of spirituality that centers the earth and social

[406] Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are,* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden Publishing, 2010), 64, emphasis my own.
[407] Juyal and Dandona, "Spirituality and Wellbeing," 260.

justice. Fiona Gardener, author of *Critical Spirituality: A Holistic Approach to Contemporary Practice*, defines critical spirituality as being "about seeking meaning in a way that creates wholeness individually and leads to communities that live in sustainable, inclusive and socially just ways,"[408] She offers this expanded definition:

> Critical spirituality is a way of naming a desire to work with what is meaningful in the context of enabling a socially just, diverse and inclusive society. Critical spirituality means seeing people holistically, seeking to understand where they are coming from and what matters to them at a fundamental level; the level that is part of the everyday but also transcends it. What is important in critical spirituality is to combine a postmodern valuing of individual experience of spirituality with all its diversity with a critical perspective that asserts the importance of living harmoniously and respectfully at an individual, family and community level.[409]

The inclusion of such principles as valuing diversity and living harmoniously and respectfully at the community level seem to me to be useful dimensions to critical spirituality in a decolonizing context, as these echo the Indigenous concept of non-interference and peaceful co-existence and is aligned therefore, with our Treaty relationships and responsibilities as settlers. It is this concept of critical spirituality then, that I mean when I speak about spirituality and spiritual practice; the key component of a critical spirituality is that it remains *accountable* to the trilogy of our relationships to self, others, and land. The following section discusses some of the ways in which such accountability has been severely compromised when it comes to spiritual seeking among settlers.

Accountability in the New Age

Candace Brunette-Debassige, in the chapter she wrote for the book *Sharing Breath: Embodied Learning and Decolonization,* invokes Graveline's concept of *self-in-relation* to describe the life-affirming importance of "an understanding of the interdependence between self and community that provides a place from which to view

[408] Fiona Gardner, *Critical Spirituality: A Holistic Approach to Contemporary Practice*, (Surrey England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 10.

[409] Gardner, *Critical Sprituality*, 2011.

'life, the natural world, and one's place in it'(Graveline, 1998, p. 57)."[410] In describing her journey to discovering an embodied pedagogy for decolonization as an Indigenous woman, Brunette-Debassige highlights the importance of attending to the spiritual aspects of identity and belonging, of attending to questions such as *Who Am I* – "my lived experience, my ancestry and connection to land, and how I feel inside." In my own decolonization and personal healing journey, I have found that these are fundamental questions for myself to address as well, and how I go about answering them as a white settler woman living on stolen land in a continued settler colonial context involves rigorous attention to accountability. In order to locate myself in relation to these questions, I need to remember my responsibilities to the trilogy of my relationships.

It is with this critical consciousness of my positionality that I extend the above definition of critical spirituality to more explicitly include *accountability* to my roles and responsibilities in the trilogy of my relationships. Accountability necessarily involves some form of action or more specifically, it involves living my life in accordance with my ethical obligations – recognizing and honouring my place within the overarching and underlying interconnection that is upheld and reinforced through my ethical actions (or harmed and compromised by my unethical action, inaction, or ignorance). Critical spirituality, therefore, encompasses and expresses my worldview, informed by my own original instructions while also appropriately listening to and respecting Indigenous ways of knowing from the peoples on whose land I now live. This praxis allows me to locate myself in a web of interconnected relationships that require continual renewal through my own thoughts, choices, and deeds. Fundamental to critical spirituality is my commitment to being in integrity and accountable to these relationships – to continuing to act in accordance with these solidarities.

Walking this unfolding critically spiritual path of accountability is emergent and will naturally be different for everyone, as the parameters of our ethical obligations to the trilogy of our relationships is very much place-based and illuminated and negotiated through our particular relationships. And yet, through my

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[410] Candace Brunette-Debassige, "From Subjugation to Embodied Self-in-Relation," in *Sharing Breath: Embodied Learning and Decolonization*, eds. Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Renita Wong (Edmonton Alberta: AU Press, Athabasca University, 2018), 202.

continued conversations, I have come to believe that it is possible to offer settlers such as myself some general guidance of what accountability might look like and feel like when it comes to a meaningful embodiment and expression of our evolving place-based and earth-centered spiritualities. Firstly, if we hope to be in integrity and accountable to our relationship with the Indigenous nations on whose lands we live, we must understand and honour the implications our continued settler colonial context. Remembering Simpson's abusive relationship analogy, if we are committed to healing this damaged relationship, we must be respectful of and sensitive to the very real triggers and mistrust that exist because of the power imbalances and continued violations. I am speaking broadly about all settler colonial violence and theft, but specifically in this context, I reference that spiritual theft by non-Indigenous people is still something that happens, even in my own community, on a regular basis. There are truly countless examples of spiritual theft and cultural appropriation from First Nations communities, practices, and ceremonies. Georgie Horton-Baptiste and I discussed how a white settler woman who attended the monthly Full Moon Ceremonies offered by Liz Osawamick and Elder Shirley Williams in Nogojiwanong for little under a year, now has opened her own 'sweat lodge' for paying participants near Toronto, claiming that she has apprenticed and been blessed to do this work by various (unattributed) 'medicine people'. We also discussed the 'First Nation Shaman' White Eagle whom the Lion's Club brought to a health expo last year. Immediately, from the title and description of this person's offering, it should be apparent that something is amiss. As Elder Dorothy Taylor tells me, *Shaman - we don't use that word. Cultural Anthropologists uncover spiritual practices and then they start teaching it as shamans.* Aside from not being able to locate himself within a First Nations community and not naming the lineage from which he came to be given his teachings, this travelling 'medicine man' claimed he forgot his tobacco and had the white-only audience imagine they were holding some while he performed a 'sacred naming ceremony'. Georgie and two other concerned community members attended this event in order to observe and perhaps dialogue with this man and the organizers. I too had called earlier to voice our concerns. As Georgie told me: "*When we were talking to him, asking questions about appropriation, he just gave a jolly answer that at heart we're all the same. But we're not there yet. We aren't there yet that we are all one and the same."*

We aren't there yet precisely because of our continued colonial context and the severe inequities – indeed, the cultural genocide – that still persist. Georgie highlights this point in telling me about her conversation with one of the Lion's Club organizers:

> *She said, "We see what you have and many of us don't know where we come from, we want that connection. We want that connection to the land, we want that connection to our ancestors." And then I said, so many of our people are hurting. We have drug and alcohol problems. We have high rates of suicide among our youth. Our communities don't even have clean drinking water. And sometimes our traditions are the only thing that is keeping us here, that is keeping us connected, and you want to take that from us?!*

Georgie went on to note that, "*It is really difficult to make people understand when they believe that they have a sincere heart, to make them understand, especially regarding the appropriation of our ceremonies, that they are doing anything wrong*." We as settlers have a responsibility to understand this harm that spiritual appropriation causes and to stop causing harm. Here is how Georgie explained it to me:

> *The appropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous teachings by so-called shamans and healers is harmful to our people. It's also harmful to the people who are genuinely seeking, and they come to see these people thinking that this is a First Nations healer and they're going to do a ceremony and they get to participate. It's very unfair, misleading, when they think that, and they come away with just a show. A recognized Indigenous healer from our communities would seldom or if ever set up shop in a public place like that. It just isn't done. It just isn't done. Rather, we go to them. It's not for profit. [....] Whatever value a person puts on your request for your healing, that's what you give. And they're not ever going to ask you, you know, bring a hundred bucks. If someone does that, then you know it's not a place that you want to attend.*

These are just two recent and local examples of many in a sickening and shameful display of the phenomenon of settler spiritual appropriation. It is extremely important that we understand and grapple with this if we hope, as I do, to co-create spiritual community along relationally accountable and decolonizing lines. To this end, I will review here a sampling of the literature on the 'new age' as it relates to spiritual seeking and appropriation with the intention of further informing our decolonizing and healing journeys.

In his paper, *Wanting to Be Indian: When Spiritual Searching Turns into Cultural Theft*, Johnson explores three traps of cultural appropriation, denial being first and foremost. He offers us the simple truth: "We live in a colonial society. It was built upon the European theft of land. It was built by conquering and destroying the nations of people already here, and it continues its assault on Native lands and culture. This isn't something

we chose, but it is something we inherited, and thus have to reckon with."[411] In the west, rapid modernization and the "frenetic pace of contemporary life" coupled with growing disillusionment with traditional religion has created a movement towards "alternative lifestyles and spiritual worldviews."[412] This movement has been termed in the literature and colloquial discourses as the *New Age*; "a putatively anti-hegemonic discourse that regularly provokes Indigenous ire: the New Age, with its extreme lack of scruples concerning identity theft."[413]

Growing disillusionment with dominant western religions and political systems of power has created a post-modern counterculture of seekers setting out on a personal spiritual quest for "an eclectic set of beliefs and practices […] not led by any authority."[414] Having rejected Christian religion for more 'authentic' spirituality, what is being sought is a new system of meaning in which personal development and healing is a personal responsibility. [415] It becomes necessary then "to collect information from a diversity of places and cultures through travel, books, and other media." [416]

Selberg describes new age spirituality in contrast to monotheistic religion practices as a "more fleeting, almost oral religion without canonized scriptures, [in which] the holy geography is constantly being created." He goes on to point out that "the characteristic feature of New Age is that the borders between different

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[411] Myke Johnson, "Wanting to Be Indian: When Spiritual Searching Turns into Cultural Theft," *Unsettling America: Decolonization in Theory and Practice* (blog), September 20, 2011, https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/2011/09/20/wanting-to-be-indian/.

[412] Dallen J. Timothy and Paul J. Conover, "Nature Religion, Self-spirituality and New Age Tourism," in *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, eds. Dallen J. Timothy and Daniel H. Olsen (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 139.

[413] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism." 273.

[414] Timothy and Conover, "Nature Religion," 141.

[415] Christian Ghasarian, "Journeys to the Inner Self: Neo-Shamanism and the Search for Authenticity in Contemporary New Age Travel Practice," in *Tourism and The Power of Otherness: Seductions of Difference*, eds. David Picard and Michael A. Di Giovine, (Channel View Publications: 2014)

[416] Torunn Selberg, "Journeys, Religion and Authenticity Revisited," in *Re-Investing Authenticity: Tourism, Place, and Emotions*, eds. Britta Timm Knudsen and Anne Marit Waade, (UK, USA, CA: Channel View Publications, 2010) 233.

religions are made increasingly obscure; the idea being that the same wisdom lies behind many different religious ideas." The mistrust and critique of modern western culture so prevalent to the new age movement manifests as a tendency to assign authority and perceive authenticity by association within the 'other', the ancient, or traditional. As Selberg states, "new religiosity is being authenticated by virtue of its association with ancient religions and wisdom" and the "sacred is situated in the other [who is seen as] more in keeping with the original than people of the modern Western world."[417]

As Timothy and Conover describe, the alternative lifestyles and spiritual worldviews characteristic of the new age seeker include a focus on the sanctity of nature, harmony of the cosmos, self-improvement in the realms of spirit mind and body that rely heavily on nature and self-transformation, as well as an "emphasis on environmental stewardship (i.e. deep ecology, ecofeminism, nature worship, and nature conservation) and cross cultural tolerance."[418] And while these earth-centered values and desire for reclaiming more meaningful relationships with self and land are not only our birth-right as human beings, but are precious imperatives in these perilous modern times, especially in light of climate change, there is contention. As evidenced in the literature and personal accounts of new age encounters, when settlers' spiritual searching is not rooted in a thorough accounting with our continuing colonial context and remain heedless of our own positionalities, great harm is done. As Attix writes, there are serious "concerns about commercialization, intellectual and cultural property rights, access to crucial sites for the traditional Native communities who claim stewardship and derive their identities from these sources."[419] There is a great deal of conflict between Indigenous groups and new age believers around issues of "environmental degradation, commodification of culture, commercialization of

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[417] Selberg, 232-233.

[418] Timothy and Conover, "Nature Religion," 149.

[419] Attix, "New Age-Oriented Special Interest Travel: An Exploratory Study," *Recreation Research 27*, no. 2, (2002): 56.

religion."[420] Indigenous voices rightly object to the commercialization and commodification of their spiritual heritage, material culture and sacred ceremonies for non-indigenous use and profiteering. As Wolfe points out,

> With its emphasis on individuality rather than religious affiliation, however, the New Age is closer to liberalism than its missionary fore-bearers. Either way, as ho'omanawanui shows, it faithfully reproduces well-established features of settler-colonial discourse. Moreover, the shift to cyberspace ('a relatively uncharted terra nullius') enables the New Age to partake of settler colonialism's global elasticity, providing a radically ungrounded Archimedean palette on which to mix together local religious traditions in surreal detachment from their ancestral settings. In the process, not only do Native places become systematically desecrated by spiritual tourists. With place rendered inoperative, New Age colonisers can claim an essential connection to commodified figures such as Pele that bypasses the awareness of Natives themselves, who have 'lost' or 'forgotten' real knowledge.[421]

Those facing such indictments and who have joined the conversation tend to defend their practices under the banner of freedom of religion, arguing that, "everyone has a right to such [Indigenous] traditions, because spirituality and truth cannot be owned."[422] This feeling of entitlement, as well as the desire to identify with Indigenous peoples is a widespread settler trait, as Tuck and Yang remind us. In a society in which knowledge is a commodity, "members of the majority culture tend to be socialized to value intellectual curiosity and to ask questions, are accustomed to instant gratification, and feel entitled to immediately know all about another culture."[423] As Notzke explains, "New Agers tend to deconstruct traditionally observed protocols of behaviour and respect; they do not recognize an exclusive relationship between a sacred place and its traditional stewards or between sacred rituals and their rightful 'owners'."[424] New agers, therefore, are seen to be self-centered, egoistic, spiritual wannabes whose motivations "can be egocentric and escapist" and "their "aboriginal hosts view their interest in aboriginal spirituality as inappropriate and intrusive."[425]

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[420] Timothy and Conover, 152.

[421] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism," 273.

[422] Timothy and Conover, 151.

[423] Claudia Notzke, *The Stranger, The Native, and the Land: Perspectives on Indigenous Tourism*, (Concord ON: Captus Press, 2006), 143-144.

[424] Notzke, 109.

[425] Notzke, 116-118.

In citing freedom of religion as a defense, western spiritual 'tourists' ignore or deny the fact that Indigenous religious practices have a long history of being oppressed, persecuted, and outlawed. As Aldred puts it, "given a history and continued social structure in which Native Americans' voices are often overpowered by dominant white discourse, is 'freedom of religion' as egalitarian as New Agers suggest?"[426] Citing the work of Pemina Yellowbird and Kathryn Milun, Aldred refers to the new age as a consumerist movement spurred by imperialist nostalgia, "a romanticization that assumes a pose of innocent yearning thus concealing its complicity with often brutal domination."[427] In the context of colonialism, this trend is a continuation in a new form of the centuries-long cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples in the west. As she states, the new age "imperialistically nostalgic fetishization of Native American spirituality hinders any recognition of their own historical and social complicity in the oppression of Indigenous peoples."[428] And it is not only appropriation from Indigenous cultures that new age spiritual searching is guilty of. As Brunette-Debassige writes, it can also be a matter of being on "a quest for self-realization in the absence of community, society, and critical reflection around issues of privilege, oppression, colonial violence, and cultural misappropriation."[429]

Brunette-Debassige's words underscore how critical accountability is within the spiritual search; it is accountability to the trilogy of our relationships, grounded in an understanding of our positionality interconnection that must be at the forefront of any search for meaningful expressions of spirituality. This is the fundamental issue here – our responsibility as settlers to recognize our own historical and social complicity in the oppression of Indigenous peoples. Any lack of awareness of and accountability to our positionality and relationships to Indigenous peoples on whose lands we are living is the problem. And it is this fact that we as settlers need to reckon with lest any of our attempts to search out and find a meaningful sense of spirituality,

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[426] Aldred, "Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality," *The American Indian Quarterly 24*, no. 3 (2000), 336.

[427] Aldred, 334.

[428] Aldred, 346.

[429] Brunette-Debassige, "From Subjugation to Embodied Self-in-Relation," 205.

connection, and belonging forever remain meaningless. In learning to honour our fundamental human need to belong, to find a meaningful spirituality and spiritual community, and as we remember, reclaim and re-create our own sacred rituals, stepping into the power and beauty of co-participation with the worlds seen and unseen, let us remember the greater landscapes in which we are navigating.

Doing the 'Hard Heart Work' of Respecting Indigenous Protocols

If settlers are serious about answering criticisms such as Lakota scholar Charlotte Black Elk's that we don't want to take the time to learn our own traditions, if we are genuine in our desire to heal our damaged relationships, to work towards an ethical existence through relational accountability - we must take the time and do the hard heart work of learning our own traditions. For the Nishnaabeg on whose lands I live, it is a customary part of relational protocol to state one's name, homeland, clan, and family and to acknowledge one's positionality to the land in order to locate oneself before speaking on any matter of importance. As Wilson relates, "In Indigenous cultures, what is important is to know the relationship network of which you are part, including your ancestry, genealogical lineage, and the community and land/territory to which you belong. Even the names of your family members are significant, as is that of your clan or house."[430] Being able to confidently answer questions such as *Who are You? Where do you Come From? Who are your People? How has the land shaped who you are? What are the stories of your people and homeland? What are your Original Instructions? By what right do you claim your own spiritual understandings?* are important not only for a coherent sense of identity and belonging within one's self, but they are important in forming, nurturing, and maintaining respectful relationships together.

As the above literature makes clear, it is not enough, as settlers, to simply state that certain spiritual truths or practices are self-evident or that we 'just know' what 'feels right'. In the context of our relationships, it can be a form of spiritual bypassing that is profoundly disrespectful and neglectful of the very real and valid

[430] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony,* 61.

complaints about spiritual appropriation and identity theft in the new age. On the topic of spiritual by-passing, Leon and Nadeau write:

> What is usually by-passed in settler-colonial communities is doing the embodied work of processing the reality of one's historical and psychological relationship to colonialism. Many non-Indigenous individuals, especially white settlers, seek to experience Indigenous spirituality, specifically ceremony, without taking responsibility for the fact that they are benefitting from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples.[431]

Again, it is worth reiterating over and over again to ourselves, if we are genuine in our desire to work towards healing our relationships, we must remain cognizant of respectful relational accountability and our positionality within the ongoing settler colonial project. In this context, even the optics of our individual spiritual expressions can be misunderstood by Indigenous neighbours. We must be willing and able to answer the questions of identity protocol. This has in fact been a large impetus for my own work – how do I find an ethical, relationally accountable place to stand in my own understandings and spirituality? My work here is also an articulation of this "embodied work of processing the reality of one's historical and psychological relationship to colonialism" of which Leon and Nadeau write.

The 'hard heart work' of retracing, remembering, and reclaiming our original instructions is difficult. Speaking personally, as I outlined in the preceding chapter, there is a vast amount of new age 'tosh' out there about Druids and Celtic spirituality that is not accurate or is entirely made up. Furthermore, the process of figuring out how to appropriately integrate the reclaiming work of our ancestral wisdom traditions, stories, ceremonies, and identities here in this landscape, on Indigenous lands, is difficult and fraught. The inherent contentions and contingencies, I believe, are liminal points on the decolonizing journey, potent opportunities for settlers such as myself to actually experience the profound and grievous losses brought about by the forces of settler colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. There are many things about the vast knowledge, beauty, and sophistication of my ancestral culture that will never be recovered. The process of searching out, discerning, and

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[431] Alannah Young Leon and Denise Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence," in *Sharing Breath: Embodied Learning and Decolonization*, eds. Batacharya and Wong, (Edmonton AB: AU Press, Athabasca University, 2018), 67-8.

processing our journey to answer such spiritually fundamental questions of identity and belonging is part of the work of decolonization and reconciliation.

