LAND AS BODY

a collection of voices

Indigenous Womxn's Leadership, Landbased wellness and Embodied Governance

A Community Basket for shared reflections, discussions and learnings about relationship to Land, Body, Spirit and Cultural Leadership

2019/20

OPENING PRAYER

Your body is an extension of
your home-lands and home-waters

Your home-lands and
home-waters are sacred

You belong to the
Land and Waters

Your body is sacred

Your breath is sacred

Ayis Kihewini
Pimatisiwin

You are Sacred

table of contents

01 Opening Prayer
02 Table of Contents

04 **Intention: Tatawâw**
07 How to Use this Book
10 Acknowledgements

12 **Embodied Governance: Land-based Research**
12 Introduction
18 Abstract
21 Wâhkitowin- Research Relations and Accountability

32 **Learnings & Teachings**
32 1) Spirit and Culture
46 2) Creative Self-Becoming
50 3) Relational Accountability
56 4) Kitaskinow I pi Kiskinohomakoya

74 **Activities**
76 1) Mind
82 2) Body
88 3) Heart
92 4) Spirit

96 **Close the Circle**

TERMINOLOGY

The research project explicitly employs the spelling of womxn to include and acknowledge diverse intersections of race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation and embodiments of feminine identities within the research.

All research participants identify with this term and felt strongly that the use of this spelling was a positive tool for personal liberation and self-actualization beyond hetero-patriarchal norms imposed by the English language.

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To the knowledge keepers, leaders, co-researchers and kin who participated in this research. This belongs to you. Thank you for your time, trust, care and energy.

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INTENTION

Tatawâw, there is room for you here. You are welcome here. The Land welcomes you, the waters welcome you. Come sit, breathe, release what no longer serves you. Make room for Spirit. You are not separate from your belonging to place, memory and healing. You belong here. You belong to yourself. You belong to Great Spirit.

There is room for you here.

This Collection is dedicated to all self-identified Indigenous womxn* who embody governance in their own intimate, personal and brilliant ways. This is dedicated to all bodies who carry the weight of the Nation, the emotional labor of the community, and the visions of futures to come.

This is for the leaders who embody leadership at the kitchen table, in the kitchen, in the birth-room, through song, dance, ceremony and self-becoming. This is for those who protect the sacred, who dig up the medicines and who choose compassion, care and kindness.

This is for those who are lost, found, searching and becoming.
This is for you.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book represents a collection of learnings, teachings and shared findings from diverse Indigenous Womxn about themes of Land-Based wellness, personal healing and governance.

The purpose of this tool-kit is to support Indigenous community-led reflections regarding themes of: wellness, relationship to land/water, cultural responsibilities, everyday acts of leadership, personal governance, self-determination and spiritual belonging.

The first sections outline the research project, findings and methods. The second section identifies four pathways of governance, including: Spirit and Culture, Creative Self-Becoming, Relational Accountability and Kiskinohamâkoya. Sâkihito-maskihkiy î pî kiskinohamâkoya (Relationship to Land/Water). The final section offers diverse reflections and shared practices which you can take to your own communities to inspire collaborative work towards personal healing and collective wellness.

You are invited to explore diverse reflections, sections and activities outlined in this tool-kit in a way that feels authentic to you and your community.

This tool-kit is a product of shared teachings, knowledge and reflections from Indigenous womxn from ten different Nations across Turtle Island. May this Collection of Voices inspire and incite conversations, reflections and shared-creations in your own relations to Self, One another, Spirit and Land/Waters.

Hiy Hiy!
Erynne M. Gilpin
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To all knowledge carriers represented here in this collection

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Ashleigh Thompson
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Shelby Blackjack
Chantal Blackjack
Lianne Charlie
Rebecca Watts
Chastity
Emilee Gilpin

Hiy Hiy!

Tân'si Kiya, Manitoo Nootin Iskwew nitisiyikason. Li pas, kayate nitocheen. Niya Nehiyaw-Michif iskwew,

For Indigenous Communities, our languages are gifts from the Land and Waters. The sounds, frequencies and vibrations they carry are direct manifestations of the healing properties of the planet we call home. Kã wee ooma aski.

Extended from relationship to Land are social systems and governance protocols which encode all of the information that we need to live a good life. Miyo-Pimatisiwin.

However, colonial enterprise disrupts Indigenous governance practice across Canada and beyond. Social, political, health and economic systems around the world are out of balance.

It has been said only when the last tree has died, the last river poisoned and the last fish caught will they realize that they can not eat money. Ehe!

The wellness of our communities is can not be divorced from the Wellness of the Land and Waters.

