Decolonizing Narratives: Dichotomy Dance to Indigenous Wholism

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Abstract: This is my personal and professional decolonizing narrative while navigating the duality of my blended Indigenous and European heritage. The process of resisting marginality within colonial thought while reclaiming my Cree identity has been a challenging dichotomy dance. A transformation occurred through decolonization and rediscovering the meaning of difference, inclusion, and equality in Creation. I have changed my narrative by stepping out of colonial thought and into indigeneity, wholism, and Indigegogy. By walking with my indigeneity, I have come to understand who I am in Creation and in relation to my kinships. The purpose of this paper is to take the reader through a chronological journey of decolonization that touches on (1) marginalization of colonial thought; (2) Indigenous wholism; (3) Indigegogy as a formal educational process; and (4) embracing kinships.

***Keywords*:** Indigenous, social work, Indigegogy, decolonization, kinship

Locating My Indigeneity

I identify as a Two Spirit Indigenous woman who is mixed-race with Plains Cree and European ancestry. I am a member of the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation. My indigeneity is grounded within wâhkôhtowin (kinships) and nêhiyawi-itâpisiniwin (my Cree worldview; McLeod, 2007).

In this reflection paper, I honour Indigenous scholars and knowledge carriers from various nations who have contributed to my understanding and worldview. I am not creating a pan-Indigenous perspective; I am standing in my Cree identity while sharing various Indigenous perspectives who have informed my understanding along my learning journey. I am relationally accountable to those who have walked before me and I honour them by lifting up their name, nation, and knowledge.

Cree scholars Stan and Peggy Wilson (1998) from Opaskwayak Cree Nation discuss relational accountability in terms of All Our Relations by sharing that:

> Indigenous peoples who follow traditional ways seem to provide the clearest glimpse into the depth of this accountability. In ceremony and in prayer they honor and give homage to all our relations. In various ways this term is used in most Indigenous cultures as a way of expressing one's place in the universe … The [Cree] language thus provides a structure for a world view in which the individual is related to all living organisms. In addition to being related in a kinship manner to all living organisms, there is the added dimension of respect for and taking care of "all our relations." (p. 157)

The interrelatedness of all life—including humans, animals, plants, and minerals—is taught in many Indigenous cultures. Anishinaabe scholar Gus Hill from Obadjiwaan (Batchawana) First Nation (personal communication, 2021) told me that the water I drink from Mother Earth has

spirit that has the same spirit as the water that my ancestors once drank. The water that flowed through my ancestor's veins is the same water and spirit that I experience and that informs me. All Indigenous nations and ancestral relations are connected through water and land. Both water and land exist in our blood. To honour my ancestors is to apply this knowledge in a way that will allow me to be a good ancestor. Giving thanks, honouring, and offering my respect to All My Relations is being relationally accountable to my ancestors (Hill, personal communication, 2021).

In this article, I will take the reader through decolonizing colonial thought by stepping into indigeneity, wholism, Indigegogy, and kinships. I reflect on Indigenous teachings about water, spirit animals, wholism, kinships, and Creation. This paper is about transformation and not the specific teachings themselves. For further reading on these teachings, I encourage the reader to explore the work of Indigenous scholars, such as Raven Sinclair, Kathy Absolon, Michael Hart, Stan Wilson, Peggy Wilson, Shawn Wilson, Gus Hill, Banakonda Kennedy-Kish (Bell), Leanne Simpson, Neal McLeod, Freda Ahenakew, Lori Hill, and Blair Stonechild. These are the academic Elders that have paved the way for me to engage in the transformation I share in this paper.

Introduction

Decolonization is a process that has occurred in my life through personal reflection; walking with wholism (Absolon, 2010, 2016; Hart, 1996; Hill, 2014, 2016, 2021; Nabigon, 2006); engaging Indigegogy (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014); and embracing kinships (McLeod, 2007). The dichotomy dance is a representation of my experience with colonial thought. Walking my path between my two cultures has been challenging due to historical, political, and sociocultural differences. The contrast in the values and intentions between my Cree and European ancestors has shaped the landscape of my socialization. I have found my identity within white colonial society to be alienating, oppressive, and stereotypical. By contrast, my identity within Indigenous culture has been inviting, inclusive, and empowering. The dichotomy continued from my youth into my professional experiences as an adult with Land Acknowledgements.