Decolonization as Spiritual Recovery

Regardless of how spirituality is defined, expressed, or experienced by individuals, research has shown that spirituality plays a profound role in resilience and healing.[432] And healing is very much what is needed, as we have seen, in many aspects of our modern life, both individually and collectively. It is widely understood that Indigenous peoples have suffered from the fragmentation that colonialism creates, but whereas settlers are rightly implicated in the damaging effects of settler colonialism, we are rarely asked to consider our own fragmentation and what we ourselves have lost to these systems of domination. Acknowledging, as Njoke Wane puts it, the colonial logics that have divided us, "ourselves, our histories, our roots, our humanity,"[433] is a key step in returning ourselves to wholeness and right relationship with one another.

In a panel on The Place of Spirit in the Academy at the 2018 CIARS Decolonizing Conference, Kimberly Todd, PhD candidate and Dr. Njoki Wane discussed the role of spirit in healing the wounds of colonialism. They discussed the 'spiritual technologies' of dreaming, journeying, art, rituals, ceremonies, remote sensing, and others, what Georgie Horton-Baptiste has termed 'human heart knowledge'. I believe we must become aware of the nature and source of our colonial wounds. As I have been describing throughout my thesis work, the nature of these colonial wounds, from my point of view, is a profound disconnection in the trilogy of our relationships; disconnection from the land, from others, and from ultimately, therefore, our selves. And since spirituality is all about connection and interconnection, I believe the nature of these wounds of

[432] See for example, the work of Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection,* (2010).

[433] Njoke Wane, "The Place of Spirit in the Academy," (panel discussion, *CIARS Decolonizing Conference*. Toronto, ON: UOIT, November 8, 2018).

disconnection to be spiritual. In the face of this profound disconnection, as Marie Battiste puts it, "we all must become healers in a wounded space."[434]

The path of healing and becoming a healer in this wounded space is manifold and is conceptualized in my Celtic understanding as triple spiral in nature; and yet, it begins with understanding the source or cause of our profound disconnection. As Blackie vividly relates in her telling of the story of the Well Maidens found the prologue of this thesis, epistemologies of mastery and dominance, as well as the violent behaviours and relational dynamics they create are profound violations of natural law. In her chapter, *Windigo Footprints*, Robin Wall Kimmerer accurately and hauntingly parallels the "the legendary monster of [the] Anishinaabe people, the villain of a tale told on freezing nights in the north woods," with modern western culture. In describing the Windigo, a character guilty of succumbing to the repulsive taboo of cannibalism out of desperate hunger and thus banished from the community to wander alone, Kimmerer writes, "it is said that the Windigo will never enter the spirit world, but will suffer the eternal pain of need, its essence a hunger that will never be sated. The more a Windigo eats, the more ravenous it becomes. It shrieks with its craving, its mind a torture of unmet want. Consumed by consumption, it lays waste to humankind." Understanding that Windigo is a human who has become victim to their own insatiable desires, it becomes clear, as Kimmerer relates, how the 'insatiable consumption' of modern western economics, corporate greed, and the epidemic of individual self-destructive behaviours are evidence of Windigo. In a powerful indictment of our present-day Windigo culture, she states: "We are all complicit. We've allowed the 'market' to define what we value so that the redefined common good seems to depend on profligate lifestyles that enrich the sellers while impoverishing the soul and the earth."[435]

Recognizing that the accumulated wealth and material abundances of modern western society (unfairly and unequally hoarded by and distributed among largely 'white' settlers) have actually dramatically

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[434] Marie Battiste, "Cognitive Justice and Transsystemic Change: Indigenize the academy," (keynote address, *CIARS Decolonizing Conference*. Toronto, ON: UOIT, November 9, 2018).
[435] Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, 304-305.

impoverished both our souls and the earth is a profound shift in consciousness for many and one that I think can be vital to catalyze a decolonizing journey for settlers. Understanding that the principles on which modern western society is based are profound violations of natural law can help us begin to grapple with our actual impoverished state and degrees of suffering within these systems. Kimmerer emphasises this point when she writes,

> Indulgent self-interest that our people once held to be monstrous is now celebrated as success. We are asked to admire what our people viewed as unforgivable. The consumption-driven mind-set masquerades as 'quality of life' but eats us from within. It is as if we have been invited to a feast, but the table is laid with food that nourishes only emptiness, the black hole of the stomach that never fills. We have unleashed a monster.[436]

This monster we have unleashed is a monster precisely because its nature is in direct violation of natural law, natural law that is encoded within the original instructions of both the Celtic and Anishinaabeg peoples; as Kimmerer describes it: "all flourishing is mutual." And yet, settler institutions and the logics that they are based on celebrate this inversion and perversion of the truth of our interdependence. There was in fact an outright war on natural law and the state of nature in the western tradition, highlighted notably by the work of Hobbes whose treaties glorified private property, the capitalist notion of which has now become sacrosanct.[437] As Kimmerer again, writes:

> Maybe we've all been banished to lonely corners by our obsession with private property. We've accepted banishment even from ourselves when we spend our beautiful, utterly singular lives on making more money, to buy more things that feed but never satisfy. It is the Windigo way that tricks us into believing that belongings will fill our hunger, when it is belonging that we crave.[438]

The Importance of Grief

This craving to belong can be exacerbated for settlers like me who feel they have been cut off from their original homelands, from the land of their ancestors. Moreover, in this discussion of healing our colonial

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[436] Kimmerer, 308.

[437] Leon and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence," 62.

[438] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 308.

wounds of disconnection and of coming to recognize the ways in which we have become spiritually impoverished under these systems of capitalism and settler colonialism, is an acknowledgement of how we are not from here. Whereas I acknowledge that this is not the experience of everyone, and everyone has a different value system, for me, and many like me, it is a source of profound grief, whether conscious or unconscious, to be disconnected from the lands of my ancestors, lost to my own ancestral language, ceremonies, songs, medicines, and stories – everything that we always once knew to be the very source of our power and potency and human beings. Alfred and Corntassel, writing about the various new and continual threats to Indigenous nations and their sources of spiritual power, relate the fundamental human need for connection in our "relationships to each other, communities, homelands, ceremonial life, languages, histories . . . *These connections are crucial to living a meaningful life for any human being*."[439]

When we as settlers allow ourselves to sit with the grief and rootlessness of this reality of disconnection, it can catalyze a deep desire to transform the systems and epistemologies at the root of this dis-ease of spirit. Emily Root speaks to this concept of *self as displaced person* and urges settlers to "engage with [the] difficult emotions associated with our own loss of Indigeneity."[440] In speaking to the necessity of dealing with the grief of being ourselves displaced persons, she offers that "Settler decolonizing requires us to recognize ourselves as disconnected and displaced from our own land so that we realize we are not from 'here,' an awareness that can be accompanied by fear, uncertainty, deep sadness, and longing."[441]

When settlers open up to feeling this grief and this longing, then decolonization – the repatriation of Indigenous lands and life - can become a personal, collective, and spiritual imperative in a way that it was perhaps not before. I believe this is a profoundly potent part of transforming settler consciousness. Jo Cofino

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[439] Alfred and Corntassel, "Politics of Identity - Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism," 599, emphasis my own.

[440] Emily Root, "Dis-Placing Myself: Decolonizing a Settler Outdoor Environmental Educator," (PhD dissertation, Lakehead University, 2015), 182.

[441] Root, 180.

writes about the importance of collectively experiencing and expressing the grief for what we have done to ourselves and to the planet as part of the process of finding innovative solutions and alternatives together. In an article Cofino wrote for The Guardian, Patricia McCabe from the Dineh Nation of New Mexico and Arizona is quoted as saying:

> Humanity has developed a very deep ability to push devastating information about the impacts of our actions into our subconscious and this is a danger. We are numbing ourselves to this life going out. Expressing grief has always been a cathartic experience and a rebalancing mechanism, and I believe it is a part of building the foundation for any new story we might want to tell.[442]

When we spoke about the importance of grief and grieving in decolonizing contexts, Marjolaine LaPointe offered this:

> *Settler society doesn't want grief because grief is antithetical to consumption. Because grief is a slowing down and a recognizing of inter-relationship. You can't grieve something that you don't have a relationship with.*

Leon and Nadeau write that, "Indigenous ways of knowing can support the emotional triggers associated with the inevitable grieving that surfaces in this healing work."[443] A decolonizing journey for settlers then becomes tandem to a process of recovery, recovery from the fragmenting effects of colonialism, of diaspora, of complicity in the violence of settler colonialism, a recovery of our pre-colonized consciousness[444] and a recovery of our dignity and honour as human beings with respect to 'all our relations'.

Decolonization as Embodied Spiritual Practice

In a powerful interview she gave to the *Sacred Land Film Project*, Anishinaabe author and activist Winona LaDuke discusses the disconnection of and devastation to peoples and land with the advent of colonizing Christianity. As she puts it:

> In the teachings of these churches, there is a separation of the land that is there from the people. There is a cut of the umbilical cord, so people are not related to the land by the creation stories. They assume someone else's creation stories. There is a loss of connection as to how we reaffirm relationship. Instead

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[442] Jo Confino, "Grieving Could Offer a Pathway out of a Destructive Economic System," *The Guardian: Sustainable Business*, Thursday October 2, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/oct/02/grieving-pathway-destructive-economic-system.

[443] Leon and Nadeau, Embodying Indigenous Resurgence, 209.

> of having reaffirmation religions we end up with commemorative religion, that commemorate someone else's history some place else. And then we end up with a belief that it doesn't matter what we do here because salvation is someplace else.[445]

LaDuke asserts that "power resides within our spiritual practice." It is for this reason, therefore, that the "religious and spiritual domination of peoples" through, in the west, Christianity, has been deployed by governments and corporations in order to sever peoples from their vital connection to their land, their power, and themselves. This happened in Europe to my ancestors first and then it happened here, and as LaDuke puts it, we can see the scars across people and the earth as its consequence. And yet, she says, "you see people who retained connection, who never forgot, or who […] woke back up and remembered." She goes on:

> And so in this recovery of our humanity as Indigenous peoples, where we remember and we recover our things and we remember our songs, and we rid ourselves of the cloaks of Christianity or the cloaks of consumerism, and we remember who we are supposed to be, these spiritual places not only buttress our beings but are the places to which we essentially go, must essentially go, to keep restoring that relationship and recovering that power of place.[446]

The reaffirmation of our human connection and relationship with the land is a vital aspect to our individual and collective healing as "our severance from nature leaves us feeling as if we do not belong in the world, and that can be a source of anxiety and deep despair."[447] Furthermore, colonial fragmentation under Christianity actively targeted the body, especially the bodies of women, as well as the Land herself, whom my ancestors knew to be feminine. The Christian tradition essentially demonized the female body and, as a result of female original sin, casts humanity out into the 'wilderness,' seen as an evil punishment for evil deeds. Kimmerer writes about the far-reaching consequences of such creation stories: "Look at the legacy of poor Eve's exile from Eden: the land shows the bruises of an abusive relationship. It's not just the land that is broken, but more importantly, our relationship to the land."[448]

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[445] Winona LaDuke, "Indigenous Reflections on Christianity," *Sacred Land Film Project*, 2015, accessed April 2019, https://youtu.be/OoxNyNWFvZw.

[446] LaDuke, 2015.

[447] Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted*, 34.

[448] Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, 9.

The fragmentation from our own bodies under this patriarchal paradigm is widespread and reproduced in countless ways in the capitalist system. As Brunette-Debassige writes, "the impacts of colonization have created a sense of disembodiment at both individual and collective levels."[449] Coming home to ourselves, into our bodies, and back into relationship with the body of our mother, the earth, are vital aspects to an embodied spiritual practice, one that can offer us healing and a path out of these destructive systems of dominance and disconnection. As Leon and Nadeau write, "the body cannot be separated from the whole person, so challenging and transforming the colonial project requires body awareness."[450] And much like our Treaty relationships, our relationship to our bodies and to the land needs to be continually renewed and reaffirmed. This is what I mean when I use the term *embodied spiritual practice*.

Research has shown that an embodied spiritual practice can be instrumental in assisting the healing of colonial wounds and to reconnecting us with our own bodies and thusly, a sense of power and purpose.[451] Leon and Nadeau write about their journey to develop what they term an *all our relations pedagogy* that supports Indigenous lifeways and provides "a decolonizing framework that involves the body at multiple levels" that involves "the centrality of ceremonial principles in relationship building."[452] As Leon writes, this pedagogy teaches people "to reconnect to the land through the physical body, to begin to reclaim the senses,[453] and to explore what it means to embody the term *all my relations*." She goes on:

> My intention with this work has been to develop a pedagogy that operates within an Indigenous worldview and provides an embodied experience, a lived experience, of a cosmology that challenges both the material and social construction of colonialism. An 'all our relations' pedagogy articulates, for me, the

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[449] Brunette-Debassige, "From Subjugation," 203.

[450] Leon and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence," 69.

[451] See for examples, Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Earl, Young and Nadeau, 2005; Leon and Nadeau, 2018.

[452] Leon and Nadeau, 56.

[453] The process of reclaiming our senses and relationship with our bodies, notably, has also been found to be essential in healing from trauma, (e.g. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score)*.

> level of interconnection necessary to challenge imperial relations at all levels – body, mind, emotions, and spirit.[454]

I believe that their *all our relations* pedagogy is important for settlers to engage in as well, for the same reason that it actively challenges both the material and social construction of colonialism. Given our settler positionalities, how we go about this may look different; relational accountability remains paramount, while incorporating our own developing understandings of our ancestral teachings and traditions can make it all the more nourishing.

Self & Community Care, Listening in, and Reclaiming

The sustainability of decolonial praxis involves taking exceptional care of ourselves - our body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Healing can seem at times to be hard work and it requires radical self-care. Grappling with the immensity of our issues such as global climate catastrophe and ongoing settler colonialism, as well as the isolating nature of our current operating paradigm and our own individual traumas can be exhausting and terrifying. It is a radical act of refusal of capitalist patriarchy to take the time to slow down and pause, to prioritize our own wellbeing and to take responsibility for caring for others. Sandy Marie Grande has said that patience and the virtues of slowness is a refusal of *Settler Time*.[455] It is important to note here that self-care as it plays out in the 'new age' can also recreate colonial power imbalances, individualism, isolation, and privilege. Critiques of self-care as well as a discussion of the alternative concept of community-care can be found, for example, in Harsha Walia's book *Undoing Border Imperialism*. As Walia writes,

> Given that systems of exploitation and oppression aim to annihilate and break us, preconfiguring the conditions to feel healthy, whole, and purposeful are vital. But it is impossible for a community to heal independently of the well-being of each individual, and conversely, it is impossible for an individual to be healthy in isolation from the trauma within their community and on the land.[456]

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[454] Leon and Nadeau, 59-60.

[455] Sandy Marie Grande, "Engaging Indigeneity and Indigenous Concepts of Living Well," (panel discussion, *CIARS Decolonizing Conference*. Toronto, ON: UOIT, November 8, 2018).

[456] Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, (New York: AK Press, 2014), 267-268.

There are many avenues to spiritual wellbeing, and it is not my intention to delineate the plethora of paths. Rather, I wish to highlight what I have experienced working for myself and have observed working for others; to offer some guidance as a jumping off point for settlers such as myself who are committed to a decolonial praxis. In general, for me, my embodied spiritual practice centers the work of *reconnecting* and *reclaiming*. As Cator writes, "retrieving what we've lost is a life-long journey of unpacking, unlearning, healing, remembering and reclaiming."[457] It is the work of reclaiming what Georgie calls our *human heart knowledge* and of how to use such spiritual technologies as dreaming, journeying, meditation, communion, remote sensing, distance healing, and tools such as guided imagery, music, drawing, and movement "that help us express and enhance our connections with animals, stories, memories, or places."[458]

I came across the reclaiming work of Thérèse Cator through Layla Saad's *Me and White Supremacy Workbook* emails. What I appreciated most about her work is that Cator centers settler colonialism, whiteness, and capitalist patriarchy as the root cause of the pervasive sense of disconnection and longing that so many of her clients and course participants are experiencing. She offers some excellent insight into what we must reclaim as human beings in order to transform our consciousness and to sustain ourselves as we endeavour to bring about the changes that are so desperately needed today. Specifically, she outlines some key themes of reclaiming and what gifts they can offer us. I have found them so succinct and inspiring that I have summarized them here with her permission:

> **Reclaiming Spirituality**: our relationship to the natural world and to our natural and supernatural allies.
> **Honouring Grief**: the degree to which we can be with our grief is the degree to which we can experience joy.
> **Reclaiming our Roots**: Retrieve the intelligence in our ancestry and lineage and infuse that into our lives and work. At its essence, our roots signify our connection to one another, the earth, and our sense of home. When we are deeply connected to our roots, we are in harmony with the natural world and we are able to access the lessons and medicine of our ancestry and lineage.
> **Honouring our Fear**: opens us up to greater opportunities to be courageous and to use our courage in the conversations we need to be having.
> **Reclaiming our Voice**: and speaking our truth.
> **Honouring Rage**: releasing intergenerational trauma and addictions to reclaim our softness.

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[457] Thérèse Cator, "Reclaim Your Magic Masterclass," (emailed course content, 2019).

[458] Leon and Nadeau, 70.

Reclaiming our Body: dismantling the constructs that suppress and oppress our natural sovereignty, through reverence, sharing and standing in our brilliance, and allowing our selves to be seen.
Honouring Shame: untangling our selves from unworthiness and reclaiming our worth.
Reclaiming our Identity: reclaiming our belonging and finding peace by engaging with our positionality within the dynamics of the oppressor and oppressed.
Remembering Wholeness: breaking the bonds of brokenness.[459]

Coming back into my body has also been paramount to catalyzing my own healing from trauma and to building a more resilient sense of self. I am then able to bring this sense of self into all aspects of my life, including my anti-colonial work as an educator and activist in my community. In this regard, the practices of yoga as well as certain feminine-centered intuitive dance modalities have been monumentally transformative. Brunette-Debassige too, writes about her own decolonizing healing journey and her relationship to yoga as a transformative embodied practice. Simply sitting on the land, being with the water, is also an embodied way for me to reconnect and reclaim. I would not be able to be well without the opportunities I have to connect with the Land, specifically to Trees and to Water. Shirley Williams and I discussed how simple yet powerful the act of just sitting with the land and listening/feeling into the healing energy can be. She said:

> *I found that the land, even though I was taught about the land and all that, but sitting on the land, because we had to go and sit on the land for an hour sometimes just to reflect. And just to feel - there was a certain kind of energy that was coming from the land. Even the stone - you had to go and sit on the stone and we had to go and sit by the tree, and you could feel that tree on your back, on your spine- that energy that's there in the tree and in you back to back like that. And those sharing something, which you can't explain what it is.*

The Land, Trees, Water, and every creature always has something to offer us, to teach us, if we are willing to sit and listen. My ancestors knew this. The Anishinaabeg never forgot this. My body still knows this. And it is this continual connection and deepening of relationship that is a fundamental need of mine. It is indescribable how paramount it is to my wellbeing and as well as an enduring part of my decolonial praxis.

[459] Cator, "Reclaim Your Magic Masterclass," 2019.

Acts of Restoration and Rituals of Renewal

My embodied spiritual practice includes the vision that more and more of us awaken to the sacred all around us, that we come together over and over again to co-create rituals of renewal and commit acts of restoration to heal within the trilogy of our relationships. This is my vision of my decolonial praxis. As Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel point out, "This decolonizing praxis requires what Kanaka Maoli scholar Neolani Goofyear-Ka'ōpua (2013, pp. 30, 36) calls 'land-based literacies' which are "based on an intimate connection with and knowledge of the land."[460] While I grow in my capacity for intimate connection with and knowledge of the land, it is so important that I remember in whose lands I am living. Taking every opportunity to center Indigenous voices and ways of knowing on and of the land is key at the individual, collective, and institutional levels.