Leadership from Indigenous womxn is necessary to restore balance amongst all relations. Tapwê!

In this research project entitled: **Land as Body: Indigenous Womxn's Leadership, Land-based Wellness and Embodied Governance,**

We examine the interconnectivity's between wellness practice and political leadership; and how these experiences are determined by relationship to the Land and Waters.

This research took place in three stages:

1) individual interviews on the Land
2) Two Community Research Circles
3) Translation of teachings and reflections into a written dissertation, visual film narrative and community tool kit.

This research employed Indigenous Research Methodologies grounded in principles of community ownership and authority, relational accountability and cultural protocol.

Participants identified four central themes which define how wellness and governance are interrelated:

They include:

1) Spirit and Culture (sense of personal balance mental, spiritual, physical and emotional bodies),

2) Creative self-becoming (self-actualization and purpose)

3) Relational Accountability (belonging and accountability to others)

4) Kitaskînaw î pî kis-kino-hamâkoya. (Relationship to and Knowledge from Land/Water).
These four teachings provide a pathway to transcend concepts of reconciliation but to transform relationship across socio-political, economic and even spiritual spheres - towards governance protocols which recognize all life in complex systems of inter-being and inter-becoming -

and situate Indigenous womxn's Embodied Governance as an emancipatory pathway towards healing relationship to self, to others, to Spirit and the Land;

Miyo-Wîchêtowin // All Our Relations

Ayis Kihewini Pimastisiwin // Your breath is the breath of Life

Para Chee Itaytahmahk // Let us be of One Mind

Hiy Hiy // Hiy Hiy

In the same ways that we enact governance on our homelands and Waters, we enact governance on the Lands and Waters of our own bodies. We are extensions of the Land and Waters. In this way, embodied governance is the felt personal experience of governance and leadership, as defined by each individual themselves. Governance for one person may be through spiritual ceremony, or beadwork. Governance for another may be through providing traditional and healthy foods for their family. Governance for another may be through dedicating time and energy to care for vulnerable people in their community. Each individual embodies governance practices in a unique way - and each embodiment is sacred. Every act of governance is significant. And the voices represented in this collection share the diverse ways that they enact governance through relationship to Self, Others, Spirit and Land/Waters.

Reflection:

"My father often tells me to remember to take off my shoes and walk on the Land. He says this is called grounding. He tells me that the energy from the Land flows into me and re-balances my body and heart." -Erynne Gilpin

Like our relatives the trees, we come from the Land and Waters. In this way, our bodies are extensions of our homelands and homewaters. The Land is Sacred and so is your body. The Water is sacred. So is your spirit.

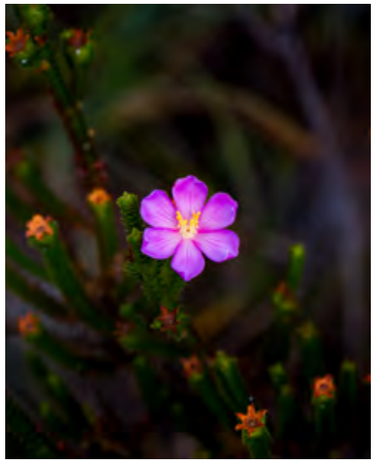
In what ways do you live out your relationship to Land/Waters? Do you pull in a canoe? Do you harvest berries? Do you plant seeds? Do you tan moose hides? Do you sit in silence?

In what ways to you live our your relationship to your Body/Spirit? Do you drink water? Do you breathe deeply? Do you braid your hair? Do you find ways to feel strong? Do you pray?

Land as Body: Indigenous Womxn's Leadership, Land-based wellness and Embodied Governance

Abstract:

As many Indigenous voices and teachings reveal, individual practices of leadership are an everyday commitment to cultural resurgence and actualize within the personal spaces of the home, kitchen table, garden, birthroom, workplace and relationships. Individual enactments of leadership are further determined by personal sense of agency derived from feelings of personal wellness, community well-being, relational balance and alignment of the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical selves. Healthy environments, including territories that encompass Land and Water, are essential for overall community wellness. This dissertation examines emergent scholarship in Indigenous wellness, governance and gender to broaden current definitions of Indigenous governance and leadership towards a gendered, storied and embodied understanding. Countering the notion that governance and wellness are separate entities within the field of Indigenous Governance, this paper draws the the Indigenous body into focus as a crucial site for self-determination as what the author defines as embodied governance. In doing so, we situate the Indigenous body within a self-determination framework that brings together critical Indigenous studies, Indigenous governance and culturally grounded wellness practices. Utilizing narrative inquiry, storytelling methods, relationship based models of accountability, this research project includes the interviews of 17 self-identified Indigenous Womxn between 21-60 years of age from over 10 different Nations to explore definitions of leadership in their everyday lives, the conditions for their personal wellness and community well-being, and finally how these notions are predicated upon meaningful relationship to Land/Waters. Welding together shared reflections on conceptions of Land-based wellness, individual understandings of everyday leadership and the shared lived and felt experiences of Indigineity, the author situates the body as a site of governance, self-determination and cultural agency. These concepts provide an embodied governance framework of self-determination to engage in ongoing efforts of personal, community, Land/Water-based healing for the purpose of protecting the future of generations to come. The final analysis celebrates and honours on the ground practices of embodied governance by focusing on rooted examples of creative self-becoming, Land-Water based healing practices and community birth work. The learnings gained supports the notion that determinants of individual leadership must be supported by a sense of personal wellness contained by relationship to Land and Waters. The dissertation begins with a critical examination of the colonial underpinnings that sabotage community healing, wellness and traditions of governance as derived by relationship to home Lands and Waters. In doing so, the author aims to interrupt the predominant trope of the Indigenous body or community as continuously in crisis. Instead, this paper situates Indigenous healing practices as radical sites of governance. We argue for the reconsideration of self-determination as embodied governance, which begins with the body as a site of regeneration, resurgence and renewal.



Objectives: Present findings from qualitative study examine narratives of leadership, wellbeing and relationship to Land/Water of Indigenous Womxn.

Design: Qualitative, Semi-structured narrative interviews and analyzed through narrative methodologies, sto-

rytelling and conducted by cultural protocols.

Methods: Relationship-based Indigenous research methodology. 17 participants from across 10 different Nations including 1-2 interview sessions of 1-3 hours per individual and a final group research circle with 9 participants for the time period of four hours. All self-identify as Indigenous Womxn, four participants identify as queer and one as two-spirit.

Results: Four metathemes; Spirit and Culture (sense of personal balance and alignment of mental, spiritual, physical and emotional bodies), Creative self-becoming (self-actualization and vitality) and Relational Accountability (belonging and accountability to others) and Kitaskînaw î pî kiskinohamâkoya. Sâkihito-maskihkiy î pî kiskinohamâkoya (Relationship to Land/Water). Overarching framework; embodied governance (embodied practices of leadership and wellness).

Conclusions: Wellness promotion model to be used as community toolkit offered to each of the participants and their communities, educational resource to incite learnings for educators and health care practitioners within the context of Indigenous health and social policy; including recommendations for cultural protocol within wellness services.

Keywords: Indigenous, Governance, Leadership, Land/Water-based Wellness, Wellbeing, Gender, Storytelling, Narrative Inquiry, healing, Land, Water, Resurgence.

Thesis Statement: The wellness of our communities is can not be divorced from the Wellness of the Land and Waters and authentic Indigenous womxn's leadership is necessary to restore balance amongst all relations. This research collection defines wellness through the lens of Nehiyaw (Cree) and Michif teachings of Miyo-Pimatisiwin (balance, personal wellness, self-care, healing, internal balance) and furthermore, defines governance and through

the Nehiyaw-Michif lens of Miyo-Wîchêtowin (relationship, enactment or action of balance, care for others, accountability and belonging, kinship, relational governance, external balance). The notion of Miyo-Wîchêtowin is grounded in the Nehiyaw-Michif framework of Wâhkôhtowin.

This thesis will examine the interconnectivities (and discrepancies or gaps) between the fields of Indigenous Governance and Indigenous Wellness (Health) Research in order to draw out the conditions necessary to promote personal wellness and collective well-being grounded in culturally defined relationship to Land, Water governance systems. Through the articulation of a reclaimed ethics of Miyo-Pimatisiwin and Miyo-Wîchêtowin, as defined by co-researchers, our learnings aim to enhance efforts towards regenerative community wellness, authentic governance & leadership in reclaimed kinship to Land and Waters.

Wâhkitowin- Research Relations and Accountability

Co-researchers are self-identified Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) womxn who are actively involved in diverse sites of community governance such as: health care and healing, wellness traditions, cultural knowledge carrier, youth-care and youth programming, Land-based youth programs, Traditional Medicines Educator, Visual Arts and Performance, Birth-care and practice, Band Council, Academia, Physical Health and Education, Child Psychology and Therapy, Journalism and media, and more. Indigenous womxn who participated in

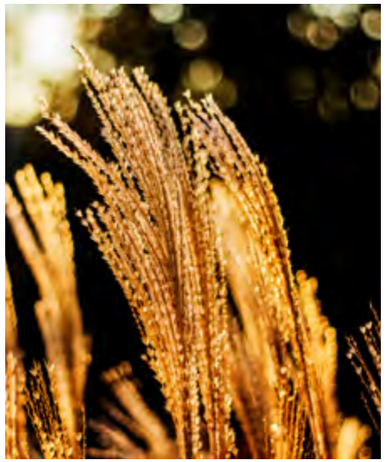
the study met the following criteria: (a) self-identified as Indigenous to Canada (b) 18 years of age and over (c) interested in participating in this project. Overall, 18 participants, from across 18 different Nations, agreed to one the semi-structured narrative interview which lasted between one-two hours and nine participants attended a secondary research circle which included collaborative visual narrative media methods.