I have made a conscious decision to step out of the colonial thought and into wholism and Indigegogy. Wholism (later defined in section "Walking with Wholism") on the level of self (spirit, heart, body, and mind) has provided me with direction and meaning that is rooted within my Indigenous worldview. Indigegogy has informed my understanding of Indigenous knowing, doing, being, and seeing as pedagogy. Wholistic evaluations within Indigegogy have sparked insights through my spirit, nature, intellect, and character. Practicing self-reflexivity has deepened my understanding of my roles and responsibilities as a helper. I continue to follow the path of my heart, ancestors, Elders, and other Indigenous scholars who have strived to enhance wholistic wellness for the benefit of All of Creation. By embracing my kinships, I have come to understand the interrelatedness of All My Relations (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017). I continue to grow and center Indigenous knowledge, and wholistic practices, to uplift Indigenous wholistic wellness. My wholistic worldview continues to teach me to appreciate and respect the diversity within all walks of life (see Figure 1, p. 20). Transformation occurred through experiencing the liberation of engaging in wholistic Indigenous pedagogy and kinships.

Dichotomy Dance

The dichotomy dance is the art of stepping back from the colonial dichotomy and stepping into the dance of indigeneity. This is a decolonizing dance of embracing indigenization while resisting Eurocentric worldviews, contexts, or constructs. The dichotomy dance is a movement towards Indigenous resurgence and a letting go of colonialism. This is a cultural healing journey due to the detrimental impacts of colonial systems of marginalization, domination, and discrimination. Reconnecting to indigeneity is a healing process from colonial harms. The historical and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and European people is complex. Understanding the waters between Indigenous and colonial worldviews and socialization has been a cultural healing journey for me. I envision my cultural healing journey as moving through the dichotomy dance towards wholistically and wholly being grounded in who I am as an Indigenous person.

In my youth, I learned to strategically position my social location to adapt to the expectations and paradigms of others. My experience has been a dichotomy dance through my Cree and European heritage. As a young person, I protected my Cree identity by insulating myself from dominant white culture. I learned to minimize my culture with family members who distanced themselves from their Cree heritage due to their internalized racism. I learned Cree culture with family members who honoured our traditional ways. The Caucasian side of my family politely ignored my Cree heritage. Learning to dance within the dichotomy of my two cultures has been difficult.

DiAngelo (2018) describes white culture as defensive by using reactionary justifications to maintain the acquired privilege of social status:

> When we try to talk openly and honestly about race, white fragility quickly emerges as we are so often met with silence, defensiveness, argumentation, certitude, and other forms of pushback. These are not natural responses; they are social forces that prevent us from attaining the racial knowledge we need to engage more productively, and they function powerfully to hold the racial hierarchy in place. (p. 8)

The racial hierarchy is held in place by social constructionism; the social construct of having to choose a side is deliberately designed by white supremacy (Guess, 2006). The aim is to divide races through the dominant narrative of us versus them; I try to remember that people tend to believe, and act on, the validity of their worldviews and subjectivity. This can create a defensive posture that inhibits the ability to learn about, and be open to, alternate worldviews. The dichotomization of self-proclaimed superiority, and implied inferiority of others, is a detrimental social construct, especially for Indigenous people.

As an adult, I desperately sought to change the social location of my birth by pursuing higher education. This led me to study to achieve a Bachelor of Arts in Economics. In my elective psychology and social science courses, I realized that my experience and values were not represented in the colonial curriculum, content, or pedagogy.

A pivotal movement occurred one day while studying for an economics midterm in the library. I stumbled upon a book that described Two Spirit people. I don't remember what the book said; however, I do remember how I felt. For the first time, I could see myself depicted on the pages and I felt calm, clear, and understood. Until this point, I had not come across any guidance or representation in the literature of what it meant to be Two Spirit. My desire to further understand who I am grew, until I met with an Anishinaabe healer who identified as Two Spirit. She shared with me teachings and helped me to understand the gift of being Two Spirit. This was foreign to me because within colonial thought, I was taught that being Two Spirit was wrong. In the Indigenous worldview to be Two Spirit is a sacred honour with specific roles and responsibilities that can vary depending on the nation or region. I now understand that I walk with a male and female essence that provides me with an ability to understand and unite both sides. My connection to my spirit and self-awareness allows me to take up my place in Creation with my gifts and purpose. Being Two Spirit has helped me realize the significance of walking with diversity and appreciating the beauty of who I am in Creation. This pivotal period in my life led me away from the study of economics. I completed my degree and decided to give up capitalism and work for a social service organization.

I began working within an Indigenous-led organization that provided social support services to Indigenous people. I found working with Indigenous people to be fulfilling, and it provided me with a sense of belonging and purpose. I continued reconnecting to my traditional ways through Elders, knowledge keepers, and healers, who taught me how to be a good helper. I decided to pursue higher education with the intention of becoming an Indigenous wholistic practitioner.