Land-based literacies, nurturing our connections to place, and re-enchanting ourselves to the natural world within and around us involves acts of restoration and rituals of renewal. As Kimmerer writes

> We need acts of restoration, not only for polluted waters and degraded lands, but also for our relationship to the world. We need to restore honour to the way we live, so that when we walk through the world, we don't have to avert our eyes with shame, so that we can hold our heads up high and receive the respectful acknowledgement of the rest of the earth's beings.[461]

Sustainability literature increasingly brings together psychology and ecology to discuss the intersection of restoration work and its spiritual implications. As Leigh writes, "restoration, community-inspired, offers a proactive means to alter future trajectories not only by the physical modifications of an ecosystem, but by renewing us psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually."[462] In discussing the work of ecological restoration as public spiritual practice, Van Wieren writes:

> There still is room, restoration work reminds us, to attempt to respect the order of nature, to learn how to live more harmoniously, more meaningfully, more beautifully with land. We can come to know a

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[460] Snelgrove et al., "Unsettling settler colonialism," 2.

[461] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 195.

[462] Peter Leigh, "The Ecological Crisis, the Human Condition, and Community-Based Restoration as an Instrument for Its Cure," *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, (2005): 13.

> particular landed place and be drawn into its slow, self-healing ways. Land, if given the chance, will come back to prolific, thriving, wildlife. Our spirits, our hearts can be transformed and renewed in the midst of fragmentation and degradation. We really can "touch the sacred with our hands."[463]

Kimmerer writes about the transformative power of ceremony and how for the Potawatomi people, "ceremonies are the way we remember to remember,"[464] Similarly, Denise Nadeau, in relating her learning from Indigenous colleagues and ceremonies, writes how "all of life is ceremony; all life involves enacting and recommitting to the rights and responsibilities of relationship."[465] As Wilson reminds me, "the purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves."[466] We need these kinds of ceremonies in our lives again.

In her chapter *Burning Cascade Head*, Kimmerer relates how "ceremony focuses attention so that attention becomes intention.[…]Ceremonies transcend the boundaries of the individual and resonate beyond the human realm. These acts of reverence are powerfully pragmatic. These are ceremonies that magnify life." But, as she goes on:

> In a colonist society the ceremonies that endure are not about land; they're about family and culture, values that are transportable from the old country. Ceremonies for the land no doubt existed there, but it seems they did not survive emigration in any substantial way. I think there is wisdom in regenerating them here, as a means to form bonds with this land. To have agency in the world, ceremonies should be reciprocal co-creations, organic in nature, in which the community creates ceremony and the ceremony creates communities. They should not be cultural appropriations from Native peoples. [467]

Finding appropriate, non-appropriating ways to co-create ceremonies together, ceremonies that are acts of reverence which serve to reconnect us to an "active, reciprocal relationship with the more-than-human world"[468]

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[463] Gretel Van Wieren, "Ecological Restoration as Public Spiritual Practice," *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion 12*, no. 2-3, (2008): 247.

[464] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 5.

[465] Leon and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence," 65.

[466] Wilson, 11.

[467] Kimmerer, 249-250.

[468] Kimmerer, 251.

is such a beautiful and vital invitation for the healing work of our time. Part of an embodied spiritual practice grounded in our own original instructions and connected to the land beneath our feet can include individually, something as simple as acknowledging and honouring the changing of the seasons and the cycles of the moon, of respectfully feeding the birds in late winter, and as Elder Shirley Williams and Grandmother Josephine-ba have taught me, of giving thanks to and singing our love for the Water. The ceremonies to be remembered, reclaimed, adapted, and co-created anew will be specific to place and birthed out of our unique relationships in our communities. As settlers committed to healing our relationships, we must always be cognizant of our positionality on this land. As much as we need to re-establish, nurture and reaffirm our relationships with and within place, Indigenous peoples and communities have the right of way here. Any inclination on our part to connect with place must be respectful, appropriate and not at all interfere with the resurgence of Indigenous lifeways and nationhood. In fact, it should be aligned with and supportive of Indigenous sovereignty. This is a fundamental responsibility on our part to be accountable to the trilogy of our relationships. "Relationship with lands is the foundation of this pedagogy, and decolonization means placing Indigenous resurgence at the centre of the endeavour."[469]

As we transform and renew ourselves through renewing our relationship with the earth, we become more rooted in place; it is an expanding spiral of healing – repair. An important part in transforming settler consciousness in relationship to place is to begin to center the land in developing a sense of identity and belonging, in coming to see land as the lens through which we tell our story and perceive ourselves. And yet, very importantly, this is not to be confused with attempting to naturalize ourselves as settlers on stolen Indigenous land. This is continually the contention of settler colonialism and unsettling this narrative is the focus of decolonial pedagogy. What I am speaking of rather, is endeavouring to transform our relationship to place through radically replacing ideas of ownership with one of mutual co-creation, intimacy, and respect. I believe this is in part what Kimmerer means when she writes about how perhaps settlers might learn how to

[469] Leon and Nadeau, 79.

become indigenous to here.[470] Living in intimate, co-creative, and respectful ways with the land beneath our feet was always once our way, but as settlers, we have largely forgotten that we forgot. Even though we are no longer in our homelands and one could very easily make the argument that we don't belong here, I agree with Blackie when she asserts that the land wants to be in relationship with everyone on it.

Re-enchanting Our Sense of Place

Part of transforming my consciousness to foster healing and reconnection in the trilogy of my relationships has involved re-enchanting my sense of place. In her most recent book, *The Enchanted Life*, Blackie writes evocatively about the importance of re-engaging ourselves with the living world around us as an imperative and urgently needed antidote to the destructive operating paradigm in western society. "When the imagination is captured, real change begins – *what is the world trying to say to you*?" she asks. Informed very much by our Celtic ancestral teachings, her definition of the state of enchantment is as follows:

1. It is founded upon a sense of fully participating in a living world – a feeling of belonging rather than separation.
2. It incorporates feelings of wonder and curiosity. To be enchanted is to be comfortable with the fact that not everything can be explained; to tolerate, even welcome, the presence of mystery.
3. Enchantment is not all in the head, it is very much a function of our lived, embodied experience in the world.
4. Enchantment is an emanation of the mythic imagination and is founded on an acknowledgement of myth and story as living principles in the world.[471]

In her writing and teaching on *The Enchanted Life*, Blackie offers many practical ways to *apprentice ourselves to place* and to remember how to develop a living, intimate, co-creative relationship with the Land beneath our feet, including mapping our places of significance and re-storying ourselves to place. I would reiterate that as settlers, living in Indigenous territories, part of this journey for us is respectfully learning the original place names and languages of the places we inhabit and learning, where appropriate, the stories of these places. While it is important that we remember and find our own lineage and ancestral stories, to locate their

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[470] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2013.

[471] Sharon Blackie, *The Enchanted Life: Unlocking the Magic of Everyday*, (Canada: House of Anansi Press, 2018), 38.

resonance transplanted and reinvented here, this work of reclaiming cannot overshadow or crowd out the stories that have already been living here for thousands of years, that have grown up out of this land.

CONTINUING SPIRALS OF CONVERSATION

Spirituality is important to wellbeing and can be a transformative part of any decolonizing and healing journey. I believe that spirituality is at the heart of our interconnected relational crises of disconnection and, like Gary Holthaus argues, is key to creating a sustainable culture.[472] Spirituality and spiritual practices can mean many things to many people: the what and how do not necessarily matter. What matters is how our spirituality brings us into more intimate, respectful, and reciprocal relationship with all of creation – with both the inner and outer worlds, with both the seen and unseen. Critical spirituality means that we embody our responsibilities within the trilogy of our relationship to self, others, and land. The heart of a critical spirituality is accountability, a relational accountability which necessitates action to ensure that everyone has what they need to be well.

The Anishinaabekweg who have supported me on this process of exploration each shared with me their personal definitions of what spirituality means to them as we discussed the role of Spirit in reconnecting us. Elder Shirley Williams echoed the idea that spirituality is a deeply personal, almost indescribable, sensing/feeling journey of returning:

> *Spirituality is [something] only you can experience...Nobody else can. You can teach all you want and they'll never experience it, but you as a person have to experience something as holy. And from that, when you experience something, something evolves there, and you want more. So, you go back and you learn more. Spirituality is not an organized religion; it's not organized by people or things like that. But it's a group of people if they experience that in order to make a ceremony happen, they have to help one another, in order to experience that part.*

For Shirley, her embodied spiritual practice involves a continual process of renewal helping her to be strong and grateful through all kinds of challenges:

> *And that's when you need to be strong and that's when you need to smudge yourself, to pray and whatever you need to do to be strong for yourself. That's what Spirituality means to me, anyway. And you need to sing it, you need to dance for it, you need to be thankful, you know, be thankful for your life. Be thankful for what you have. Be thankful that you're waking up again early in the morning. Be thankful what you have and what you don't have.*

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[472] Gary Holthaus, *Learning Native Wisdom: What Traditional Cultures Teach Us About Subsistence, Sustainability and Spirituality*, (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

Elder Dorothy Taylor echoed how important expressing gratitude is to her embodied spiritual practice:

> *My own understanding and my way of living is that we're spirits having a human experience. It's already in us, we're already in that. Spirituality from an Indigenous perspective means gratitude. Its basis is gratitude. When we say our prayers, we never really pray for ourselves, it's always a thanksgiving prayer. Thanks for the sky, the sun, thanks for the grass, for our food, for our house, our home, the love of our family. Thanks for the very breath that we breathe. You know, the very basics. That's what we think first. And then we have a relationship with the land as familial. Like Mother Earth, Father Sky, Grandmother Moon, the plants, animals, and the insects and the birds are our brothers and sisters, you know. And we think the Water is alive. So, we're not separate from them. It's not a stewardship either. I don't like that label. It's mostly a relationship with the land.*

A spiritual relationship with the land includes a sense of reverence and gratitude for the web of existence. As Dorothy explained, it holds an understanding of the sacred:

> *To me sacred means that has a relationship with the higher power. So, everything that we have, everything that we know, everything that we were gifted is a gift from the Creator. So, it's a relationship with the Creator, from the higher power that makes it sacred. Sacredness means that there is sort of like spiritual power that is associated with that piece of land.*

Shirley echoed this understanding that creation is a gift that must be received with gratitude and cared for with reverence:

> *The land was given to us to live on and that was to live as the will of yourself, the will of everything - it's been given to you to live on to provide for yourself and all of those and that. It's only a loan, you don't own it and so you have to look after it. Everything that was given to you by the Creator is only a loan and it's a gift. So when it's something that is given to you as a gift and sacred, you need to look after it. You take care of it. And we haven't done that.*

In failing to care for the land as the sacred gift that it is, both the land and we ourselves have become sick, disconnected. An embodied spiritual practice, then, becomes about healing together. Even though spirituality can be deeply personal and unique to individuals, we have the opportunity to amplify its nourishing effects and to galvanize productive action through gathering, sharing, and embodying our spiritualities together. Holding and moving towards the vision of healing in the trilogy of our relationships includes co-creating ceremony together, rituals of renewal and acts of restoration for ourselves, with one another, and for the land. Shirley shared with me her concept of the power of spiritual community and the healing power of coming together:

> *And as a group of people coming together, you can heal one another. Because that energy is like, like yoga, people come together because they like to do yoga because there's something in there that they*

> *experience. So, you come together for that. You continue to go over and over, because you want to experience that. Because it helps you to be strong and heal and so you want to be there. If it's helping you and you develop that, and only you can measure that growth. Nobody else can.*

Similarly, Marjolaine LaPointe described ceremony in this way:

> *[Ceremonies]are expressions of interrelatedness with other people of your community engaging in a process for a purpose. You can engage in a process for a purpose while you're cooking dinner. If you live in community, ceremony serves the same thing. A process like Full Moon is being engaged with community for the purpose of reconnecting you with that mind, that way of being.*

Just as we can gather in a process with the purpose to restore damaged ecosystems and our spiritual connections to place, so too does the earth reciprocate with its own healing for us, if we only let ourselves listen in. We know how to do this – it is our human heart knowledge. We just need to remember.

For me, part of the journey to reclaim my own ancestral stories and traditions has been to orient myself in terms of a spiritual identity, a way to answer the questions that Indigenous relational protocol poses. The journey thus far has gifted me with a deepening desire to become what Layla Saad terms *a good ancestor*. It has kindled the spark of longing and curiosity to live into more of an embodied cultural identity, and I want to create community within and around that. In talking together about how I am going about this journey towards an embodied spiritual practice, Shirley shared her thoughts:

> *I guess that's what we did too as Indigenous people. There was a group of us that wanted to experience [our culture/spiritual connection] so we came together, and we had a cultural camp. And as people both native and non-native want to experience that so what we had was a fasting camp and just a culture camp also. Culture camp was just teachings and you participate in that. Because we were looking for something-how do we become better teachers-how do we pass this culture back to our own people? But we had - in order to do that we had to re-learn some of our own things. So that's what we did. We went there to embody the cultural teachings and to the land, you know, where we were in order to grasp that and to understand a little bit more of ourselves. It was a big help to be able to do that.*

When I sheepishly acknowledged the vastness of my questions around the importance of spirituality in decolonizing settler consciousness, Marjolaine underscored how vital it can be to reclaim our critical spiritualities:

> *They are very big questions, but I think they are important questions to ask, especially in terms of the spiritual because that is one place where we routinely suppress and deny our ways. To my thinking, in terms of our relationship as human beings to this concept of climate change - it's something that we will need to engage with because I firmly believe that mainstream religions mask themselves as spirituality, because they're not really. They are complicit with climate change and they are complicit with oppression. All of these things are embedded together.*

Knowing our Indigenous languages is an important part of a transformative spirituality for these languages hold untold wisdom regarding how to live in respectful relationship to the earth. As Marjolaine observes:

> *In my journey as a language learner, that's one thing that I've come to understand...everything is in the language. Go back to a language, everything that you need in order to connect to that way is embedded in the language. You have to engage with it. So for me, the notions of spirituality as they relate to climate change, when you speak your indigenous language and you know it, you know the bones of it, you cannot engage blithely with processes that contribute to climate change. You can't because your way of thinking, your mind, has literally re-wired itself.*

I have begun learning *an Gaeilge* (Irish) and am thoroughly fascinated by the many meanings and stories that even one word can contain. Similarly, my attempts to learn *Anishinaabemowin* from teachers such as Elder Shirley Williams, Elder Dorothy Taylor, Liz Osawamick, Georgie Horton-Baptiste, and Marjolaine LaPointe have offered me glimpses into what a profoundly scientific wisdom tradition is contained within their language. Knowing certain words and ways of addressing other Beings here in the language of their place is deepening my felt sense of connection and belonging.

The work of reclaiming and reconnecting with our spiritual understandings can inform our decolonizing journeys. Spiritual recovery from the ravenous, unfulfilling, and oppressive realities of settler colonialism involves, as Marjolaine underscores, a process of self-reflection:

> *These notions of capitalism, climate change, religion, colonization, land theft, including white supremacy - are all agents and facets of, for lack of a better word, it's a Windigo spirit. It's a spirit of consumption and taking and neutralizing or making things sameness - totalization is a machine and it just takes and takes and takes. And that practice of self-reflection that we talked about is a deeply spiritual practice. And so, reconnecting with those ancient ways of doing things, to my mind, are vital. If we are actually really going to decolonize.*

This critical self-reflection as spiritual practice can also be supported and reinforced by deepening our connection to land. As Shirley shared with me:

> *One of the things that I learned from my parents was whenever we did something wrong, they didn't punish us, but what they did say is, "go and sit by the water. Go and sit by the water and think about what you did. And when you understand it, come back and tell us." So, you sit there, and somehow, you're feeling so hurt and you're so angry. But if you hear that water splashing against that stone, somehow there's a sound in there that heals your heart. And from that experience when you're nurturing that heart from the sound of that water, it's that Spirit that's healing you, so you feel that spirit that's with you.*

These ancient spiritual understandings of relational accountability, of our intimate relationship with the worlds seen and unseen - our *human heart knowledge*, as Georgie Horton-Baptiste calls it – are calling to more and more of us as we become collectively more aware of the crises of disconnection that we face. While Indigenous nations are resurging their cultures and reconceptualizing themselves for themselves, the transformative effects ripple outwards to others as well. Dorothy talked with me about the leadership role Indigenous peoples have had in this paradigm shift of consciousness that she sees taking place right now:

> *So, my own opinion is, as our own Indigenous people, as our own self-awareness grows…We're called the Children of the 7th fire, people of my generation - it's an era, it's not generational. We stopped and turned around and have taken up those traditions. So, with our own awareness and our own embracing of our culture and our traditions and our language and our connection to the earth, I think that has influenced people around us. Because we're strong again. We're strong in our language and our culture. Stronger and a little bit more confident. It's changed among our people first. And it's sent out sort of like a paradigm shift to the people who interact with us. Because we respect ourselves, where we're from, our culture, our language. We're no longer hiding it. We're no longer ashamed of it.*

Many settlers are seeking more meaningful spiritual solutions but in the absence of an understanding of our positionality within ongoing settler colonialism, this spiritual search treads harmful ground, recapitulating centuries-long colonial violence and theft. In order to adequately answer to the criticisms of the new age, doing the hard heart work of taking the time to rediscover our own traditions and original instructions is important to healing. Developing an embodied spiritual practice that is accountable to the trilogy of our relationships to self, others, and land, includes finding appropriate ways of reconnecting and reaffirming our relationship to place, of fostering land-based literacies, and allowing this literacy to inform the co-creation of acts of reverence and rituals of restoration in the places we live. Any move in these directions must be appropriate and accountable to the First Peoples in whose lands we are living. Through the process of deep listening, critical self-reflection and collective action (a decolonial praxis), we can learn to negotiate ourselves through the spiritual terrain that is willingly shared while staying firmly away from what is not. The generosity of spirit that continues to be held out to settlers is profound. Here is what Shirley had to share about how to think through what we may receive from Indigenous spiritual traditions:

> *I know our culture talks about - I heard one Elder say - if this talk was healing for me, by all means embrace it, if it's good for you, then take it with you. Because if it helps you, take it, it's yours. Yeah, that's what one Elder, one of my oldest teachers said. And I do believe that. Because I see a lot of women*

> *that are hurt. A lot of white men that are hurt. They can't seem to find themselves. So, they need to find themselves. If they find something that's meaningful for them, embrace it.*

We went on to discuss how what is considered appropriate and what is not is very much relationship- and place-based. Part of relational accountability and our responsibility as settlers to healing our relationships together is being very mindful of the trauma and lack of trust that still exist between us. Shirley and I discussed how certain permissions, or the privileges of certain teachings based on trust in relationships in one place, do not necessarily translate into other places or with other people; we must remain sensitive and respectful of our relational and ongoing structural positions always.