During my Master of Social Work in the Indigenous Field of Study program at Wilfrid Laurier University, I began to further identify my experience in the stories shared by Indigenous academics. Through engaging Indigegogy (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014), I participated in sharing circles with professors, an Elder, Indigenous students, and non-Indigenous students. Some of my colleagues also identified as Two Spirit. Slowly, I began to reframe my conception of difference. I learned to decolonize by shifting my perspective of difference as interrelated, rather than dichotomous. Searching, with kindness, for unity between two sides allows for connections to be found as we are all equally a part of the human race (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20). Unity will never be created through the colonial quest for assimilation of Indigenous people or any people. Imposing sameness of one's own values and beliefs onto others is a human rights violation. The effacement of assimilation does not "involve recognition of belonging or being full members of Canadian Society" (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017, p. 62). Unity does not include assimilation or sameness; unity is appreciating and uplifting uniqueness, diversity, and respecting all individuals' and populations' autonomy and sovereignty.

Learning to cope and survive within the control of the dominant white culture has taught me the importance of respecting and validating alternative narratives. According to Anishinaabe scholar Kathy Absolon (2016) from Flying Post First Nation, inclusion is inviting voices to share perspectives openly, which is empowering and promotes healing:

> When I was invited to submit an article for this special edition I initially thought maybe they invited the wrong person. Who me? I realized this initial response is an impact of

> being excluded and feeling alienated throughout my life … Now what? Inclusion begins with voice in Creation experiencing and being. I know I belong. Inclusion simply begins with an invitation. (p. 44)

Kathy Absolon graciously shares her experience of exclusion that validates my personal and professional experience. Indigenous practitioners demonstrating strength through kind, honest sharing is inspiring (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017). Indigenous people who have been oppressed, marginalized, and reviled due to systemic racism are demonstrating resilience, and resurgence, by sharing stories, knowledge, and learning with one another.

The history of Canada is dominated and perpetuated by colonial stories and culture that has not included an Indigenous perspective. Contemporary Canadian education still does not include curriculum on Indigenous experiences of the Sixties Scoop; the Millennial Scoop (Sinclair, 2007); Residential Schools; and the loss of land, language, and cultural identity (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] of Canada, 2015). The story has only been partially told, and the curriculum in all educational institutions requires immediate revision to honour and include the truth from an Indigenous perspective (TRC of Canada, 2015).

As an Indigenous social work practitioner, speaking the truth from my heart and honouring my ancestors is a part of both my culture and wholistic practice. "As Elder Jim Dumont explained at the Traditional Knowledge Keepers Forum in June 2014, 'in Ojibwe thinking, to speak the truth is to actually speak from the heart'" (TRC of Canada, 2015, p. 13). As a social worker, I need to be vulnerable and critically reflect upon both historical and contemporary practices. In the words of George Santayana (1905), "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 284).

Dichotomy Dance & Land Acknowledgements

The dichotomy dance has played a role in a myriad of ways in my professional life. More specifically, I would like to share my experience with Land Acknowledgments. While working in an Indigenous-led social services organization, I engaged with many executive directors, social workers, and coordinators from colonial organizations inquiring about Land Acknowledgements. Some asked if an Indigenous person from the organization would like to perform a Land Acknowledgement and others inquired about information on how they could go about performing a Land Acknowledgement. I felt conflicted about what to tell them, because rarely would Indigenous staff want to perform a Land Acknowledgement or take the call. Frequently, the inquiries were referred to a university website that provided a description of the territories named, and to recognize the original Indigenous people whose lands were invaded and stolen by Europeans.

I would like to share, in a kind, honest, and respectful way, why Indigenous people tend to not feel comfortable performing Land Acknowledgements. Land Acknowledgements can be uncomfortable for Indigenous people who experienced tremendous trauma, grief, and loss when their lands were stolen to form Canada. As I watch Land Acknowledgements occur, I often reflect upon how I would feel if individuals dispossessed my parents' home and then years later

their relatives stood on the porch and stated that this was once my family's home. According to Blackstock (2009):

> It is easier to believe some other society is perpetrating human rights abuses than to believe that your own country and society is—because that frames the accountability on a more personal level to do something or own the responsibility of remaining silent and still. (p. 34)

Social workers are ethically obligated to pursue social justice, so it is important to critically reflect on who Land Acknowledgements are truly serving. Are the acknowledgements a sign of respect for Indigenous people, or do they help colonial society decrease their guilt and grief about the trauma inflicted on Indigenous people to perpetuate white colonial privilege? Land Acknowledgements are for colonial society to process their guilt and grief of the harms done. Asking Indigenous people to do a Land Acknowledgement is avoidance of self-reflexive practice.