> *I was told that if a white person was given [a certain] privilege and if you're going to another community, you wait till you're invited, otherwise, it's good what you are doing. If you are feeling good about it, keep it like that. Only you use it for whatever you are going to experience, ok…[privately]. If they find something that is meaningful, and they are trying to help themselves, by all means, go ahead.*

Dorothy, too, expressed this same generosity of spirit while also reminding me of how important it is that we do the hard heart work of reclaiming our own spiritual traditions:

> *But see, whatever we share with you in the general, issues like the 4 direction teachings and the grandfather teachings, those can be shared widely. What we have issues with are people who appropriate the ceremonies. That's our issue. When some non-native people become sweat lodge holders and pipe carriers and stuff. Because you have to be trained and even born into that responsibility. For someone, especially - even the Dali Lama has something to say about that. He's teaching Tibetan Buddhism, but he says all our cultures have our own spiritual practices, and you really should learn that more than ours, but you're welcome here. That's the way our Elders are like that. You're welcome here. But don't be saying that you're an Elder and you're a sweat lodge holder.*

Remembering our original instructions, reclaiming and co-creating reciprocal, respectful relationships with and within place in ways that are respectful to the Indigenous nations on whose lands we are now living, and finding more and more ways to embody these spiritual understandings of our interdependence all requires courage. It takes courage to hold ourselves accountable to the healing of our damaged relationships and to remain sensitive to the ways in which our spiritual seeking and expressions can sometimes cause harm. It takes integrity to give up or pass on practices and language that have been appropriated, to forgo, perhaps, certain privileges in order to nourish more trust and respect between us. At the same time, it also takes courage to articulate our own spiritualities, to do the hard heart work of reclaiming our spiritual tools and ancestral stories

so that we might become more able to answer the questions of Indigenous relational protocol. Showing up to our relationships with greater integrity, insight, and sense of self requires work; it is a practice. This work – the work of an embodied spiritual practice as part of a decolonial praxis - is vital to the healing process. It is transformative. Shirley reminds me of the importance of continually showing up for this journey of reclaiming and of building spiritual community for ourselves, a journey that requires a critical uncertainty, beginning with ourselves. As she puts it, "*Well [settlers] have to kind of find their own way, even though some of those things that they were taught may not be there, but they have to start something new, to begin from there in order to grow together as a community, whatever that is."* As we individually and collectively stare down the climate catastrophe, the searing grief at the devastation we have wrought and experienced, as we dream new dreams of belonging for ourselves and our world, I believe that, as Dorothy says, *"walking with ceremony, prayer, and spiritual courage will make a difference."*

Section III: SKY (*Nem*) - Courage

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When we show up drenched in uncertainty on wobbly legs with quiet willingness, there is a quiver of magic underneath all that unknowing.

In the pulse of that willingness to enter into the deep cave of the heart we get to see - really see, with our heart -eyes. It is at the moment when breath becomes shallow and we remember to just take in one more breath - that is when our courage is re- inflated.

It is in the small rememberings and the big truths, in the quiet hours & silent hush and the gut stirring howls that we are our most true selves.
What I know is that when I show up, with wet eyes and a raw beating heart
the built up barriers of resistance have broken free and there is no going back. I am in the river.

Held by the sky, and the lakes and the night bugs, by the land and the ancient ones and the living breathing ones sitting beside me.
Sometimes the words don't come, they stick right to my throat and my heart pushes them out anyways.
They are almost never right - the words.
The way they feel in my heart and how they land on the outside.

But.

I say them anyways, through shallow whispered breath. I let them out and when they leave me... my interior opens, truth makes way for space and space makes way for more practice.

And this is how it goes.

In my bone drenched knowing I know that showing up is more important than the words.

We swim out, we leave the shoreline behind, with bare bones, a beating heart and hope. The swim is mostly our own to paddle, through the sorrows and ache of our human existence.

And every now and again there are those who hold our beloved hearts so we can rest and float awhile. Those sweet humans who say, rest here dear one, I've got you. You have done enough, you are enough, breathe. They are the ones who remind me of our most important work, taking care of each other.

I am not alone.

You are not alone.

We are not alone.

We belong,

to the woven web of all the living breathing things

that pulse with life.[473]

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[473] Wendy Martin, *The Wilderness of Being: Collected works of poetry*, (publication forthcoming).

Chapter 6: Wayfinding in Uncertain Terrain

The Imperative to Engage

The inspiration for this phrase 'the imperative to engage' came from reading *Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass*, in Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass.* In it, she describes a graduate research project conducted by one of her students on how different harvesting methods affect Sweetgrass. The study found that, contrary to prevailing scientific theory, the harvesting of Sweetgrass proved beneficial to the plant's growth (it stimulated its flourishing and abundance), while not harvesting this sacred plant resulted in its dwindling. The teachings of grass are thus: "If we use a plant respectfully it will stay with us and flourish. If we ignore it, it will go away. If you don't give it respect it will leave us."[474] *Wiingaashk,* as Kimmerer explains, teaches that "reciprocity is a matter of keeping the gift in motion through self-perpetuating cycles of giving and receiving." In describing the intimate and mutually beneficial relationship between the people and the plant, she writes:

> With their tobacco and their thanks, our people say to the Sweetgrass, "I need you." By its renewal after picking, the grass says to the people, "I need you, too."
> *Mishkos kenomagwen*. Isn't this the lesson of grass? Through reciprocity the gift is replenished. All of our flourishing is mutual. [475]

The Teachings of Grass spoke to me about the necessity of engaging respectfully with Creation and served as yet another inspiring story from Kimmerer that teaches of the wonderful invitation held out for me when I enter with respect and celebration into the trilogy of my relationships. I understand that I have a responsibility to engage in tending to my relationships with myself, with the land and waters, and with all other beings with whom I share this beautiful earth. The impetus for my thesis work is my recognition that as a society, we are experiencing a crisis of disconnection in all of these relationships – that there is profound *dis-ease* among and between us, and that we are in need of healing. It is therefore my duty - as the Irish would say, *it is upon me* - to commit gifts to this healing work, of restoring myself to right relationships as best I am able. I understand that I cannot do this alone; *"I need you."*

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[474] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* 157.

[475] Kimmerer, 165-66.

I need you as we need each other. It is going to take all of us - at least a critical mass of us - to transform things and to build a just future for all Life. As a settler here on Indigenous land, I have a responsibility to engage with this work, the tough and uncomfortable truths, and to take loving action that is aligned with Indigenous agendas of resurgence. Indigenous theorist and teacher Willie Ermine writes about the concept of *ethical space* in engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. He describes the Indigenous gaze in terms of a mirror:

> Currently, the situation, and very often the plight of Indigenous peoples, should act as a mirror to mainstream Canada. The conditions that Indigenous peoples find themselves in are a reflection of the governance and legal structures imposed by the dominant society. Indeed, what the mirror can teach is that it is not really about the situation of Indigenous peoples in this country, but it is about the character and honor of a nation to have created such conditions of inequity. It is about the mindset of a human community of people refusing to honor the rights of other human communities. The gaze staring out from the mirror is the mindful look of Indigenous humanity standing as it is with substantial heritage. This heritage acts as the standpoint from which Indigenous peoples gauge and view the unfolding of the Canadian state. Philosophically, there is an expectation from our children and grandchildren that we resolve these issues and to leave them a better world than the one we found."[476]

Peering into this mirror, we must "use our arbitrarily-awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base"[477] in order that "the collective fabric of Native life be affirmed and strengthened."[478] Realizing the devastation that has and continues to accompany 'modern western progress', we have an obligation to *act* to refuse and dismantle the worldviews and systems that perpetuate it. As Hiller writes:

> (realizations) must be combined with *concrete actions* in support of Indigenous efforts to disrupt such narratives and push back against all forms of settler encroachment – of land, territory, sovereignty, culture, history, knowledge; likewise, processes of clearing bedrock assumptions, working through difficult emotions, and interrogating privilege tied to land must be combined with *concerted efforts* to dismantle the structures that reproduce that privilege and to *respectfully engage* with Indigenous communities, philosophies, cultures, and knowledges as 'incommensurable but not incompatible'.[479]

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[476] Ermine, "The Ethical Space of Engagement," *Indigenous Law Journal 6*, no. 1 (2007): 200.

[477] Mcintosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," 12.

[478] Berger, *Long Terrible Shadow*, 155.

[479] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 18, *emphasis my own*.

Whereas the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their Calls to Action have gone some way in raising the general awareness of Canadians about the devastating effects of the residential school system and of the need for healing in our relationship with Indigenous peoples, as Davis et al. point out, "without the critical learning and unlearning necessary to unsettle Canadian identities and name settler colonialism, reconciliation initiatives may succeed in making settlers feel good about themselves while failing to promote substantive change."[480] Decolonizing our sense of identity and belonging as I have been describing throughout this work is critical to the learning and unlearning that is necessary for substantive change, but there is even more for us to consider as we move to act. As Harsha Walia points out, "a growing number of social movements are recognizing that Indigenous self-determination must become the foundation for all our broader social justice mobilizing."[481] And yet, as Tuck and Yang remind us, "there is a long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization."[482]

Sacred Solidarity

There is a wealth of literature on Indigenous-non-Indigenous alliances and decolonizing solidarity.[483] For reasons of scope and time, I will only briefly summarize what I consider to be some of the most important issues discussed by these scholars for both myself and fellow settlers to be aware of as we take up our responsibilities to support Indigenous resurgence and healing in the trilogy of our relationships. At the outset,

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[480] Lynne Davis et al., "Complicated Pathways," 408.

[481] Harsha Walia, "Decolonizing Together," *Briarpatch* 4, no. 1 (2012).

[482] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 3.

[483] See for example: Lynne Davis ed., *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships*, (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, " Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016); Carol Lynne D'Arcangelis, "The Solidarity Encounter Between Indigenous Women and White Women in a Contemporary Canadian Context," (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2015); May Chazan, "Settler solidarities as praxis: understanding 'granny activism' beyond the highly-visible, *Social Movement Studies* 15, no. 5 (2016); Davis, Denis, and Sinclair, 2017; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; Chris Hiller, 2017; Hiller, 2015; Battell Lowman and Barker, 2015; Mackey, 2016; Morris, 2017; Snelgrove et al., 2014; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Walia, 2012; Wolfe, 2013.

we must recognize the currently inalienable reality that, "the solidarity encounter is firmly enmeshed in broader colonial relations."[484] As D'Arcangelis notes, "solidarity encounters are colonial encounters, their inter-subjective relations are over determined, although neither absolutely nor seamlessly, by colonial power relations."[485] Given our imbalanced social and structural locations in our continued colonial context, Davis et al. warn about "the dangers that can arise from even the best intentioned deeds when they are not rooted in a critical, self-reflexive consciousness and understanding of history, and how instead they can perpetuate and deepen paternalistic colonial relationships, often causing more harm than good."[486] Settlers must, as Walia notes, recognize "our own role in perpetuating colonialism within our solidarity efforts,"[487]

From the literature on alliances that I have consulted, several salient findings emerge as to how, why, and in what ways we as settlers can 'get it wrong' in our solidarity efforts. Hiller notes in her analysis of white settlers engaged in ongoing solidarity with Indigenous peoples that "at times the very things that draw these actors into spaces of engagement are themselves expressions of colonial desires: imagined affinities, mythical connections, romantic fascinations."[488] Similarly, D'Arcangelis explores the motivations and behaviours of white settler women engaged in solidarity with Indigenous women. She characterizes the various contentions that can arise in the solidarity encounter as stemming from "the desire and belief of dominant subjects that power relations can be overcome or equalized, and thereby autonomy and innocence attained/retained."[489] Reminiscent of the settler moves to innocence that Tuck and Yang[490] describe, D'Arcangelis delineates how "a

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[484] D'Arcangelis, "The Solidarity Encounter," 71.

[485] D'Arcangelis, 79.

[486] Davis et al., "Complicated pathways," 402.

[487] Walia, "Decolonizing Together," 2012.

[488] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 7.

[489] D'Arcangelis, 104.

[490] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 2012.

central dynamic of settler colonial relations—a deeply entrenched (white) settler desire for legitimate (liberal) subject status—is in turn operationalized by a desire for proximity to the Indigenous Other."[491] She describes how a host of interrelated desires and discourses regarding proximity and legitimacy can sometimes undergird settler motivations in the solidarity encounter:

> By "getting close" (figuratively or literally) to Indigenous women, the white settler woman can re-create the fiction of equal power relations between the two groups and (attempt to) transcend her location in colonial power relations, thus maintaining a sense of legitimacy/belonging. A central feature of white settler liberal subjectivity is the shared desire among settlers to transcend social relations, disavow our dominant status and reconstitute ourselves as legitimate national subjects who belong *here*. Such discursive moves can exacerbate solidarity tensions, and obscure and uphold inequitable structural power relations.[492]

Hiller's research with non-Indigenous people engaged in solidarity efforts also observes this settler desire to transcend the moral burden of our settler status within our desire for exceptionality. As she writes:

> A shared striving for 'settler goodness': a deeply embedded desire to (re)produce ourselves as the exceptional white settlers who 'get it'. This desire coalesces with what Tuck and Yang refer to as 'settler moves to innocence'; it is manifested first and foremost by denigrating other (white) settlers, holding them in subtle contempt for their incredible unawareness of colonialism, chuckling or scoffing at their unthinking and unthinkable racism. It is this desire for exceptionality – a desire which, at its base, is a desire for redemption from the full moral implications of racism and colonialism – that underwrites the way we at times highlight our experience with, relationships to, knowledge of, and even familiarity and comfort with Indigenous peoples, communities, and spaces as markers of our difference from those 'other' colonizers.[493]

Further to these shifting settler desires for exceptionality, legitimacy, power, control, as well as to act out of a 'helping imperative' or 'saviour mentality' is the longing for spiritual community and meaning. Lydia, an Indigenous participant in D'Arcangelis' research, observes the following of some white women: "A lot of them, I think, are spiritually disenfranchised, so they run to Indigenous people to get their spiritual enfranchisement. … I find they're impinging on us, and we don't have the resources to help them with their issues."[494] Here again we see the ways in which our crises of disconnection, the loss of our own Indigeneities

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[491] D'Arcangelis, 79.

[492] D'Arcangelis, 115.

[493] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 14-15.

[494] D'Arcangelis, 152.

- our *spiritual disenfranchisement* as Lydia so aptly puts it - can undergird settler longings which unfairly imposes upon Indigenous people.

The 'Hard Heart Work' in Alliance

It is clear that there are a myriad of ways in which we as settlers, even the best intentioned among us, often stumble, consciously or unconsciously, in our attempts to align ourselves in support of Indigenous agendas. It becomes even more apparent then, that consistent critical self-reflection, an enduring commitment to being accountable, as well as a willingness to learn, re-learn and continually surrender our embedded settler logics is needed. This is the hard heart work in alliance that we are called to do; it is, for me, a gritty form of spiritual practice – facing and taking responsibility for my own longings, fears, and desires, striving for greater accountability in the trilogy of my relationships. Wanting to be connected, to belong, to help are not bad things in and of themselves; they are part of what makes us human. But in our colonial context, there are realities and impositions that we must always bear in mind. Again, Lydia offers her compassionate insight into the need for settlers to do our own work in solidarity:

> I think [wanting to help is] just compassion, empathy and need. I don't think it's a dirty thing or a bad thing. I think it's a beautiful thing. I think it's terrible when people try to spin it into a bad thing. I mean isn't that just something we innately do, is want to nurture and care for one another? . . . [But, helping can be destructive] if [white women] haven't critically reflected on how their helping may actually hurt. ... *You really have to do your own work if you're interested in genuinely helping*.[495]

Nurturing my own embodied spiritual practice – doing my own work - which includes tracing and reconnecting to my own ancestral wisdom tradition has begun to gesture at filling the deep inner need for spiritual enfranchisement that Lydia so keenly detects in some of the settlers she works with. Furthermore, this hard heart work helps to reveal to me the ways in which my deep desire for belonging can confuse a clear and sustained understanding of my continued structural privileges here as a white settler subject. As D'Arcagelis asks, "do white settler subjects (attempt to) convince ourselves that colonial power relations cease to matter

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[495] D'Arcangelis, 119, *emphasis my own*.

when we meet certain conditions, including the establishment of friendship and trust?"[496] The hard heart work in solidarity involves a personal form of 'polishing the rust from the chain'[497], a Haudenosaunee teaching about our relationships under the Covenant Chain; a continual renewal of my conscious awareness of the contention at the root of my relationships here in place. This work is never finished. It is continual and uncertain. D'Arcangelis offers this reflection on her own conflicting desires to both distance herself from the colonial processes and settler logics while at the same time trying to not move to deny their existence:

> It is clear to me (now) that as a white settler woman I retain the hope of distancing myself from colonial processes and logics. I continue to understand how this is so: have I attempted to keep this "distance," as Ahmed (2000) suggests, through seeking proximity to Indigenous women? Do I reproduce hierarchical Indigenous/settler difference by placing Indigenous women on a pedestal of sorts? In answer, I'd say that solidarity work for me remains in part a personal, that is, self-making journey, regardless (or perhaps because) of my efforts to acknowledge my privileged subject position. My own desire to be the good ally is never permanently assuaged.[498]

Towards a Non-Colonizing Solidarity

So how can Indigenous and settler people work together to foster equitable relationships when we are hierarchically positioned in relation to one another? D'Arcangelis posits that what she terms a *non-colonizing solidarity* involves foregrounding our structural privilege as white settlers and privileging the political stakes of solidarity work (over the personal). She urges us to:

> re-conceptualize the seemingly personal desires for friendship, belonging and legitimacy for what they are—a reflection and consequence of our structural positionality as members of a white settler collectivity. In other words, we must continually remind ourselves that we remain settlers complicit in colonial relations, irrespective of our ability to foster relationships or bonds with individual Indigenous people or communities. Self-reflexivity, in this case, would propel the white settler ally to do the research and locate herself in colonialism past and present, not as either guilty or innocent, but rather as a settler whose privileged structural positioning in a settler collectivity persists regardless.[499]

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[496] D'Arcangelis, 226.

[497] Mackey, *Unsettling Expectations*, 2016. In her book, Mackey presents the words of several Haudenosaunee teachers who speak about their understandings of the Guswentha and subsequent Covenant Chain treaties. I encourage readers to see her writing on 'treaty as verb' and discussions of Indigenous interpretations of treaty as an ongoing relationship between nations that must be tended with consistent action and renewal. When I have been fortunate enough to receive some of these teachings in person from Six Nations Knowledge Holders, I have been incredibly moved. The beauty, wisdom, and opportunity being offered is truly transformational.

[498] D'Arcangelis, 127.

[499] D'Arcangelis, 249.

We need to be doing our own work, nurturing ourselves with our own embodied spiritual practices as part of our decolonizing praxis, in order to process our feelings of guilt, longing, or outrage so that we can hope to make ourselves more aware of and work to transmute our settler tendencies that can be seen as invasive. Lee, an Indigenous participant in D'Arcangelis' work, movingly illustrates this concept so foundational to the sacred in solidarity when she says:

> So there's a space between us that's the cherished thing. In my language, this is the home of the breath that we share. Both our breath is here. Not just my breath, not just your breath, but our common breath. The sound we make here is going to go around the world. It'll take a hundred years. It'll come right back to this spot. That's sacred. You can't get more sacred than that. So, this is what we cherish. So, when you come too close and take up this space, then the cherished thing is gone. So [solidarity] requires non-invasive behaviours.[500]

We cannot give up our innate human desire to belong any more than we can give up our need for food, shelter, and water because belonging is part of our sustenance. It is who we are as human beings; we are wired for connection and belonging to each other and to place. And yet, we must understand the intrusive problem that our longing to belong as settlers here poses to our solidarity work. Through the hard heart work of critically self-reflexive spiritual practice and all that that entails, we can hope to demonstrate our continued commitment to keep showing up regardless of how contentious, uncertain, or fraught our relationality remains.

Shared Responsibility through Indigenous Leadership

Certainly one of the most straightforward ways to embody non-invasiveness and to refuse to recreate paternalistic colonial power imbalances in solidarity work is to understand that in Indigenous-non-Indigenous alliances, "the decision making must be left up to the Indigenous community.[501] As D'Arcangelis notes, "the [settler] should be present as a peer, not an expert, and demonstrate a willingness to learn how to help.

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[500] D'Arcangelis, 151.

[501] Leanne Simpson, *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2008), 146; the comment was made by Jocelyn Cheechoo.

Indigenous leadership should be centred to mitigate the possibility of ally domination in the solidarity encounter."[502] In other words, we are asked to "step back, but not out."[503]

In my own experiences in alliances, I have found, as de Costa and Clark do, that for reconciliation, the politics of the local matter. As their research with non-Indigenous Canadians reveals, it is necessary that we take an *embodied* approach to reconciliation and solidarity. This mode of embodied engagement, they describe it, is "characterized by the clearing and articulating of a path for the [settler] self to take responsibility through culture and land."[504] Similarly, Coulthard and Simpson articulate an Indigenous approach to solidarity practice, which they term *grounded normativity*, rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to place. As they describe:

> Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner. Grounded normativity teaches us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests. Our relationship to the land itself generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which we practice solidarity.[505]

It is critical that we as settlers bear always in mind that "solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must be grounded in actual practices and place-based relationships, and be approached as incommensurable but not incompatible."[506] Whereas it is clear, as several Indigenous participants in D'Arcangelis' research articulate, that we must come together to heal our relationships with one another and the land: "*we are at a crucial time in terms of the planet environmentally and that isn't going to be solved unless people work together*," (Audra, p. 256); "*We're in this together. We breathe the same air, we drink the same*

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[502] D'Arcangelis, 120.