Indigenous people acknowledge the land in a different way. I acknowledge the land by offering tobacco and giving thanks to the spirit of Mother Earth. By laying down my tobacco, I am nurturing a reciprocal relationship. Mother Earth provides me with my source of life and ancestral intelligence. The respect my Indigenous ancestors showed Mother Earth exists in the wholistic health and beauty of Creation. By honoring and respecting the balance between myself and my kinships, I am maintaining balance in my relationships. All aspects of Creation are my relatives. Nurturing my kinships, as Mother Earth has nurtured me, has brought about my sense of belonging and desire to live a good life (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2018). The sacred connections I experience with Mother Earth, Father Sky, Grandfather Sun, and Grandmother Moon are timeless. What is sacred can never truly be quantified, only qualified within the Great Mystery of the heart. Elders have shared with me that "the Creator has hidden the answers in the last place you will look, your heart" and "the longest journey you will ever take is from your head to your heart." What is sacred is connected to the wholistic aspects of self: spirit, heart, body, and the mind.

From a colonial worldview, a Land Acknowledgment is often treated as a politically correct checkbox that demonstrates an acknowledgement of unceded Indigenous territories. The concept of land ownership is rooted in a colonial paternalistic and capitalistic worldview. An honest Land Acknowledgement would involve giving land back to Indigenous people. The neoliberal philosophy of extraction and exploitation does not value the Indigenous wholistic approach of relationality and cooperation. Restoring balance between colonial and Indigenous relationships requires a wholistic paradigm of inclusion and integrity. The detrimental impact of colonization on Indigenous people has caused me to experience the dichotomy dance. My work is to step back from the colonial dichotomy and step into the empowering dance of being in a meaningful, wholistic, and reciprocal relationship with myself, Mother Earth, and All My Relations.

Walking with Wholism

According to Gus Hill (2021), a widely used illustration of wholism is represented through the Medicine Wheel (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20). The Medicine Wheel is an Indigenous construct that guides understanding of who we are and where we are going (Absolon, 2010, 2016; Hill, 2014, 2016, 2021; Nabigon, 2006). The Medicine Wheel is a means of sharing knowledge and concepts that align with the Indigenous worldview. The Four Directions hold meaning and understanding to assist with self-exploration and self-reflection (please refer to "Engaging Indigegogy"). The cycle of life teachings described by Nabigon (2006) helps us understand that we begin as a baby in the East, youth in the South, adult in the West, and Elder in the North. At the end of our final season of life as Elders, we again enter the spirit world. As Nabigon (2006) stated, "The spiritual interpretation of the native worldview is divided into the Four Sacred Directions. These Directions are used to search for harmony and peace from within" (p. 5). Understanding the meaning of the Four Directions, East, South, West, and North, has helped me become grounded within myself while in relationship with others (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20).

The wholistic approach is based on the understanding that all aspects of the self (spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental) need to be balanced and healthy to maintain wholistic wellness (Hart, 1996; Hill, 2016). Indigenous scholars are striving to uplift Indigenous voices that declare the importance of wholism and traditional healing practices. Some Indigenous knowledge has been lost as planned by colonial policies of cultural genocide. Indigenous resurgence is Indigenous people reclaiming our heritage by supporting one another through cultural continuity and a rekindling of traditional teachings. The Indigenous worldview focuses on the wholistic wellness of all future generations.

As I walk along my cultural healing journey, I continually engage in a relationship with the Four Directions of Mother Earth (East, South, West, and North) and four aspects of myself. My journey of continuing to reach for my Indigeneity led me towards Indigenized higher education where I learned to engage Indigegogy.

Engaging Indigegogy

The term *Indigegogy* was coined by Cree Elder Stan Wilson and centers Indigenous ways of seeing, being, knowing, and doing within a formal educational process (Wilfrid Laurier University, n.d.). Indigegogy is a placeholder word that describes Indigenous wholistic teaching and learning approaches until a word can be found in a traditional Indigenous language that reflects a collective cultural understanding (Absolon & Dias, 2020; Wilson & Schellhammer, 2021). According to Wilson and Schellhammer (2021), a Cree word for Indigegogy is Kiskinohamatowin:

> [This] means "teaching and learning from each other." It is implied in that concept that not "the teacher" is the center dishing out knowledge. The concept is interactive, each participant is able to share knowledge and initiate discussion rather than only the teacher having and disseminating knowledge. (p. 50)

I experientially learned Indigegogy in circle with Gus Hill at Wilfrid Laurier University in the Master of Social Work program in the Indigenous Field of Study. An aspect of Indigegogy that I internalized was wholistic evaluation. I learned to reflect on my spirit, nature, intellect, and character as a means of reflexive practice. As wholism is interrelated with Indigenous pedagogy, according to Hill and Wilkinson (2014), "one of the goals of Indigegogy is to teach students how to just be at peace, be calm, be quiet in the heart and the mind, and be open and receptive" (p. 187). Meaning from observing the natural world has brought depth to my inner and relational awareness that has strengthened and shaped my understanding of professional practice. I will use my journey with my spirit helper, the buffalo, and my relationship with water to demonstrate my engagement with wholistic evaluation.