[503] D'Arcangelis, 254.

[504] Ravi de Costa and Tom Clark, "On the responsibility to engage: non-Indigenous peoples in settler states," *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 3 (2016): 197.

[505] Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016), 254.

[506] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," 3.

water, we eat the same food," (Danielle, p. 256), as Wolfe reminds us, "solidarity is not assimilation. To conjoin is not to dissolve. To work together, differences have to be integrated rather than levelled."[507] Despite our imperative to engage, "solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict."[508] To put a fine point on this, Indigenous resurgence scholar Michael Elliot writes:

> Members of settler society should be under no illusions in this regard as (or if) they take up opportunities for engagement extended through resurgence. To participate in a process of unsettling norms and exploring alternatives does not automatically render oneself any less complicit in perpetuating colonial injustice, and it emphatically does not render the experience of such injustice any less acute or real. It can, however, better demonstrate a commitment to tackling the complexities involved in decolonizing the Canadian landscape.[509]

Despite the ongoing uncertainty and incommensurability that undergirds our relationships in solidarity, Indigenous theorizations of transformative ways of relating through shared responsibility to land and water continue to offer us positive ways forward together. The point in coming together is, as Elliot puts it, is "to cultivate ethics of openness, sensitivity and responsiveness that would enable a transformative and collaborative politics of decolonization."[510]

My Role as Educator

It was while at the CIARS Decolonizing Conference that I heard Sandy Marie Grande say that "*everything we do as academics must inform pedagogy*." Furthermore, she said that our work must seek to answer this one fundamental question, "*what does it mean to be a good relative*?"[511] As an educator, I see it as

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[507] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism," 256.

[508] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 3.

[509] Michael Elliott, "Indigenous Resurgence: The Drive for Renewed Engagement and Reciprocity in the Turn Away from the State," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2018): 80.

[510] Elliott, 79.

[511] Sandy Marie Grande, (morning panel, *CIARS Decolonizing Conference*. Toronto, ON: UOIT, November 8, 2018).

my primary responsibility to align everything I do both inside and outside the classroom with this guiding question in mind. In order to do so effectively, I believe it is imperative that I model for my students the embodied realities of a decolonizing praxis and to advocate for embodied, experiential learning opportunities that foster living, reciprocal relationships with self, others, and land. There is a wealth of literature on decolonizing educational practices and pedagogies, but my purpose here is to relate only a few thoughts on this topic that resonate most acutely with me.

It is important to note that the education system was purposefully designed to serve the settler colonial capitalist system. As discussed throughout the thesis, settler colonial power structures social and political life in Canada, our education system is one of the most salient sites of this ongoing reproduction. There is excellent work published on pedagogical effectiveness and theorizations on how to decolonize education, but what is crucial for us to acknowledge is that the vast majority of people involved in education are actively prevented from teaching in a non-colonizing way, in a way that would actively challenge the settler colonial system, (e.g. by curriculum restraints, by policy, by 'teach to the test' imperatives, and many other factors that tacitly support colonialist approaches). What I offer below are only some of my experiences in attempting to move from 'knowing better' to 'doing better', a form of pedagogical insurgency, if you will, against the limiting curriculum and culture in education. Obviously, these approaches will not be enough to counter, refuse, and dismantle these colonial power structures, but I believe they are an excellent place for settler educators such as myself to start.

Modelling Accountability

Part of the work of decolonizing our sense of identity and belonging as settlers here on Turtle Island is to center the voices of Indigenous educators, Elders, and Indigenous ways of knowing. Tuck and Yang remind of the importance of centering Indigenous thinkers in my anti-colonial and decolonizing pedagogies: "clearly, we are advocates for the analysis of settler colonialism within education and education research and we position the work of Indigenous thinkers as central in unlocking the confounding aspects of public schooling."[512] While

[512] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 3.

teaching about our shared history and being accountable to our responsibilities under the TRC Calls to Action, we as educators must walk the talk and model to our students that this process of coming to understand and accept the truth involves all aspects of our being. As Battiste writes in *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*:

> For every educator, our responsibility is making a commitment to both unlearn and learn —to unlearn racism and superiority in all its manifestations, while examining our own social constructions in our judgements and learn new ways of knowing, valuing others, accepting diversity, and making equity and inclusion foundations for all learners.[513]

We must accept and embrace the emotional process of how the truth of our shared history and its effect on our sense of identity and belonging inevitably unsettles us. We must find ways to not only cope with it, but to commit to it, and to model it to our students.

In modelling a decolonial praxis, I am walking my talk; I am embodying my 'hard heart work'. There is "the need for teachers to decolonize themselves, their identities and the ways they view education,"[514] and we cannot hope to support decolonizing education without doing our own work of decolonizing our sense of identity and belonging. Going beyond tokenism and truly confronting our own unconscious biases requires consistent, embodied action and a commitment to open-minded self-reflection. As Regan reminds, "decolonization is not 'integration' or the token inclusion of Indigenous ceremony. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of denial to the making of space for Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems as they resurge, thereby shifting cultural perceptions and power relations in real ways."[515]

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[513] Marie Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, (Saskatoon SK: Purich Publishing , 2013), 66.

[514] Heather E. McGregor, "Decolonizing pedagogies teacher reference booklet," *Aboriginal Focus School, Vancouver School Board* (2012), http://blogs.ubc.ca/edst591/files/2012/03/Decolonizing_Pedagogies_Booklet.pdf.

[515] Paulette Regan, "Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada," (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2010), 189.

This paradigm shift will require that we bring our whole selves to the work, as it has already been established that "providing education and information to settler Canadians is not sufficient to shift the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler colonial society."[516]

Nicoll's work on teaching critical whiteness theory explores the productivity of honestly relating to her students both the challenges and the joys that we can expect to experience when we commit to working to improve our relationships with the Indigenous peoples on whose lands we are living. We must build our students' capacity (and our own) to focus on the settler problem/critical whiteness in safe and yet unsettling ways. "As teachers and active researchers," Nicoll writes, "we need to generate new pedagogical strategies to deal with the emergence of a defiant form of white subjectivity, which is injured by the very idea of racism."[517] She has found that identifying her own whiteness and privilege, while also recognizing Indigenous sovereignty "can be pedagogically productive insofar as it unsettles the connection between embodiment and 'perspective' (see Nicoll 2000 and 2002) naturalized through the rhetoric of 'reverse racism.'"[518] She relates that, "my refusal to embody moral virtue and perform an exemplary role as the 'good' lecturer dedicated to the fight against racism and racists made it easier for other white students to honestly explore the ambivalence that accompanies the recognition of their race privilege."[519] I have found this strategy of modeling my own decolonizing journey and of identifying the ways in which I continue to struggle with the complexities and discomfort of this work to be very productive in my classes. Through modelling accountability – not how right I get it, but rather how I am thinking and feeling my way through it – has allowed my students to move beyond defensiveness and denial, into a space of shared transformative learning.

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[516] Davis et al., "Complicated Pathways," 399.

[517] Fiona Nicoll, "'Are You Calling Me a Racist?': Teaching Critical Whiteness Theory in Indigenous Sovereignty," *borderlands e-journal* 3, no. 2 (2014): 14.

[518] Nicoll, 18.

[519] Nicoll, 21.

Embodied Pedagogies

Western education privileges the mind to the almost total exclusion of the body; it essentially ignores the emotional and spiritual aspects of our identity as human beings in relation with others and the land beneath our feet. As Indigenous scholar and educator Brunette-Debassige writes, "embodied learning challenges the primacy of mind over body in education."[520] In their endeavour to counter the "placeless-ness of Euro-Western schooling" (David Greenwood), Leon and Nadeau state that it has been their intention "to work from the wisdom of the body to explore educational tools for building Indigenous-settler relationships that support Indigenous resurgence."[521]

Battiste emphasizes this holistic nature of decolonizing education when she describes what she terms the processes of reconnecting. As I learned from her keynote address at the 2018 CIARS Decolonizing Conference, these processes of reconnecting include nourishing our spirit, mind, and body to reveal and honour our unique gifts; fostering strong relationships including with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge-holders, as well as relationships with land; of honouring the power of the mind, attentive listening and of going within to seek answers; of reconnecting to the collective, and of actively supporting and participating in the resurgence of languages, ceremonies, traditions, histories, foods, livelihoods, and seasonal teachings; caring for others, giving, sharing, contributing; and of considering the Seventh Generation.

At this same conference, Zinga and Styres[522] presented their work of *Teaching as Reconciliation*. They invoke Willie Ermine's concept of ethical space and explore how we can foster this ethical space through our pedagogy as educators, holding space for our students to have difficult conversations and to more successfully struggle through counter-resistance. In relating what they have learned together, as a non-Indigenous and an

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[520] Brunette-Debassige, "From Subjugation to Self-in-Relation," 208.

[521] Leon and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence," 55.

[522] Dawn Zinga and Sandra Styres, "Teaching As Reconciliation: Lessons Learned From Land," (presentation, *CIARS Decolonizing Conference*. Toronto, ON: UOIT, November 8, 2018).

Indigenous educator respectively, working together in decolonizing spaces, they spoke about realizing that it is not in their control to transform anyone. Rather, as they see it, they must open up opportunities for engagement, meeting counter-resistance with inquiries, inviting reflection through questions, without provoking students unnecessarily so as to avoid disengagement. In their final thoughts, they called on each of us to take up our responsibility as educators to do this 'hard heart work' when they note that "the challenge lies in whether we have the courage to step outside the confines of how we have defined ourselves to embrace the messy and tangled realities of decolonizing work."

Fostering Spiritual Capacity

During my undergraduate degree at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, I had the opportunity to engage in several community-based research projects with and for First Nations communities along the North shore of Lake Superior. During a conversation I had with an Elder from one of these communities about possibilities for eco-tourism developments and heritage interpretation initiatives, he mentioned the concept of *spiritual capacity*. He told me that his community would gladly share certain information about the rich history woven throughout their landscapes, but not all, as he had observed that many people do not yet have the *spiritual capacity* to receive information in a good way; to not do harm with it. The story that accompanied his explanation of what he meant related the idea of not telling his grandson where the eagle's nest is, because until his grandson understands who Eagle is, how she feeds her young, and what is important to her wellbeing, he does not have a relationship with Eagle and therefore, does not have the spiritual capacity to take in this information of her nest and not inadvertently cause harm to her, even with the best of intentions, or out of sheer curiosity.

As I let the wisdom of this story and the concept of spiritual capacity take root in my consciousness, I realized that what I feel my calling is as an educator is to learn how to foster spiritual capacity in both myself and my students. Defining what exactly comprises spiritual capacity is something I approach lightly; I think the concept will continue to evolve in my understanding. But right now, for me, spiritual capacity means something

akin to Indigenous ways of knowing and relating in the trilogy of our relationships. It contains the wisdom of an embodied relational accountability.

To begin with, in my experience as an educator, as well as my experience as an activist and community collaborator, I have found that, in general, both our students and many adults, would benefit from improving our basic emotional literacies, self-awareness, and the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively. I have found that explicitly teaching emotional literacy (emotional vocabulary, bodily sensations and locations of emotions, how emotions are connected to and impacted by thoughts and fundamental human needs, how to identify and articulate our emotions, and how to address our needs both to ourselves and to others) has gone a long way in helping my students manage their sometimes overwhelming stress, and to foster more collaborative relationships with their fellow classmates. The social capital (relationships, trust, identity, belonging) that we create everyday in our classrooms in this way allows us to draw on one another when content or course load becomes more intense, which in turn allows us to go deeper with our mutual learning.

In the introduction to the book *Indigenous Perspectives on Education for Well-Being in Canada*, editors Frank Deer and Thomas Falkenberg write about the Indigenous principles and core values of well-being that serve as focal points for the work. Reframing our own consciousness and thereby our pedagogy as educators to more fully embrace and embody the following principles and values can serve to center and honour Indigenous ways of knowing, while also enriching the embodied learning and spiritual capacity of every student. As Deer and Falkenberg relate:

> Mino-pimatisiwin (literally means “the good life” in Cree) is the realization/acquisition of healing, balance, and life-long learning. The realization of the good life, particularly for First Nations peoples, may be reflected in the following principles (Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird, 2008, pp. 134- 135):
> • The concept of ***wholeness*** is about the incorporation of all aspects of life and the giving of attention and energy to each aspect within ourselves and the universe around us.
> • ***Balance*** reflects the dynamic nature of relationships wherein we give attention to each aspect of the whole in a manner where one aspect is not focused on to the detriment of the other parts.
> • All aspects of the whole, including the more than world, are related and these relationships require attention and ***nurturing***; when we give energy to these relationships we nurture the connections between them. Nurturing these connections leads to health while disconnection leads to disease.
> • ***Harmony*** is ultimately a process involving all entities fulfilling their obligations to each other and to themselves.

• ***Growth*** is a life-long process that involves developing aspects of oneself, such as the body, mind, heart and spirit, in a harmonious manner.
• ***Healing*** is a daily practice orientated to the restoration of wholeness, balance, relationships and harmony. It is not only focused on illness, but on disconnections, imbalances and disharmony.
• ***Mino-pimatisiwin*** is the good life or life in the fullest, healthiest sense. Mino- pimatisiwin is the goal of growth and healing and includes efforts by individuals, families, communities and people in general, in fact, all living forms, including the more than human world.

Core Values:
• ***Respect*** or the showing of honour, esteem, deference and courtesy to all, and not imposing our views on others.
• ***Sharing***, including the sharing of all we have to share, even knowledge and life experiences, which show that everyone is important and helps develop relationships.
• ***Spirituality*** is the recognition that there is a non-physical world. It is all-encompassing in Aboriginal life and is respected in all interactions, including this helping approach, and is demonstrated through meditation, prayer and ceremonies that guide good conduct.[523]

In our attempts to foster spiritual capacity in our students, as educators we must be doing our own spiritual work, and this includes nurturing ourselves through an embodied spiritual practice, one that is accountable to the trilogy of our relationships to self, others, and land. As we do the hard heart work of remembering our own original instructions and reclaim as best we are able our own Indigeneities or pre-colonized consciousness, we begin to embody a way of relating that aligns and embraces Indigenous resurgence here; rather than appropriating Indigenous spiritualities, we learn how to respectfully listen to and incorporate their wisdom traditions along with our own. Marie Battiste, in her work on displacing the cognitive imperialism of our colonial education system, urges us all to engage inner discoveries through ritual, ceremony, and tradition to bring about "deep introspective learning and attention, not only to the teachings of elders and to the ancestors, but also deep connections to how one is present with oneself."[524]

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[523] Frank Deer and Thomas Falkenberg, *Indigenous Perspectives on Education for Well-Being in Canada*, (Winnipeg Manitoba: Education for Sustainable Well-Being Press (ESWB Press, 2016), 2–3.

[524] Marie Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, (Saskatoon SK: Purich Publishing, 2013), 160–61.

'Land-based Literacies' and 'The Grammar of Animacy'

A large part of my experience as an educator has been in the wilderness and outdoor, experiential settings. Given that my work here takes our (dis)connection from the earth as central to the discussion, I cannot write about anti-colonial and decolonizing pedagogy without addressing the issue of environmental education. Emily Root in her doctoral thesis *Dis-placing Myself: Decolonizing a Settler Outdoor Environmental Educator*, provides a model for 'unsettling the settler' with the intention that western culture may move towards respectful relationality with Indigenous peoples. Root calls for settlers to take responsibility to heal our settler colonial disease through embracing the following: land-based experiences and acknowledgement of Indigenous land; engagement with resilient Indigeneity and relationships with Indigenous peoples; critically reflexive autobiographical work; and connections to one's own cultural heritage and community[525] As she puts it, "settler decolonizing involves interacting with the more-than-human world. It requires getting to know and learning to honour and respect 'all our relations.' It also involves learning that the Land teaches deep relational knowledge."[526]

While it is vital that we advocate for more place-specific and land-based environmental education and nature connection in our anti-colonial and decolonizing pedagogies, it is also equally important that we understand and grapple with "the incommensurability of place-based, environmentalist, urban pedagogies with land education."[527] As in all things, settlers must remain conscious of not reproducing settler colonial constructs even through what may be our best intentions. In their editorial *Land education: Indigenous, post-colonial, and decolonizing perspectives on place and environmental education research*, Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy point to the ways in which, "though earnest in attempts to acknowledge colonial histories of particular places, the place-based and broader environmental education literature has replicated some of the very problematic

[525] Root, 3.

[526] Root, 173.

[527] Tuck and Yang, 30.

assumptions and imperatives of settler colonialism."[528] They distinguish place-based and environmental education from Land education insofar as:

> Land education puts Indigenous epistemological and ontological accounts of land at the center, including Indigenous understandings of land, Indigenous language in relation to land, and Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism. It attends to constructions and storying of land and repatriation by Indigenous peoples, documenting and advancing Indigenous agency and land rights.[529]

Although in this era of unfolding climate disaster, it is imperative that we develop loving relationships with the places we inhabit so as to foster a deeper and personalized imperative to protect them from development and exploitation, it is equally important that we balance this with the understanding that "historically, a desire to live on Indigenous land and to feel connected to it – bodily, emotionally, spiritually – has been the normative formation of settlers."[530] As Tuck et al., write:

> understanding and fostering sustainable relationships to land and the environment cannot happen when those activities are accountable to a futurity in which settlers continue to dominate and occupy stolen Indigenous land. Maintaining settler futurity cannot be the purpose or side-effect of environmental education and research; this is not to say there is no future/ity for now-settlers, but that their relationships to Indigenous land and peoples must be informed by an unsettled imaginary. Environmental justice can only take place with Indigenous peoples and epistemologies at the center.[531]

Again, it is imperative to center Indigenous voices and ways of knowing in our work and to remember that decolonization is not a metaphor.[532] As role models for our students, we must embody the *empowered humility* that we are seeking to cultivate in ourselves and our students. We don't have to be the experts; it's more than ok to admit that we do not know everything. It can be empowering to realize that there is more than one way to

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[528] Eve Tuck, Marcia McKenzie, and Kate McCoy, "Land Education: Indigenous, Post-Colonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives on Place and Environmental Education Research," *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 15.

[529] Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy, 13.

[530] Scott Laurie Morgensen, "Un-Settling Settler Desires," in *Reflections and Resources for Deconstructing Colonial Mentality*, ed. Unsettling Minnesota Collective, (Minneapolis, MN: Self published source book, 2009): 157, http:// unsettlingminnesota.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/um_sourcebook_jan10_revision.pd157.

[531] Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy, 17.

[532] Tuck and Yang, 2012.

know, more than one kind of knower. As Kimmerer writes, "we don't have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us. Imagine how much less lonely the world would be."[533] Part of this empowering humility comes through, what Kimmerer calls, learning to speak *the grammar of animacy*. As she writes, "if we are to survive here, and our neighbours too, our work is to learn to speak the grammar of animacy, so that we might truly be at home."[534] In describing the place-specific relational wisdom embedded within Indigenous languages, Kimmerer contrasts the respect and agency afforded to other-than-human beings in Potawatomi, for example, with the profound disrespect for our non-human relations that English seems to manifest, through basic grammar. As she writes, "the arrogance of English is that the only way to be animate, to be worthy of respect and moral concern, is to be a human."[535]

My own lived experience, reinforced by teachings I have received from traditions on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrate to me that the elements and unseen beings are powerful allies in my life. They are willing and able to help me, whether with personal healing work or even with insight and direction for work such as a master's thesis. Learning how to develop and nurture a respectful, reciprocal relationship with the more-than-human world, with aspects of creation that I cannot necessarily 'see', remembering that I am not alone, and developing my ability to acknowledge and work with these beings is a powerful part of decolonizing my sense of identity and belonging, of refusing the logics of settler colonialism and the capitalist patriarchy, and of reclaiming my own ancestral wisdom traditions.