Spirit

Stepping into Indigegogy has helped me to understand how spirit can create vision and purpose for my wholistic practice (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). My spirit helper, the buffalo, assists me to reflect on my relationship with Creation. As my family is Plains Cree (Nehiyawak), the buffalo has been my ancestors' source of survival for thousands of years pre-colonization. I have been taught by Elders that the buffalo is sacred and selfless as they give every part of themselves to help our people and to nourish spirits, hearts, bodies, and minds. When my ancestors used the buffalo, no part would go unused; the buffalo giving its life to feed, clothe, and sustain life was deeply respected as every part of the buffalo had a purpose. Similarly, to connect to identity, sense of self, and belonging, an Indigenous person must sacrifice personal gain by giving all that one is able and gaining only the essentials (Hill, 2021). The buffalo teaches me that being a helper means the spirit of giving is receiving without having expectations of service users.

By entering the space of my heart, I am able to learn from my spirit helper and find compassion beyond what I thought possible. My helper guides me to find the courage to be a compassionate helper in the presence of fear and hardship. An Elder once shared with me that the buffalo will plant their feet in a snowstorm and shift their shoulder into the wind. The buffalo teaches perseverance as they stand strong and shoulder the difficulties individually and collectively as a herd. The buffalo teaches me how to be a good helper through reciprocity, perseverance, and unity. Being present with Creation and spirit reminds me that I am always in community when in Creation and with myself; this brings peace and keeps me grounded as a helper.

Nature

My nature is connected to how I affect, and am affected, by those around me. This can be people, plants, animals, or any element of Creation. Hill and Wilkinson (2014) stated, "We have a general [effect] on others and our involvement in their lives affects the nature of their lives—an [effect] which we hope to be both positive and nurturing" (p. 186). In the natural world, water extends beyond myself to my service users, colleagues, and All of Creation; I need to acknowledge how I affect those I interact with daily as a helper. Relational accountability is described by Wilson (2001) as "answering to all your relations … fulfilling your relationships with the world around you" (p. 177). I fulfill my relationship with Creation by being a helper who listens to others to be aware of how my actions and behaviours have impacted them. A

teacher once shared with me a sentiment commonly attributed to Maya Angelou that people will not necessarily remember the words I say, but they will remember how I made them feel. It is important that I am aware of what I am sharing within a systemic, historical, and contemporary context in my practice. Education is vital in not perpetuating further harm by unknowingly offending, triggering, or marginalizing service users, colleagues, and community members. The specific needs and cultural worldviews can vary from one Indigenous nation to another. Relational accountability is maintaining relationships with respect, curiosity, and open-mindedness to ask others about their needs, rather than assuming (Wilson, 2001; Wilson & Wilson, 1998).

Intellect

My intellect rationalizes and articulates the presence and meaning of spirit (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). My spirit is expressed through my values, beliefs, and the meaning I derive through my mind. Creation can be meaningful or meaningless, depending on the choice of the individual and the collective. I choose to make meaning from the world around me through the essence of my spirit. This helps me to be a helper as I assist others to understand traditional knowledge, wisdom, and the meaning that has been shared with me.

The intellect is the process by which Indigenous knowledge has been passed down for generations for thousands of years through the oral tradition. Indigenous communities benefit from this traditional process as younger generations have relied on their culture and community for positive socialization. As Gus Hill has told me, not sharing sacred knowledge and wholistic practices that we carry within our bundles may result in illness (personal communication, 2021). Succeeding generations will only be able to learn if those before them are able and willing to share. Listening to the teachings of one Elder is listening to the collective voices of the many Elders who helped shape their conceptual understanding of what constitutes Indigenous knowing, doing, and being (McLeod, 2007).

Indigenous knowledge has been passed down through the oral tradition, as wisdom is passed down through the relational tradition. Through Indigegogy, I have learned how my role as a helper can assist others to form a relationship with water and Creation. In a personal communication in 2021, Anishinaabe Elder Banakonda Kennedy-Kish (Bell) shared with me that water carries the wisdom and the collective memory of our ancestors. She further explained that in a Water Ceremony, the water can help us remember the sacred teachings of our ancestors. I now carry the understanding that the wisdom of our ancestors is not lost. Our ancestral wisdom has been recorded within the memory of water; being in tune with water is being in contact with the ancestral wisdom within my inner and outer nature. The water is a healer, helper, and Ceremony. My ancestors' cultural identity and connection to the land and All of Creation is remembered within the water. The water I drink today may very well be the same water my ancestors drank thousands of years ago (Kennedy-Kish (Bell), personal communication, 2021).

Character

When considering water as a life-giver and memory, I reflect on my character and impact on Creation. My character is my outer representation of myself; it is the integrity that I carry, or do not carry, through my spirit's physical essence (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). Each time I touch water my presence and spirit will be remembered. Gus Hill (personal communication, 2021) discussed that when an ancestor had stepped into a pond that their footprint forever changed the land and water. He further stated that each time we step in nature, it will never be the same again after our presence has been there. Our collective spirit, emotion, body, and mind is not separate from the water; it is interconnected and imprints upon all life.

Relational accountability is walking with integrity while interacting with every aspect of Creation. While I intentionally walk with the practice of relational accountability, I reflect on the quality of my character. My character is reliant on my self-care, balance, and the values I practice within the four aspects of myself. When my spirit, heart, body, and mind are working in alignment, I feel connected and whole. Balance and wholeness are a form of self-care; the more balanced I am within the four aspects of the self, the deeper the connection I feel to my nature and All of Creation. The greater connection I feel to the land and people, the greater motivation I feel to engage in transformative and community-based practice as a helper. Relational accountability is understanding that I am in an interdependent relationship with Creation. There is a giving and receiving, or an ebb and flow, in order to maintain this reciprocal relationship. Realizing that I am a part of a vast interconnected system of life increases my awareness and sense of responsibility. Each individual aspect of the system needs to be healthy for all to thrive and flourish.

By walking with Indigegogy, I have learned that Mother Earth provides a mirror for self-reflection that allows for deeper connection to the self. When I feel my feelings and observe the interconnection of land, water, sky, trees, birds, and an ecosystem at play, I experience a sense of inclusivity that is all-encompassing and does not comprehend separation. The beauty and wonder that resides in Creation is within each person and all of humanity. What raises us up into our humanity is realizing we are all in this together.

Embracing Kinships

Wâhkôhtowin is "a Cree word meaning kinship or the state of being related … a fundamental concept for understanding Indigenous culture and traditional beliefs" (Ermine, 2001, as cited in O'Reilly-Sanlon et al., 2004, p. 30). This includes relationships that may or may not be blood-related, as All of Creation is interrelated and follows laws in the natural world. Wâhkôhtowin is central to Cree natural law and teaches how to maintain positive and balanced relationships with all relations. Wâhkôhtowin teaches to respect nature by knowing we are a part of nature (Johnson, 2020; Stonechild, 2016). There is humility in knowing that in the sacred circle of life no individual is above or below anyone else because All of Creation has spirit and is equal in Creation (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20).

The sacredness of my relationship with the spirit of the land and all of life is strong and sacred. All of Creation is sacred through a wholistic worldview. Cree-Métis scholar Vanessa Ambtman-Smith (personal communication, 2022) shared Indigenous knowledge that was passed on to her through the oral tradition:

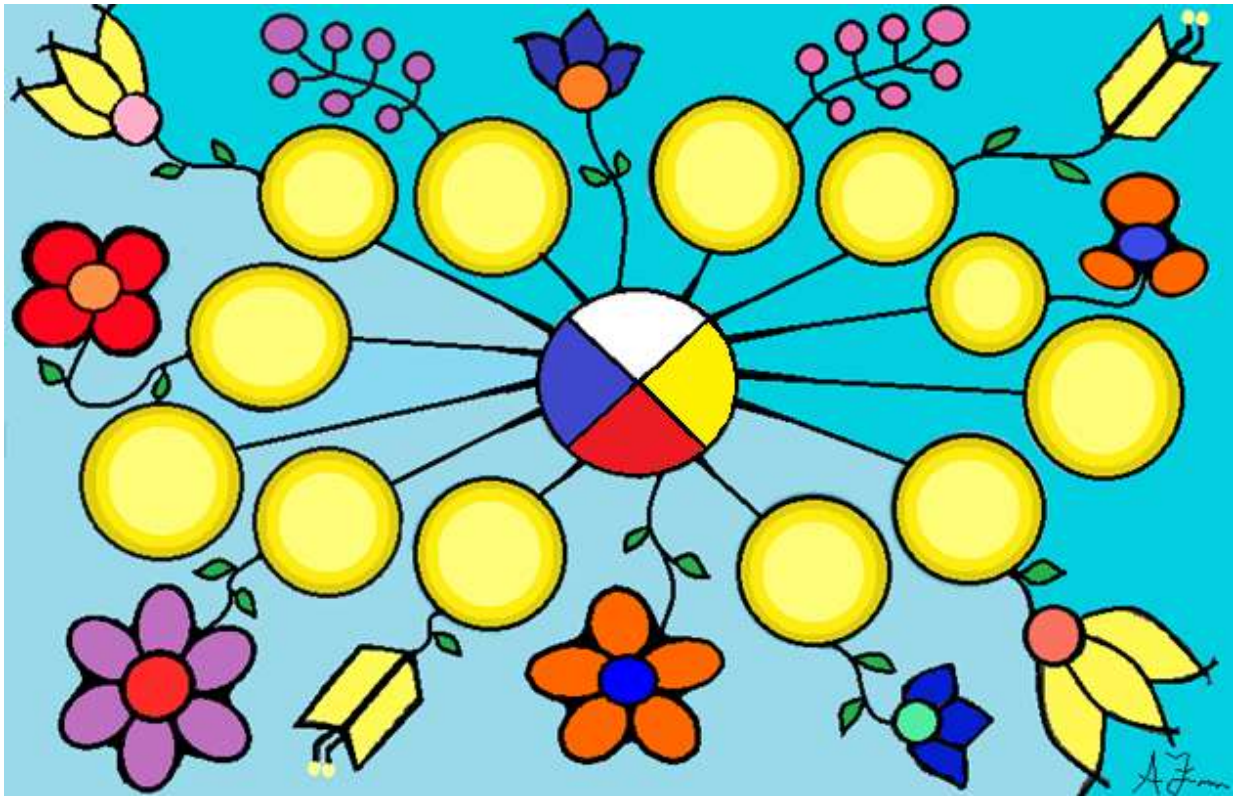
> When we stand on our land, under any condition—even in opposition of those that hold the "power"—we need to remember that it is we who stand in that power. Our connection to ancestral lands and territories is sacred and cannot be undone. When you acknowledge your place in this world you are reigniting that connection to ancient knowledge and wisdom embedded in relationships and kinships within your being, with family, community, the ancestors, the land, the cosmos, and All of Creation. Recognize and nurture this sacred power and stand your ground.

I have learned to embrace my place within Creation as all aspects of my being are in a reciprocal relationship with All My Relations (Figure 1, p. 20). By sharing and embracing my spirit, heart, body, and mind, I feel the power of belonging as my kinships are rooted in my identity and worldview. I am reclaiming my identity that resides within the ancestral knowledge and wisdom of both my inner and outer being. I feel balanced when connected to myself, friends, family, community, nation, and Creation. Connecting to my kinships and the land strengthens and revitalizes my connection to spirit.

Being in relationship with land and Creation teaches humanity how to be in good relations with one another. Creation consists of diversity and uniqueness all around us. Having respect and appreciation for diversity only brings prosperity and encouragement for life and spirit to express itself fully; Creation is a Web of Diversity (Figure 1, p. 20). How we choose to engage in relationships as human beings is interdependent with our collective values and intentions. If we choose to value autonomy and sovereignty collectively, we are collectively appreciating diversity. People expressing their individuality allows them to be the truth of who they are; this is liberation.

Figure 1

Creation is a Web of Diversity



My art piece in Figure 1, "Creation is a Web of Diversity," represents All My Relations standing together in a web of unity, harmony, and balance. In the Cree worldview there is humility in knowing who we are in Creation. Understanding indigeneity is connected to relationality and knowing that we are a "strand in the web of life" (Lee, 2012, para. 35) and in an interconnected relationship with one another. The medicine wheel in the center represents Asian (yellow), Indigenous (red), African (blue), and Caucasian (white), and each of the four quadrants are equivalent in size to denote that in Creation we are both unique and equal on individual and collective levels. The two shades of blue in the art piece's background signify balance and healing of the dichotomy, as we are all made up of water and the ability to shift our perceptions. Every human being has the ability to create change and transform. Creation is always in motion, and we are Creation. The circles surrounding the Medicine Wheel represent healing circles that are forming today in communities striving to reverse the harm done. The yellow healing circles are drawn to emulate the sun. The sun rises each morning in the Eastern Direction which represents new beginnings by bringing light and growth to All of Creation. The wavy vines and floral designs signify Indigenous resurgence, revitalization, and wellbeing. Indigenous people are reclaiming our ancestral knowledge and wisdom, and a movement of renewal is occurring. I enjoy being part of this movement and will continue to facilitate healing circles grounded in wholism and Indigenous knowledge. The wholistic approach is not the only way for people to heal; however, I do believe it holds significant value for those on a path of reclaiming their cultural identity and wholistic wellness.