CONTINUING SPIRALS OF CONVERSATION

As human beings on this planet and as settlers here on Turtle Island, currently occupying as we are, Indigenous homelands, we have a responsibility to engage in the work of healing our relationships with

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[533] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass.* 58.

[534] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass.* 58.

[535] Kimmerer, 57.

Indigenous Nations and the land beneath our feet. As a foundation of this work, we require critical consciousness of the continued problems which we have inherited, benefit from, and are complicit in perpetuating. As Hiller puts it, this "critical consciousness entails coming to awareness of white domination tied to land as a primary axis of benefit arising from and constitutive of settler colonialism."[536] If we foreground this awareness while at the same time continuing to do the hard heart work of an embodied spiritual practice, we can hope to move towards a non-colonizing solidarity that aspires to be in alliance with Indigenous resurgence. Fostering our own spiritual capacity and moving outwards from this place to educate and collaborate with others opens up a possible way forward in righting the wrongs and repairing the damage of our individual and collective crises of disconnection.

The women with whom I shared research conversations throughout this learning journey have reflected on what the concept of spiritual capacity means to them. One theme that arose was the idea that fostering spiritual capacity depends on our ability to process trauma. For Georgie Horton-Baptiste, spiritual capacity means growing her ability to feel empathy and compassion for others who may trigger her own trauma and judgement. She observed that becoming more knowledgeable about the hardships others may have faced allows her to grow sparks of empathy. But, importantly, it has been her spiritual practices of self-reflection, reconnecting with her traditions, and through these, the processing of her own disconnections that have grown her ability to show up and remain engaged in the work of healing with others who may be different from herself. As she put it, "*That's what I have to remember. They're human. And as humans, they are deserving of kindness. So spiritual capacity, it depends a lot on experience, how a person thinks*."

For Elder Shirley Williams, spiritual capacity means the "*ability to listen and to recognize and take action to take care of yourself when you are being swayed to not listen or to do harm. It is also about being thankful and giving thanks*." She tells me, "*you need to sing it, you need to dance for it, you need to be thankful, you know, be thankful for your life. Be thankful for what you have. Be thankful that you're waking up again early in the morning. Thankful what you have and what you don't have*." Shirley also reminded me that

[536] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 16.

fostering spiritual capacity in others is much more about embodying it myself and leading by example. "*You can talk about it and you can show people about it, but you really can't make somebody become aware and embrace it. But you can show it. And once you show something to somebody, if they experience just a little tiny bit, they'll go back again and then explore it more. You can only change yourself*."

Again, Shirley's teaching is that this work, the work of decolonizing our sense of identity and belonging, of healing in the trilogy of our relationships to self, others, and land really begins with ourselves. And from this place, as we transform ourselves, we are able to show up differently to our relationships. For Marjolaine LaPointe then, spiritual capacity is about reciprocity, of learning how to become a leaver instead of taking, taking, taking all the time. When I shared the story that the Elder shared with me about his grandson and Eagle, she said:

> *I feel that way about the wild rice all the time. In a lot of ways, I feel very stuck where I want to bring settlers to understand why rice is so important and the structure of our governments and how it's the plant that keeps us all together and all of these things. And it's delicious and wonderful and it's so good for you. And yet I'm afraid that there isn't the spiritual capacity within those people to not start going and taking and going and taking and going and taking.*

Marjolaine also shared with me that for her, spiritual capacity is about relationships and "*understanding that relationships can be different with different beings at different times and that those things are - for us anyway - spiritual relationships. But those spiritual relationships are also deeply scientific in nature.*" Transforming our settler consciousness involves our coming to respect that Indigenous nations have their own relationships with their places and that these relationships are necessarily different than the ones we might have here.

Storienteering

The women also all expressed their understanding of how best to approach transformational education and articulated their understanding of the importance of using stories as educational tools. For Shirley, as far as decolonizing education goes, the importance of stories starts with remembering our own in order to reconstruct our own identities: "*that's what the education system really teaches us is to be somebody else and not who you are. For whatever that is, they were trying to do - anyway it didn't work. It's not working*," she told me. We

talked about how one of the most transformative elements in her teaching career has been when she has encouraged her students, both native and non-native, to "*go and research*" their own traditions. She would tell her students:

> *'Make that [cultural dish] and bring it and share it and we'll talk about it.' They learn about their own identity. They learn[ed] to accept who they are and grew from there and developed where they wanna go, I guess. I'm glad I did that because some of these students were 20 years old [and didn't know who they were or what their traditions were]. I was sharing my own culture and then they were sharing their own. I was trying to teach them to find their own path, wherever they came from.*

In trying to inspire her students to reconstruct their own identities and sense of self through researching and sharing their own stories and traditions, Shirley emphasized her pedagogy of non-interference, a form of respect or empowering humility that sees her role as a teacher to be one similar to that of a coach. "*I took coaching in Toronto and coaching really helped me out. Talking to people. You don't take ownership of someone when you are teaching them, you give the ownership to that individual*." Her approach reminds me of the one expressed through the work of Zinga and Styres, who stress the importance of guiding students through a process of inquiry, mirroring their questions and holding safe space for them to dive deeper without getting defensive and shutting down, in their 'teaching as reconciliation' framework.

Similarly, Elder Dorothy Taylor talked about what a powerful invitation storytelling can be for students to do their own work of decolonizing their sense of identity and belonging or of relating to the world around them:

> *And you have to do it through storytelling, not by lecturing. Not as a lecturer, but as a storyteller. That's how we used to. The way our Indigenous teachings - we don't tell people what to do, we don't even tell them how to do things. We just tell them a story and you have to figure it out yourself. And it takes longer than maybe one lecture for it to sink in. It might not even be within the generation. You just have to have faith that what you planted will become something. Have patience...and faith.*

Our conversations together each involved reflections on the alchemy of this work, of balancing the urgency and magnitude of it with the realities of transforming human consciousness. As Marjolaine LaPointe noted: *"[sometimes]it feels like we're not saying and doing enough. Like it's not hard-hitting enough. It's Indigenous issues 101 is what it is really because there are a lot of folks that are not there yet. You can't wake people up too fast. If you jump up and down yelling and screaming, it's not going to work."* She echoed Dorothy's analogy of planting seeds and having patience and faith that what we have planted will take root and

begin to grow. For Marjolaine, this is one way of approaching a decolonial pedagogy for settlers in order to overcome our shackles of binary thinking:

> *Students are already so inculcated into binary thinking that the idea of multiple genders and sexualities [for example] is really jarring because their brains have been shackled in this way of binary thinking for so long, all the time. And I think when you start to teach people that there are other ways - just giving them the little seed that it doesn't have to be binary - it doesn't have to be this - and then letting them do their own work.*

The act of planting the right seeds is the work of the storyteller/teacher. The work of tilling the soil of our consciousness to be ready to receive these seeds is the responsibility of each one of us; this is the work of fostering our own spiritual capacity. Stories transform consciousness and storytelling is the most ancient art form for fostering our spiritual capacity as relational beings. As Georgie shared, "*we were raised with [Windigo] stories…seeds that were planted about excess and greed and wanting more and more. Of not knowing when something was enough*." What a wonderous invitation – what an adventure - the process of learning our own ancestral stories that might teach similar wisdom, of learning how to listen differently to the stories already being shared here, of learning how to participate more fully in this exchange of stories that have the power to grow a whole new world for ourselves and all our relations.

Chapter 7: Spiraling Back to The Beginning

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The long game of love is a slow steep,
it is the willingness to walk the path together regardless of whether or not you are familiar with the terrain.
It is learning how to sit together at the resolution table to talk it out.
It is shared silence, and future dreaming.
It is holding the ladder so another may rise and softening the fall when they do fall.
It is holding the ground when your loved one is wavering.
It's cultivating shared language that holds hope and sweetness and safety.
It is becoming the best friend you can be.
It is becoming comfortable with uncertainty at times, while holding your gaze on the horizon of possibility.
The long game of love is about doing your own inner work so that you love yourself deeply enough for love to authentically pour out of you.
It is saying "I don't have the answer but I'm willing to learn"
the long game of love is steady, not hasty.
It is the long and winding road with an ever-evolving landscape,
and it is also home.[537]

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[537] Wendy Martin, *The Wilderness of Being: Collected works of poetry*, (publication forthcoming).

Critical Uncertainty in a Landscape of Questions

It has taken me longer than I could have anticipated to become ready to write a conclusion of sorts for my thesis journey. I have tried to weave a number of threads together while also feeling that there are many more necessary to tell this story. These are complex and nuanced issues that I have been engaging with: decolonizing my settler sense of identity and belonging, remembering my Celtic original instructions and reclaiming my own ancestral traditions in a way that makes sense in this very different time and place; conceptualizing accountability and healing in the trilogy of my relationships to self, others, and land; coming to grapple with the realities of my complicity in ongoing settler colonial violence and the unfolding climate disaster, and reflecting on what my roles and responsibilities are in anti-colonial work. Processing the emotional and spiritual ramifications of all of this will naturally overspill the banks of any artificially imposed container or any linear journey with a clear beginning and end. This learning will be lifelong and what I have written here represents a moment in time on my journey. Mercifully, Marjolaine LaPointe reinforced this idea for me near the end of one of our conversations. She offered:

> *The thing is that a lot of these theses are about process...We're so inculcated into this binary thinking that we think everything has a beginning and everything has an end. Right? So why would you assume, if you are decolonizing your methodologies and you're decolonizing the way that you're engaging with the world, including your own way of thinking and trying to get out of this binary bullshit, why would your thesis have a beginning or an end? So, it's a Triskele. Right? So, it continues on, and it builds, and it grows, and it's a living being. And you're breathing life into a being.*

In this concluding chapter, I look back on and refer to some of the markers I have found in the landscape of my journey thus far, summarizing and synthesizing some of my key learnings. I discuss the concept of uncertainty[538] as critical to my own decolonizing journey and anti-colonial work while also emphasizing what I have found to be true of hope along the way. Turning my thoughts toward the future and ever-informed by the generous knowledge-sharing of research participants as well as the words of other voices and scholars, I explore what some next steps might feel like as I continue to seek healing in the trilogy of my relationships. I conclude

[538] Mackey, 2016.

with words from Elder Doug Williams and certain teachings that his Elders have shared with him about the importance of original instructions in pointing us down the path of love, a path on which we all might belong.

My intention here has been to take up my own responsibility to walk an anti-colonial, decolonizing path, and to narrate my travels through our current social, political, ecological, emotional and spiritual landscapes in a way that does not necessarily locate specific and concrete answers, but seeks rather to further orient myself to the many questions and contentions. I think, as it has been suggested to me, that perhaps my questions and my continuing to hold these questions, is just as valuable, if not more so, than any answers I could give at this point in my journey. Taking a deep dive into confronting the relational implications of my own structural positionality within these settler colonial systems, continually engaging in the discourses in academia, online, and in my personal relationships regarding white supremacy, white fragility, solidarity, as well as much of the latest climate science has been incredibly challenging on a personal, psychological level. There is just so much to do. Everything I have been doing, am doing, and could ever do is simply not enough. The challenges we face in the trilogy of our relationships are so vast and insidious that as much as I want to be optimistic, to find hope and a positive way forward, I sometimes wonder if we will ever make it right. As sustainability expert Bendell writes, "what we face is a complex predicament beyond our control."[539]

What I am realizing, though, is that I am not alone in these feelings of uncertainty. The Anishinaabe-kweg who have supported me through our shared conversations also spoke about sitting with similar feelings, despite each one of them being tireless activists and teachers in their communities. Georgie Horton-Baptiste says, "*I can only speak for myself as an Indigenous woman...Sometimes I question - what am I doing? And what I am doing - is that any good?! Sometimes I wonder, do I even have the qualifications?*" But a certain acceptance of this uncertainty is also offered when Georgie says, "*Sometimes we don't know and somethings we'll never know, and we just have to accept that*." Georgie prefers to keep her focus on the here and now, and to keep doing the best she can to be of service to this healing work: "*If you look too far ahead, you just lose*

[539] Bendell, "Deep Adaptation, 2018.

sight of what's actually here." As I grapple with my own anxieties about what the future may hold for us, it strikes me that her resolve has much wisdom in it.

Beginning with Ourselves

Despite the magnitude of the problems we face, I believe that the fulcrum of power does not reside outside of ourselves in the hands of governments, corporations, or institutions; it is ultimately within us and exists between us. Speaking broadly, as settlers here, particularly white settlers, these institutions are largely made up of us; we elect these governments, we vote with our dollars every day, we tacitly consent to this mess we are in and perpetuate it whether we are aware of it or not. It is critical as a foundation for transformation that we become aware of the ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples, ongoing theft of Indigenous lands, as well as the ongoing destruction and desecration of the natural ecosystems that support all life. But we also must learn how to acknowledge and accept how we are a part of this, personally, individually, and collectively every day we live and breathe within these systems; the way of life that we have become accustomed to or been trained to desire, being raised first and foremost as consumers in a consumerist culture, is daily driving these devastating processes. But, as Davis et al question, is realizing this even enough to make a critical change?

> Is it enough to hear the 'truth' about residential school history or the history of colonialism? Is it enough for settlers to recognize Indigenous territory? To grapple with their own implication in history? To support Indigenous struggles to alter the way things are? To actively interrupt and challenge processes that recreate settler privilege and Indigenous dispossession? To work on issues of restitution and returning land and land access?[540]

Is it enough to root out the pervasive sense of entitlement in our settler consciousness, to reveal to us our own blind spots when it comes to understanding that what we feel we are entitled to has been gained or made available to us on the backs of others, specifically at the expense of Indigenous and POC lives, at the expense of the wellbeing and lives of all other beings with whom we share this planet? Apparently, the answer is *no*; it is not enough. The information is out there. The opportunities to engage with this information exist. Ignorance of

[540] Davis et al., "Complicated Pathways," 409.

these facts, although an enduring one, is no longer the only problem. And that has essentially been my journey here – to explore what else might be missing in order to help us to awaken and to transform – to *heal*.

The truth is that I don't feel I have many answers - just more questions, more to reflect upon and grapple with. I am not sure I have said anything new either; everything I have written here is simply a compilation of all the brilliant and heartfelt teachings of others, taken in, savoured, digested, and shared through my own lens of understanding. And yet, I am not the same person I was when I began my thesis journey. The process of sitting in these questions, of seeking, listening, taking in all of my uncertainties, feeling my discomfort, my longing, my frustration, of embodying my prayers through ongoing collective actions led primarily by Indigenous women has been transformative. Coming to acknowledge and grieve the pain I have been in and to source this pain largely within the reality of our vast history of settler colonialism has gifted me an orienting framework to begin to reconstruct my own identity in relationship to Indigenous nations and to the land in which I live.

As I have been describing throughout this narrative, the nature of our collective colonial wounds, from my point of view, is a profound disconnection in the trilogy of our relationships; disconnection from the land, from others, and from ultimately, our selves. In its most basic definition, spirituality is about connection and interconnection. As such, I believe the nature of these wounds of disconnection to be spiritual. In the face of this profound disconnection, as Marie Battiste has said, *we all must become healers in a wounded space*. The path of healing and becoming a healer in this wounded space is manifold. For me, it can be conceptualized as a triple spiral in nature.

The entry points onto this path of anti-colonial healing are also a trilogy. We can come to it through witnessing the devastation that our way of life is causing to the earth, to all the creatures with whom we share this planet. We can come to it through awakening to the brutality of our shared history here in this place, to the ways in which the Canadian state has been brought about and is sustained by the oppression and continued genocide of Indigenous Peoples. Or we can stumble upon our own individual sense of longing for meaning, our feelings of isolation and familial experiences of trauma and addiction. Regardless of what wound and its

attendant pain might nudge us into an awareness of the crises we are facing, what matters is that we awaken, and then that we take action.

As Elder Shirley Williams has spoken to me about, in this profound work, we must begin with ourselves. In a teaching that speaks to me about healing our own trauma, she shares that we must go back and find the parts of ourselves that we left behind, so that we can learn who we are and where we belong; this sense of identity is the foundation on which to build healthy, loving relationships based on mutual respect and trust, the initial spirit of our founding treaties. Healing in the trilogy of our relationships begins with healing our own wounds of disconnection from ourselves. For Shirley, as she shared with me, she left the little girl inside herself at residential school and found healing in returning to her Anishinaabeg culture and language. For me, it has involved various forms of trauma therapy and continuing to do this very work, including remembering my own original instructions, building some kind of identity through connecting as best I can to a pre-colonized Celtic consciousness while committing to actively supporting Indigenous sovereignty here on the lands I now live. At every turn, this path for me involves enduring through paradox; the paradox being that I must continually question myself, my choices, my worldview and my assumptions, continually strive to hold myself accountable to the trilogy of my relationships, to do better, to do more, while at the same time actively choosing gratitude, acceptance, surrender, and even, importantly, joy. This, for me, is love-in-action, the real root work of my embodied spiritual practice that sustains my decolonial praxis. And importantly, this inner work cannot exist in isolation, cannot be accountable without ongoing engagement within the collective.

Staying Engaged

The kind of critical uncertainty that Mackey[541] talks about, for me, involves staying engaged in this decolonizing process even when my deepest longing for a sense of ethical existence, identity and belonging here is fraught and contentious. The idea that, as a white settler woman, I cannot transcend or escape my structural location and complicity in ongoing settler colonialism, and that as such, the relationships I have with my

[541] Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 2016.

Indigenous friends and neighbours are contingent and perhaps even incommensurable, can be existentially excruciating. As D'Arcangelis reminds, "we remain settlers complicit in colonial relations irrespective of our ability to connect to individual Indigenous people or communities."[542] Sitting with the real confusion and discomfort of this, not moving to refuse the truth of it or defend against it, cognitively, can be a tremendous act of surrendering the kind of certainty many of us crave so dearly. This existential uncertainty involves the idea that my structural positionality is irreconcilable with my longing for an ethical existence within community, within place. Furthermore, along this journey through the academic discourses, it had seemed to me that there was little room for a white settler woman such as myself to claim any sort of ethical existence, to claim a sense of identity that is imbued with self-acceptance, self-love, a place of belonging. To be a settler committed to decolonization, accountability, and justice seemed at one point to me to necessitate a commitment to self-flagration and a resolute unwillingness to even hint at articulating that transformation is possible, let alone desirable. And yet, this is not necessarily the case; it is simply part of the affective nature of my decolonization process. This is the paradox without promise of certainty, only the hope of praxis in the right direction.

The paradox of my decolonization/healing journey is to allow, acknowledge, and accept all the shameful truths of my inherited legacy as a white settler while refusing to wallow in shame or despair, and to learning how to articulate this journey well so that I might improve my ability to be of service to this work with others. My embodied spiritual practice involves processing my own trauma and embedded shame, both ancestral and personal, releasing the tendency to take everything so personally, and to commit to doing my best in my relationships. The reality of this in my everyday life is not necessarily pretty – it is messy, confusing, frustrating, and it is constant. It requires as a prerequisite, as Marjolaine LaPointe has emphasized, the willingness to be self-reflective, and not just superficially reflective, but to "dig deeper" into the gritty details of what I think and why I do the things I do. At the same time, it does involve hope, too; hope that I and my fellow settlers *can* do and become better – that we *can* transform and heal ourselves and our relationships. Marjolaine offered this piece of critical hope, cited earlier, but I think it bears repeating here:

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[542] D'Arcangelis, "The Solidarity Encounter," 226.