Discussion

My experience of the dichotomy dance led me to wholism and Indigegogy that resulted in some recommendations for social work education. Through traditional teachings, I have received great appreciation and respect for my Two Spirit and mixed-raced identity. Being Two Spirit is honoured and revered, with purposeful roles and responsibilities in community. Being mixed-race is embraced as all ethnicities are equal in Creation (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20). Within the white supremacist construct of sexism and racism, I have experienced dichotomization within my sense of self. My wholistic transformation through my Indigenous culture and indigenized education has helped unify my identity. Experiences of marginalization and othering are very real for many people who enter colonial education. My positionality is unique to me; however, there are diverse positionalities, and each deserves a safe space to unfold, be expressed, be journeyed through, with support and full acknowledgement of the challenges that such journeying represents. Indigegogy has helped me to develop relational awareness through wholistic self-evaluation and relating to other Indigenous academics and colleagues. Wholistic practices have guided my understanding that I have always been whole within All My Relations, despite the hierarchical division of colonial social constructionism. This process is important for all practitioners in social work, regardless of their positionality. Such transformative journeys clear a path for authentic, relational, wellness-based engagement with service users. I have been able to experience transformation due to the safe spaces provided by my Indigenous community, Elders, Indigenous healers, knowledge keepers, Indigegogy, and the Indigenous Field of Study. I call for supportive spaces to be nurtured across schools of social work in Canada.

My transformative journey has sparked insights and recommendations for social work education on the value of wholism and Indigegogy. Non-Indigenous and Indigenous students can greatly benefit from understanding wholism and Indigegogy. Indigenized social work practice is not a central focus for all social workers; it is critical for non-Indigenous social work students to engage in a wholistic self-evaluation to develop the capacity to bear witness to other people's vulnerability and to appreciate diversity. A student acknowledging their vulnerability through wholistic self-reflexive practice, within safe spaces, with the wholistic support of faculty and staff, increases their capacity to provide wholistic support and empathy to service users. Training non-Indigenous social workers how to engage in a relationally accountable and ethical way that is about wellness and not surveillance or social control is crucial. The pedagogy of colonial social work does not reflect the socialization and worldview of Indigenous people, and with the increasing diversity of social work students, it is fair to say that colonial social work pedagogy is antiquated. The foundational knowledge of Indigegogy and wholism is often otherized or excluded from the curriculum. For Indigenous students, colonial social work education needs to decolonize to allow for the exploration of indigeneity and to build knowledgeable Indigenous social work practitioners. To step out of colonial dichotomy and into appreciating diversity requires safe spaces. I call for the field of social work to ask and answer the following question: In what ways can safe spaces be created to allow for transformation to occur within the academy? Social work needs to make safe spaces for people to explore positionality to ensure transformative processes can transpire. Values of love, non-judgment, open-mindedness, respect, and compassion need to be upheld for members of vulnerable populations to feel safe to engage in self-exploration and transformation. As social workers we

all have a responsibility to ensure safe spaces are available. Balancing the relations between Indigenous and colonial social work education must begin with respect, equality, and inclusivity.

Conclusion

My journey of decolonization has included the dichotomy dance, the dilemma of Land Acknowledgements, wholism, Indigegogy, and kinships. I have found a way to decolonize and overcome the challenges of experiencing the colonial construct of dichotomization. The dichotomy dance is a healing dance of stepping back from the colonial dichotomy and stepping into the dance of indigeneity. While walking with Indigegogy, I learned to center my indigeneity in higher education. I learned to appreciate and respect wholistic self-reflection and self-reflexivity in practice. By engaging in wholistic evaluation with my spirit, nature, intellect, and character, I have fostered a deeper self-awareness as a wholistic practitioner. As Indigenous scholars before me have demonstrated, the more that I can release oppression and stand within my identity, the more I will be able to show others how to do the same. Sharing wholism continuously balances and harmonizes the four aspects of myself. Embracing kinships has helped me to understand that I am in a reciprocal relation with All My Relations. The interrelatedness of all of life is the foundation of "Creation is a Web of Diversity" (Figure 1, p. 20). Understanding that as human beings we are a part of Creation is knowing the value of our humanity. The process of decolonization has had a profound impact on my well-being, identity, and, ultimately, my story.

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