> *We always need to be in a state of healing. And we're never 'healed'. If we can't allow space for growth, then we're doomed, really. I kind of feel like if we don't allow space for that settler transformation and if settlers don't allow that space for themselves…I mean they have to believe that they can. And I know that they can because I've seen it happen.*

Marjolaine also observed that, "*Indigenous nations didn't have gods, we had heroes. And heroes were fallible. And the reasons we didn't have gods is because of this lack of this concept of original sin. And you can be fallible and grow and make mistakes and redeem yourself and continue on*."

Shirley and I discussed that this healing and transformation is really about settlers earning back the trust that has been broken between ourselves and Indigenous Peoples. "*It's about trust. You need to earn that trust*," she said. She went on to offer insight into how all of us, wherever we land in this colonial divide, are in the process of healing – of doing our work to process the traumas of colonization:

> *There is still lack of trust by many people, and for good reason. I can feel when somebody's is carrying that good trust. I mean, I can feel it when they really truly are meaningful in trying to learn and understand. So, I feel that those people are good people and that it's ok. You know, they're the helpers, they're the true allies. Those people that are still saying those kinds of things, they are still very angry, They haven't really understood. And so, I mean I just feel kind of sorry for them, in some way, but they are still having to work their own stuff.*

Georgie too reflected on how the work really begins with each of us taking responsibility for our own healing:

> *They [our ancestors] knew that a new time was coming [with the arrival of white people]. For me, I accept that. I accept that. And I also accept the upheaval that it has caused. And every night I pray that our people can begin in greater numbers to begin that hard heart work of healing. Because we have a lot of work to do. And some of us, people don't want to acknowledge that. They still want to blame the settler. But we have our own path to walk. A settler can't walk it for us. We have our teachings, our traditions, our culture, to pick up and guide us. And every day I pray that more and more of our people will pick up those bundles.*

As Indigenous nations continue to heal from the violence of ongoing settler colonialism and to resurge their languages, lifeways, cultures, and nationhoods, we settlers must be doing our own work too. Decolonial praxis for settlers is about readying ourselves to show up in our relationships differently, to be accountable, and to endeavour to listen and share together in a new way. As Shirley offered:

> *Well that's what we gotta do in order to move forward. We have to continue to come together to talk about certain things. As hard as it will be, the Elders say – as difficult as it may be to hear, to see, to talk about what has been done wrong, wrongs are always hard to deal with. But when wrongs have been done, you need correct that wrong and from then on, you need to move on. So, and I guess that's where people need to come together to continue to meet and talk and talk together.*

Shirley also re-emphasized the teaching that, "*You can only change yourself."* She said, *"That's what Commanda was talking about and few other Elders too. I guess that time hasn't come yet, but people are starting to wake up now*." People *are* starting to wake up now, and to hear that call which I first heard from Grandfather Commanda: *remember your original instructions*. Part of changing myself has been to heed this advice. Part of transforming settler consciousness is realizing what worldview and traditions we have been fed, realizing they are not working for us or our relationships, and choosing a better way. Acknowledging all the inherent complexities and contentions, the concept remains quite simple. As Shirley put it:

> *Even though it was made over there, you need to um, even though you encountered those, you know, you sort of embraced them, but they're not the ones that you wanted so you get rid of those. You no longer need them, eh, anymore. So, you become a better person, to try and do good. You're still listening to the Creator, so that you're trying to do good for the Creator and for all people. Because you want to be kind to the other people.*

There is so much work to do. Waking up to it, committing to it, and sticking to this hard heart work is the journey. Georgie Horton-Baptiste reflects on her own journey:

> *Sometimes I miss that person I used to be. I do. I miss that innocence. And sometimes I find it really difficult when I'm in an introspective mood and I'm thinking, but I can't stay there long, because there's so much work to do. That's where this overused word of resilience comes in. It's like yeah, you turn around and look at it all in the face. You turn around, you know it's there. But that doesn't stop you from doing the work that has to continue, that you know has to continue for a long, long, long, time yet. And you just have to find that spark, that hard work - it keeps going. It keeps going and you can't give up. Just keep on keeping on. That's the way I've come to see it - sometimes it seems thankless, never ending, but that's my path and I accept it.*

In her article, *Making home on Anishinaabe lands: storying settler activisms in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough, Canada)*, Chazan holds the question of "whether it is possible, and what it would look like, for settlers to make home, to belong, and to live meaningfully on Indigenous lands, without reproducing and reinforcing cycles of settler colonial dispossession, displacement, and violence."[543] In describing the stories of three settlers engaged in decolonizing work in their communities, Chazan writes:

> What emerges is that, in different ways and to different extents, these three activists begin to challenge: (1) assumptions of home as epistemically associated with mastery and ownership; (2) notions of settler

[543] May Chazan, "Making Home on Anishinaabe Lands: Storying Settler Activisms in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough, Canada)," *Settler Colonial Studies*, (2019): 14.

> futurity as preoccupied with maintaining settler property and security; (3) narratives of white settlers as 'at home', racialized settlers as outsiders, and Indigenous homelands/home-makings as no longer existing.[544]

Building on Hiller's double spiral model of settler decolonization, which involves (1) learning about Indigenous epistemes; and (2) unlearning settler common sense,[545] I conceive of my own decolonization journey to be a *Triple Spiral* that also includes *reconstructing my sense of identity*[546] and belonging, of embracing and embodying an ontology and epistemology that is earth-centered, place-based, and necessarily respectful and accountable to my relationships with both fellow human as well as more-than-human beings. In remembering my own Celtic original instructions in the context of my positionality as a white settler here in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory, I am beginning to reconstruct an emergent sense of identity from the ashes of my ongoing transformations of consciousness. As I strive to be accountable to the trilogy of my relationships, I am finding some sense of *unsettled belonging* that embraces critical uncertainty as well as the contingencies of my relationships to and in being here. I understand that I have choices to make and responsibilities to honour. And a big part of my responsibility is to commit to the "processes of grappling with and coming to actively support Indigenous sovereignty, title, and rights and relations to land."[547] I understand that there is a large portion of Canadians who barely have a beginner's understanding that we are a part of ongoing colonial genocide or that we are benefitting from and perpetuating it. We need to build this understanding to begin with in order to then

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[544] Chazan, 15.

[545] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement," 2017.

[546] As discussed in chapter 1, this is a salient concept in the discourse on transformational education. See for example: Ray Land, "Liminality Close-up. Think piece for 7th Higher Education Close-Up Conference (HECU 7)," accessed January 21 2019 from https://studylib.net/doc/8436389/liminality-close-up---lancaster-university; Jan H.F. Meyer, Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie (eds.), "Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning," *Educational Futures: Rethinking Theory and Practice* 42, (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2010); Margaret A.L Blackie, Jennifer M Case, and Jeff Jawitz, "Student-Centredness: The Link Between Transforming Students and Transforming Ourselves," *Teaching in Higher Education* 15, no. 6 (December 1, 2010): 637–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.491910; Jen Ross, "Traces of self: online reflective practices and performances in higher education," *Teaching in Higher Education* 16, no.1, (2011): 113-26, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2011.530753;

[547] Hiller, 5.

consider how we might work to dismantle these systems of oppression. Each one of us is in our own place in the spectrum of consciousness about these issues. For me, this is where I am at; and it is a place of returning of sorts. It is certainly about healing for me. It is about finding my gifts, learning to believe in them, as well as learning how to hold a relaxed position in the center of seemingly opposing forces – to sit comfortably in the discomfort and tension, without moving to disavow or avoid it, while mobilizing to transform. All of this transformational learning occurs within the collective and within the Land, which is the place in which we all meet. It happens through continuing to engage in collective story sharing and action in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and agendas, in taking responsibility to stand up, speak out, and to step back when appropriate.

Reconciling in the Apocalypse

Apologies without a change in behaviour is just manipulation.

Erica Violet Lee, an Indigenous author who was part of the Canadian Youth Delegation to Paris for the COP 21 climate conference, wrote an article entitled *Reconciling in the Apocalypse.* In it, she states, "it seems few have an understanding of what it means to practice reconciliation in the face of ongoing colonialism." Far from simply apologizing, and perhaps feeling 'sorry' to and for Indigenous people, Lee notes, "the real task of reconciliation, however, is not in Canada waiting around to be forgiven for colonialism so business can carry on as usual; it is for Canadians to end the ongoing colonial violence that still suffocates Indigenous lives."[548] She goes on to elaborate that what reconciliation is really about is "the restoration of good relations. [And] restoring good relations requires fundamentally breaking with a vastly unjust world to a focus on how we relate to each other and the world around us."[549]

[548] Erica Violet Lee, "Reconciling in the Apocalypse," *Monitor: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, (March/April, 2016): 18.

[549] Lee, 19.

Sandy Marie Grande has said that refusal (refusal of the settler colonial systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and our notions of land as commodity) is the foundation of possibility.[550] To effectively refuse and begin the work of dismantling these oppressive and destructive systems, we have to work together. But in order to work together, we must first understand what can never be reconciled. As Lee illuminates:

> A classic case of worldviews colliding: as Indigenous people, we will never be able to sit at a table with mining companies and reconcile. No person can sit at a table and claim to give consent to fracking, mines or pipelines on behalf of the lands, waters and more-than-human lives that make up Indigenous territories. […] *Reconciliation is about Indigenous liberation, and it is about the liberation of the earth*. We are never "all in this together" while Indigenous communities are stripped to the bone for the fat to maintain Canada. Reconciliation includes the land. Reconciliation includes not only humans, but "more-than-human" creatures."[551]

The science is in, and it confirms what Indigenous nations have been saying from the beginning: we cannot do what we are doing to Mother Earth! Oil is not a gift from creation; we do not have the right to be destroying whole ecosystems and poisoning our water and air for fuel - it is literally killing us and all our relations with whom we share this planet. Indigenous nations have known this destruction, have been witnessing it and suffering under it and educating against it since the first Europeans settlements began, and they have been documenting and resisting it ever since. In a YouTube video entitled *Reconciliation Begins with the Land*, Indigenous artist and environmentalist Isaac Murdoch, Manzinapkinegego'anaabe / Bombgiizhik says, "reconciliation, I think, that it really needs to start with the earth; it's the foundation of everything."[552] Murdoch emphasizes that reconciliation has no meaning without the concerted action on all our parts to reconcile with the Land and Waters, with the other Nations of Creation:

> […] To me that's reconciliation. To me it's the foundation of any healthy society. The benchmark for success needs to have healthy ecosystems in their biospheres, clean air, like that needs to be our benchmark for success, not economic development and growth as we see it now. When we can drink

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[550] Grande, CIARS Decolonizing Conference, 2018. Grande's use of the term 'refusal' can be traced back to the work of Audra Simpson, "On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship." *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 9 (2007).

[551] Lee, 19, *emphasis my own*.

[552] Issac Murdoch, "Reconciliation Begins with the Land," *Onaman Collective*, posted by Project H.O.M.E. on January 26 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pwHxmGU58U.

> water out of that stream or out of that lake, to me that's success. So when I think about reconciliation, I'm not even thinking about the reconciliation between governments and myself and my people. How can we reconcile with the earth and the waters and the animals? I think that really needs to be our next move forward. We're in a critical time. We're in sacred times. And the next generation is really depending on us to do that and I truly hope that we're able to do that and that we can do it together. And I believe we can, so let's reach out let's support each other and let's just really, just love everything to pieces if we can, because that's what the world needs. We need just to love everything again.[553]

Despite enduring now centuries of cultural genocide perpetrated by the Canadian government, Indigenous nations have never forgotten their original instructions and their duty to protect the Lands and Waters that have been entrusted to them. They are on the front lines every single day, resisting further settler encroachment, protecting and advocating for the land and water against pipeline developments, mining expansions, fracking, and more. As Lee writes, "do you know how many times Indigenous worlds have been 'doomed'? Relation by relation, we dream worlds back into existence. […] Unfortunately, Indigenous people are no longer the only ones responsible for the wellbeing of this land. This is where reconciliation really matters"[554] Simpson, too, writes:

> We were facing the complete political, cultural and social collapse of everything we had ever known. My ancestors resisted and survived what must have seemed like an apocalyptic reality of occupation and subjugation in a context where they had few choices. They resisted by simply surviving and being alive. They resisted by holding onto their stories.[555]

Marjolaine LaPointe echoed this sentiment that apocalypse is nothing new to Indigenous communities:

> *I'm reconciled. Like, I am completely reconciled to this post-apocalyptic society that we live in now. And post-apocalyptic doesn't mean that there's not more apocalypses...there will be more...we've had several. As Indigenous people, we are children of the apocalypse. Right? Predator came. Climate change is going to be the next one and nobody is safe from this one.*

In discussing how so many people, or western society in general, still seem asleep to or unable to grasp how serious this environmental crisis is, Georgie Horton-Baptiste offered that she thinks "*most people would acknowledge the times we are in - that we are racing towards a precipice, but we can't seem to stop ourselves. But as long as I can't really see it, [we think] you know, I'm still good; we're still ok*."

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[553] Murdoch, *Reconciliation Begins With the Land*.
[554] Lee, 19.

[555] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 15.

Elder Dorothy Taylor and I talked about the unprecedented times we are in collectively – facing the extinction of life as we know it - and how this is the culmination of the Anishinaabeg prophecy of the 7 Fires. She observed:

> *Now a days, when you have climate change and global warming and all this kind of stuff, people are now concerned. They're self-reflective now of their activities. There's an environmental crisis, which will cause a political crisis, which will cause an environmental crisis. That's why they're looking to Indigenous people about how do we renew our relationship to the land. That's part of our prophecies too, there's going to come a time in humanity's progress, when they're going to look to the Indigenous people of the world, not just Turtle Island, on how to renew their relationship and balance to the world. And that's happening now. That's what I'm thinking. So, we're living in prophetic times right now. It's so amazing.*

Shirley Williams too, sees that more people are waking up to the urgency of the crises we are facing:

> *So now we have to – it's time now, I think everybody's being awakened because of climate change and many people want to save the world and save themselves and they wanna change something for the better because they realize where they went wrong and they wanna reconstruct that. So, we all have to do that as people - we have to reconstruct. And that's what reconciliation means. Damage has been done already, now we have to reconstruct that damage of that human being. And how do we do that? So, we have to begin somewhere. And we have to start from the basics. You know, try and find - what do we need to do in order to move on to make things better.*

Trying to figure out *what we need to do in order to move on and make things better* as Shirley put it is precisely what all of our conversations together held at heart. Marjolaine emphasized that the path forward is for each of us to reclaim a sense of self rooted in our own indigeneities.[556] She contrasted the Indigenous nations who have retained their sense of self are "*the ones yelling and screaming about climate change right now*," and compared them with nations that aren't "*because they have no sense of their own Indigeneity*." She pointed out that, "*in North America because we have these embedded notions of whiteness and whiteness is the default, it's because of the way colonization works, you have all of these nations that have lost their sense of self. Rather than being leavers, we are being takers. And that's the end of all of us."*

[556] It bears repeating that what is meant in this context is not to have settlers continue established moves to innocence by attempting to claim an Indigenous identity. Rather, what is called for is a (re)claiming or co-creating a sense of identity and belonging that is accountable to our place-based-relationships, an understanding of our responsibilities to the land beneath our feet and to the other beings with whom we share this place. This can be informed by investigating our own ancestral lineage(s) and remembering our stories, while also centering Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous relationship models to Land.

Transforming ourselves into nations who are leavers instead of takers requires us to reflect deeply on ourselves and our responsibility to our relationships. As Marjolaine asks, "*so, how do you turn the tide without self-reflection? Without corporations becoming self-reflective. Without individuals daily engaging in self-reflection as a relationship with the land*?" As more of us become willing, with *spiritual courage* as she calls it, to reflect in this way and to take action to transform ourselves and our nations, Dorothy observes that, "*according to the Hopi people, too, they say we've made the choice. That crook in the road, we've chosen prosperity and balance, spirituality and gratitude as humanity*." What an encouraging and radically hopeful thought that is, that we have chosen that good path.

And yet, making a choice is not quite the same thing as setting that choice into motion and to seeing it through. This is truly where relational accountability comes in as it relates to reconciliation between settler Canadians and our relationship with Indigenous Peoples as well as with the Land. Recalling to mind the abusive relationship analogy that Leanne Betasamosake Simpson uses to characterize these relationships, her accounting of Indigenous theorizations of restorative justice offer settlers a meaningful framework for ethically taking responsibility for our role in this healing or restorative process.[557] She writes:

> Reconciliation must move beyond individual abuse to come to mean a collective re-balancing of the playing field. This idea is captured in the Nishnaabeg concept *Aanji Maajitaawin:* to start over, the art of starting over, to regenerate. Reconciliation is a process of regeneration that will take many years to accomplish. […] Canada must engage in a decolonization project and a re-education project that would enable its government and its citizens to engage with Indigenous Peoples in a just and honourable way in the future. From a theoretical and legal perspective, regeneration or restoration is at the core of re-balancing relationships. Nishnaabeg legal systems are, at their core, restorative. Restorative processes rely upon the abuser taking full responsibility for his/her actions in a collective setting, amongst the person s/he violated, and amongst the people both the perpetrator and the survivor hold responsibilities to - be that their extended family, clan, or community.[558]

The work that must be done must be done on a massive scale and it is urgent. It requires all of us, literally and figuratively. It requires individuals to engage physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. And it requires each of us to work together, on all fronts, across all sectors of society.

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[557] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 24.

[558] Simpson, 22–23.

Radical Hope

"In abandoning hope that one way of life will continue, we open up a space for alternative hopes."[559]

It should be abundantly clear to anyone not committed to willful denial of plain fact or to maintaining the status quo of white privilege that the way we are living - the very foundations and mechanisms of our way of life here within settler colonialism and globalized capitalist patriarchy are NOT OK!; these dominant systems and paradigms of consciousness are quite literally killing us. As Lynch writes, "it is not that we live in a world where our economics, politics and culture happen to contribute to climate change, but that life in 'the West' is essentially destructive of the rest of nature […] The problem isn't an accidental by-product of our way of life—it's our very way of life."[560] Similarly, Bendell notes that "we definitely know that continuing to work in the ways we have done until now is not just backfiring – it is holding the gun to our own heads. With this in mind, we can choose to explore how to evolve what we do, without any simple answers."[561]

It is time to let ourselves fully grasp that our identities and way of life must crumble in order to make way for the possibility of a new future in which we all belong, belong to a world that can sustain us – and all our relations - and the many generations to come. For this to happen, we must become willing to give up our unearned and unethical power, privilege, and sense of entitlement to a culture that is consumptive to the point of compulsion. Thompson writes,

> For many of us, to even conceive the possibility of living well with significantly less requires a kind of imaginative excellence similar to that of Plenty Coups. Then, actually living committed to this vision will require the resources of a radical hope, helping one to swim against the currents of dominant culture. Radical hope is manifest in the virtues of commitment to a new form of living well, in the resolve to live well with less, along with the ingenuity, frugality, and restraint required to accomplish this."[562]

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[559] Tommy Lynch, "Why Hope Is Dangerous When It Comes to Climate Change: Global warming discussions *need* apocalyptic thinking," *Slate,* July 25, 2017, https://slate.com/technology/2017/07/why-climate-change-discussions-need-apocalyptic-thinking.html.

[560] Lynch, 2017.

[561] Bendell, "Deep Adaptation," 2018.

[562] Allen Thompson, "Radical Hope for Living Well in a Warmer World," *Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23, (2010): 52.

The concept of *radical hope*[563] as it is employed by sustainability thinkers is related to the decolonizing concept of *critical uncertainty* as discussed by Mackey. It strikes a balance between blind optimism and the paralysis of despair through action, despite the certainty that things as we know it must be dissolved and in spite of the fact that we don't yet know what will come to take its place. This link between hope and action is similarly made by Greta Thunberg, in her *TEDxStockholm* talk in November 2018, when she say, "yes, we do need hope, of course we do. But the one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere. So instead of looking for hope, look for action. Then, and only then, will hope come."[564]

Radical hope towards a sustainable and just future for all our relations embraces the fact that our way of life is ending, and that it must, that upheaval is inevitable, while also admitting that we do not know what our future will look like, moving toward it the best way we know how, step by step, in collective action. Critical uncertainty and radical hope are requirements for this journey. Our settler entitlement and settler futurity must die to make way for the possibility of a more ethical future together. "This is not to say there is no future/ity for now-settlers, but that their relationships to Indigenous land and peoples must be informed by an unsettled imaginary."[565] Purpose, and action taken in service of that purpose, is what gives us hope, and hope is a fundamental psychological human need. As Kimmerer urges us, we must find our gifts and share them in service of this fundamental purpose – healing and accountability in the trilogy of our relationships.[566]

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[563] See for example: Lynch, 2017; Thompson, 2010; Rebecca Solnit, *Hope In the Dark: untold histories, wild possibilities*, (New York: Nation Books, 2004).

[564] Greta Thunberg, *The Disarming Case to Act Right Now on Climate Change*, [Video File], (November, 2018), Retrieved from: www.ted.com/talks

[565] Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy, "Land Education," 17.

[566] For a brief summary of Jem Bendell's Deep Adaptation model, please see Appendix B.

Resilience, Relinquishment, Restoration and Reconciliation

The Deep Adaptation model as articulated by sustainability expert Jem Bendell is one that centers the fact that our way of life must transform utterly, indeed that it will regardless of whether we would like it to or not. It includes four pillars of resilience, relinquishment, restoration, and reconciliation. As he writes, "resilience asks us '*how do we keep what we really want to keep*?' Relinquishment asks us '*what do we need to let go of in order to not make matters worse*?' Restoration asks us "*what can we bring back to help us with the coming difficulties and tragedies*?"[567] In a subsequent article on the fourth pillar, reconciliation, Bendell writes that "ours is a time for reconciliation with mortality, nature and each other." He calls for us to reconcile ourselves to the fact that the collapse of our society and way of life is now inevitable and to develop a radical hope of how to live and love in the face of this uncertainty and impermanence. As he puts it, "a radical hope of humanity awakening is one where we are actively engaged in it." In describing his vision of reconciliation, he adds, "I envision people feeling grateful they suddenly found there is time in their lives to sing, dance and connect with nature and each other. I envision this connection also supporting ways of production, sharing, consumption, and caring, that mean people are able to live happily with fewer resources and less certainty."[568]

***Taisce*: That which we Value**

In re-claiming my roots, in doing the hard heart work to uncover my complicities and implications with colonialism as well as my own colonial wounds of fragmentation, in committing to an embodied remembering of how the stories of my ancestors teach me something about how to be in relationship with and within place, I am better prepared to continue this anti-colonial work in service of Indigenous lands and life, and all of Life. The three pillars of my embodied spiritual practice, the arms of the riverbed, help to move me forward,

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[567] Bendell, "Deep Adaptation," 2018.

[568] Jem Bendell, "Hope and Vision in the Face of Collapse – The 4th R of Deep Adaptation," *Professor Jem Bendell* (blog), January 9, 2019, https://jembendell.com/2019/01/09/hope-and-vision-in-the-face-of-collapse-the-4th-r-of-deep-adaptation/.

reminding me of *Taisce,* the Irish word for 'treasure', 'that which we value', of what is most important. It is time we decide what is most precious and valuable and choose to directly engage ourselves in supporting this.

Land and Waters as the ground of my Life

In their article, "The History of a Friendship, or Some Thoughts on Becoming Allies," Christian and Freeman relate with fierce honesty their ongoing struggle for trust, accountability, healing, and mutual understanding in their relationship. Christian relates asking her non-Indigenous friend Freeman, *Can you love the earth like I do?* And I think this is a defining and important question to ask ourselves. Whereas I can't claim to understand how Christian loves the earth in her own unique way, I can state unequivocally that I love this earth with all my heart. I am in love with her being, her mystery, her beauty, her generosity, and I am committed to living my life in deepening intimacy, respect, and love with the land beneath my feet. I understand that it is my duty to live in reciprocity, in reverence with the earth. This has been emulated and shared with me by many Indigenous teachers, Elders, writers, and speakers whom I have been privileged to listen to and learn from, and this is also the way of my own ancestors. It is time we remembered this; Indigenous ways of relating to the earth, land and waters must be centered. Decolonization will emerge through Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and practices. As Kimmerer again describes the invitation being extended to settlers by Indigenous Nations:

> an invitation for the people of this watershed to engage in becoming indigenous to place. No newcomer can ever match the Onondaga's identity with these hills, but what does it mean for an immigrant culture to start thinking like a native one? Not to appropriate the culture of Indigenous peoples, not to take what is theirs, but to throw off the mindset of the frontier, the mindset that allows people to bury sacred sites under industrial waste, to fill a lake with mercury. Being indigenous to place means to live as if we'll be here for the long haul, to take care of the land as if our lives, both spiritual and material, depended on it. Because they do.[569]

My Celtic tradition teaches that the land is Sovereignty herself and that I am in continuous interdependence and co-creation with her. In Irish stories we are taught that we have a contract with the

[569] Kimmerer, "The Rights of the Land," Orion Magazine, December 2, 2008, https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-rights-of-the-land/.

Goddess of Sovereignty, the Land, and we have responsibilities to uphold. Our tradition teaches me that my responsibility is to celebrate, communicate, and co-create beauty with the land beneath my feet. In line with Kimmerer's theorizing of gratitude as a fundamental premise to refuse the scarcity of Windigoo culture and consumptive capitalism, I have a duty to celebrate the abundant gifts that the Land and Waters continually offer me, to give thanks, to revel and delight and take part in the gifts so freely given. I have a duty – as the Irish would say, *it is upon me* – to commune with the water, the trees, the creatures and stones in a way that expresses my gratitude and respect, in a way that opens me to their gifts and teachings. And I must *do* something to give back, to demonstrate and activate my gratitude – I must create: gardens, acts of restoration, pockets of beauty, tiny oases of reverence and reciprocal abundance, simple ceremonies to continually renew this celebratory and communicative relationship, to embody the ways in which I am living into loving this earth in the way she deserves. This is how I am remembering and reclaiming my original instructions; this is how I am answering, as best I can, Christian's question, "Can you love the earth like I do?"

Relationships as the ground of my Identity

"The only certainty is knowing that, in order to continue to live here together on this planet, we must find ways to have good relationships with the land and with each other."[570]

The more I live, the more I come to understand that my relationships are the most precious thing in my life. It is difficult to conceive of who I would be in the absence of my relationships, and indeed, I cannot think of anything more painful for the human heart than the loss of intimate connection with something or someone we love. As I have been articulating throughout this thesis, I believe that collectively as well as individually, we are suffering from the profound grief and spiritual isolation that is the result of our crises of disconnection in the trilogy of our relationships to ourselves, one another, and the earth. These interrelated crises of disconnection have been shown to be rooted in our settler logics of entitlement and domination, a paradigm of consciousness

[570] Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 91.

that manifests in the ongoing colonial assault on Indigenous lands and life, the feminine, the vulnerable, and all manner of 'others' who stand in the way of the capitalist propensity for exploitation and consumption.

If we are rightly dismayed, horrified, ashamed, and outraged upon awakening to this reality we are both benefiting from and suffering under, then we must move to transform it. But as Corey Snelgrove reminds me:

> if these desires and simultaneous feelings of shame, frustration, alienation, and anger are to be at all transformative, they must be accompanied by thought and practice attentive to their respective sources; they must be guided by accountability and respect, care and renewal, with urgency and insurgency, to address and destroy the parasitical relations that exist between and among settlers and Indigenous peoples, as well as to support those (potentially) good relations that already exist, and those that we wish to establish between and among settlers and Indigenous peoples.[571]

Healing our relationships together, repairing trust and mutual respect means committing ourselves to address and destroy these parasitical relations that exist between us. As I am learning, the nurturing of "good relations across differences take time and care, and a willingness to live in contention."[572] It takes an enduring commitment to our own inner work as well as a demonstrated and consistent willingness to keep showing up to collective action and relationship renewal. Trust is precious and precarious; it takes time to build and only moments to destroy. Regan offers me these series of questions with which to reflect on the all-encompassing nature of nurturing my relationships here in place:

> What am I doing on a daily basis within myself and in my relationships with my family, my community, my school, or my workplace that keeps me living in truth? Are my actions leading toward more just and peaceful relations with Indigenous people? It is my critical hope that, in answering these questions, we will be deeply unsettled in our minds, our hearts, and our spirits, and know that this is a good thing. The transformative pathways in our garden are rich and fertile but need our time, attention, love, and energy to flourish.[573]

I have learned that relationships are also place-based and are not necessarily transferrable. The relationships I had nurtured in Thunder Bay meant little when I moved to Nogojiwanong where no one knew me. In every moment, every interaction, every instance and place, I need to show up willing to listen well, to be accountable,

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[571] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," 6.

[572] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, 3.

[573] Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 236.

and to learn. I have found resonance with what Hiller writes about "the role that relationships play in sparking, provoking, and sustaining processes of decolonizing settler consciousness."[574] Like her research participants, I have found that it is my personal relationships with Indigenous neighbours, friends, and teachers that not only provoke, but reinforce and renew "a deep sense of responsibility and accountability, demanding a cyclical return to analyze and dismantle colonizing structures."[575] My living relationships both challenge and support me on my decolonizing journey. As Hiller puts it, relationships "serve as the trigger and site of unsettling moments of learning, and at times provide the conditions that sustain the process of unsettlement." It is time that we decide to move out of our comfort zones and put ourselves, our bodies, our privileges on the line in solidarity with Indigenous peoples who are defending the sacred. Hiller again illustrates the importance of direct engagement across difference in our relationships for transforming settler consciousness when she writes:

> In their most potent forms, these glimpses represent startlingly visceral encounters that involve direct engagements with Indigenous people themselves, moments in which these non-Indigenous actors are called to account for who they are and how they emplace themselves: in relation to the Treaties; in relation to First Peoples, their territories and jurisdictions; in relation to on-going histories of colonization and resistance; and in relation to the land itself.[576]

On my journey, I have been learning how important it is to my relationships that I show up with my whole self, that I continue to do my own hard heart work to heal my wounds of trauma and disconnection and to uncover and work to believe in my own gifts so that I might offer them for the good of all. Reminding me of this, Kimmerer shares the teachings of the three sisters: "The most important thing each of us can know is our unique gift and how to use it in the world. Individuality is cherished and nurtured, because, in order for the whole to flourish, each of us has to be strong in who we are and carry our gifts with conviction so they can be shared with others."[577] Being strong in who I am is certainly an ongoing process of renewal, much like our relationships

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[574] Hiller, "Tracing the Spirals," 14.

[575] Hiller, 13.

[576] Hiller, 8.

[577] Kimmerer, 134.

with each other and with the earth require ongoing renewal and tending. My embodied spiritual practice helps me to continually renew this personal strength. Strength in relationships means embodying an *empowering humility*. Glennon Doyle, in her book *Untamed* writes that "the word humility derives from the Latin word humilitas, which means 'of the earth.' To be humble is to be grounded in knowing who you are-to grow, to reach, to fully bloom as high and strong and grand as you were created to."[578] This knowing who I am - of the earth - is informed by learning my own colonization story and by remembering my original instructions, which teach me of how I am related to all other beings in creation. This humility allows me to grow, and reminds me of how it is my responsibility to ensure that everyone else has this same opportunity.

Indigenous Sovereignty as the ground of my Belonging

As settlers, regardless of how or why we came to live here, we live on Indigenous lands, and therefore, we live in Indigenous sovereignty. As Nicoll eloquently puts it, the ground of Indigenous sovereignty is the place where [we all] come into relationship; She writes, "rather than centering on Aboriginal problems or privileges, Indigenous sovereignty re-presents patriarchal white sovereignty - as well as secondary investments that non-white immigrants may have in it - as the problem."[579] Indigenous sovereignty is the ground of our belonging. It is the foundation on which we stand. Indigenous land is the land beneath our feet. As a settler, if I hope to ever belong here in any ethical or meaningful way, this is where I need to start – in a profound acknowledgement and understanding of this truth, as well as an ongoing commitment to enact it. How I came to be here, how each of us came to be here is complex. But the truth of Indigenous sovereignty is quite simple: Canada is on Indigenous land. The Canadian state was formed, and continues to draw its wealth and power from stolen Indigenous lands. Canada's assertion of its sovereignty and jurisdiction here is essentially illegal; it has

[578] Glennon Doyle, *Untamed*, (New York: The Dial Press, 2020).

[579] Nicoll, "Are you calling me a racist?," 2004.

no legal ground, other than the laws that it has created for itself[580] - laws which contradict the actual legal basis we do have for being on this land: our original treaties with Indigenous Nations.

Our Nation to Nation treaties are the basis for settlers being permitted to share these Indigenous lands, and yet, as people bound by these treaty agreements, settlers are by and large either unaware that they exist, or at a loss to articulate exactly what they require of us. 'Knowing our treaties', as well as understanding the historical and contemporary context of these treaties is a critical piece for settler decolonization, as both illuminate the fact of Indigenous sovereignty, not as something granted by a benevolent Canadian state, but as the very ground on which we have built our lives. Our treaties, and importantly, Indigenous theorizations of these treaties, spell out this relationship between Indigenous Peoples and settler Canadians - how our relationship was supposed to be, and what it still could be, if decolonization is truly embraced and enacted, not as a metaphor, but as a living framework with which to break from our violent, colonial condition.

Shared Waters

Chief Irving Powless Jr., an Onondaga Elder, reminds us all of the shared and sacred foundation of our lives here in this place as expressed in the Two Row Wampum: "Two boats on the same river, is an agreement to live side by side. But we're both on the same river. We need the same water. We're going to the same place. This belt reminds us that our futures are linked. The only way we have is forward, into the future, together."[581] Gidigaa Migizi Elder Doug Williams relates that, "it was said by our Nishnaabeg forefathers that there will come a day when life will hang by a spider web – that human beings will come close to total and complete death if the Original Instructions are not followed."[582] *This time is upon us now*. "The Original Instructions separate

[580] Lowman and Barker, *Settler: Identity*, 2015.

[581] Kimmerer, "The Rights of the Land," 2008.

[582] Gidigaa Migizi (Doug Williams), *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This Is Our Territory*, (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2018), 98.

the life path into two parts: that which promotes life and that which ends in destruction."[583] *It is time we remember*. *And recognize that the Indigenous nations of Turtle Island are the ones who have never forgotten*.

The Elder that Doug Williams speaks to in his story *Wiigwamin* relates this simple guiding principle that is at the heart of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg way of knowing: "everything on earth is connected. We must constantly ask whether anything, like this progress you mention fits into the Original Instructions. The question in the modern context should be whether the direction we are embarking on is for, or against nature."[584]

As settlers here in this place, the systems we are a part of have chosen to go against nature. We may not realize that this is what we have chosen, or we might be the unwitting inheritors of those who chose for us. Regardless, we are being called, urgently, to *make a new choice now*. The process of enacting this new choice, of choosing a commitment to remember and to embody our original instructions, our human heart knowledge that all peoples of earth once knew[585] will be a profound process of healing. In this healing, we are tasked with rebuilding the trust that has been devastated within the trilogy of our relationships. We need to be forgiven. And we need to forgive ourselves. We need to look our devastation and culpability square in the face, respecting the pain and anger that is inherent in this healing process on all sides of the colonial divide, while also finding spaces with which to give ourselves permission to want, be, and do better – to heal. To aid us, we have so many helpers, we have so many reasons to hope when we engage. In one of our conversations, Elder Dorothy Taylor shared with me the power and beauty of the Nishnaabeg odemin (strawberry) ceremonies – ceremonies of forgiveness. Like Elder Shirley Williams and Liz Osawamick have also taught me, Dorothy tells me how odemin (the heart berry) helps our hearts to heal, to bring about forgiveness, an appreciation of the sweetness of life, and of self-respect. Whereas I cannot and do not wish to appropriate this sacred Nishnaabeg ceremony meant for Nishaabeg people, the perennial wisdom within it resonates with the healing work I myself have to do within my own family – what we as a society must do in some respect or another, as well. Dorothy said:

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[583] Gidigaa Migizi, 100.

[584] Gidigaa Migizi, 101.

[585] Akwesane Notes. Basic call to Consciousness. Summertown, Tenn.: Native Voices, 2005.

> *The teaching of the strawberry is about - abwe-endemowin. Is forgiveness. The teaching of forgiveness. Abwe-endemowin. So, it's the forgiveness that we have to forgive those who have wronged us and forgive ourselves for allowing it to happen. And forgive our parents and our grandparents for having not protected the children and succumbing to alcoholism and addiction. You know, through forgiveness we can gain the strength to face tomorrow for it to be a stronger time. And people will listen to us now, because of that forgiveness. And sometimes that hurt is so deep and so profound, how can you just say, ok, I forgive you. That's why we have that strawberry ceremony. And we have to do that through ceremony and through spiritual courage, connection to the land, heart teachings. So that's what to me is Truth and Reconciliation is that forgiveness primarily and that gratitude.*

And as Kimmerer writes:

> The earth is generous with us — and forgiving. We can be the same with each other. Becoming indigenous to place also means embracing its story, because the restoration of the land and the healing of our relationship mirror one another. Coming to terms with injustice is an act of liberation. By making the past visible, we can then see our way forward.[586]

The liberation that is waiting on the other side of coming to terms with the injustices, disconnection, and devastation caused by the western/settler paradigm of consciousness, is pointing down a path of love. This path is not necessarily easy, and it makes no guarantees, and yet it is the only choice that might lead away from destruction and towards Life.

With this work, I often struggle with straddling the urgency and the alchemy of transforming settler consciousness. I fear this thesis may not find any immediate use for the great work of our time. And yet, perhaps I am playing the long game; laying the breadcrumbs down the path of enchantment for us to remember ourselves home. As Blackie has shared with me, transforming consciousness, touching hearts, requires patience.[587] The hard heart work that we are called now to do is one of profoundly transforming our own sense of identity, belonging, and home and to remember a way of relating in the trilogy of our relationships that honours, celebrates, and protects all of Life. Our ancestors and their stories are waiting to help us. As Toko-pa Turner writes about her own search for healing and personal journey for belonging:

> And in my ancestral story, I found a universal one: the great terror of otherness, which is so malignant in our world that it drives us to tribalism, xenophobia, nationalism, and war. As I was taken into these

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[586] Kimmerer, "The Rights of the Land,' 2008.

[587] Sharon Blackie, personal communication.

> broadening levels of understanding, I could see how my story was a microcosmic expression of the millions of displaced people in the world. Unaware of our unmetabolized pain, our ancestral grief, we live split-off from the vulnerability which threatens to awaken it. The anesthetised heart is capable of great cruelty, war, and the objectification of others including, and especially the natural world. […] In kissing our own beautiful idiot lives, I believe we are contributing to the larger presence we need to cross the threshold of our collective initiation. We are being called to stop turning away from ugliness, to witness the shattering, so that we can consciously participate in the reconstitution of a new world. It's only in remembering our wounded, outcast selves that we can belong our world back together.[588]

If anything else, I pray for this breaking open of ourselves of which Turner speaks. I pray that we allow ourselves to stop turning away from the ugliness, the shame, and the terrible, terrible pain, both the pain that we ourselves may be in, as well as the pain that we are causing for others and this beautiful, precious earth. When we allow our denial to melt, the real work can at last begin. May we be willing to witness the shattering and to choose the path of Love, of Love-In-Action, in service to *all* Life, for generations to come.

[588] Toko-pa Turner, *Belonging: Remembering Ourselves Home*, (Salt Spring Island, BC: Her Own Room Press, 2017), 244.

“*We each hold a pen. Let us co-author a story of how humanity fell in love with itself and its Mother earth once again.”*[589]

[589] June, “Reclaiming Our Indigenous European Roots,” 2018.

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