Wâhkôhtowin- Relational Accountability in Shared research:

The Nêhiyaw (Cree) and Michif (Métis) law of Wâhkôhtowin or Wahkootawin, provides a framework for interconnectivity in relational networks of integrity, accountability and responsibility based on kinship and inter-belonging. The Wâhkôhtowin or Wahkootawin governance framework provides a kinship model for which individuals can self-determine their own agency and governance in their relations to All Relations. Within Wâhkôhtowin or Wahkootawin law is defined by relationality, kinship and the quality of relations within individual and or collective networks of inter-being and inter-becoming. Relationality and kinship within this framework extend beyond human relations and also recognize and bring in responsibilities and honour interconnectivities to plant, animal, Spiritual and unseen Nations. To employ a sense of good relations to all relations is defined in Nehiyaw-Michif law as Miyo-Wîchêtowin; and situates the who we are related to with the how we are accountable to, responsible for and care for these relations. Miyo-Wîchêtowin is a governance model of interconnectedness and is an action-based governance practice. Wâhkôhtowin as law and Miyo-Wîchêtowin as governance, relationality and kinship are the two defining values which can only exist through conscious connection, claimed kinship and inter-belonging to People (who) , Place (Land/Waters) and Practice (Culture/Accountability/Responsibility). From a Nehiyaw-Michif perspective, relational teachings carried through Wâhkôhtowin and Miyo-Wîchêtowin are derived from direct, authentic and meaningful relationship to Land. Loyer further asserts this in their article by quoting Saulteux-Cree-Métis scholar, activist and artistic Lindsay Nixon, who says "we must liberate both land and life by actively honouring our responsibilities to kinship in this moment, fostering good relations within all creation in our intentions and actions" (qtd in Loyer, 2018, pp 152). The act of honouring life and the Land is a practice which enacts active relationality to All Relations. Personal and collective relationships to Land, story, community, time and space are defined by kin-centric notions of belonging and inter-relational enactments of accountability.

Phase 1: Outreach- Each participant was identified by friends, family and our their Nation as a leader in community wellness, well-being and governance. I would reach out personally to each individual through phone, email or an in person meeting, along with the research outline and consent form (including objectives, questions and design).

Phase 2: Gifting Protocol- I would greet each interviewee with a small pouch of tobacco, a personal thank you card and a hand-made beaded gift which I would make in preparation for our interview. This piece of process proved as being the most important for my own sense of accountability and respect as a researcher. The gift of tobacco comes from my own cultural teachings and represents shared reciprocity and fertility or regeneration of thought, reflections, relationship and energies of creative vitality. I



would also spend the time to make a pair of earrings, medicine bag or necklace for each of the participant and use that time to reflect about the work of each individual and prepare myself in a form of intentional mindfulness before our shared time together.

Phase 3: In-Depth Land-based Interview - In preparation for the interviews, I asked each participant to choose a place for our conversations, outdoors on the Land or Waters if possible. A few participants chose to go for a walk around a lake, or to meet out in a garden. Another participant invited me to join them for a Cold Water Bath ceremony at sunrise, which we then made a fire and had our "formal interview" afterwards. Another participant invited me into her home, and we made dinner and put her kids to bed and then sat together at the kitchen table. One participant invited me to travel with her to a spot to spend the day together out by the Ocean. Each participant could decide a place and space which felt good for them to enter into larger discussions based on my research themes of Wellness, Well-being, Healing, Leadership and Embodied Governance.

Guiding Questions include:(participants are not expected to answer each question, but engage with the ones that feel most meaningful and relevant to their lives and experiences):

Well-being/Wellness

1. How do you define wellness? Wellbeing?
2. When do you feel at your best?
3. What contributes to your sense of wellbeing? What are barriers to your wellbeing?
4. What does self-care look like to you?
5. What does mindfulness mean to you? Is that a term that feels relevant?

Leadership/Governance

6. How do you define leadership?
7. What are ways that you enact leadership in your everyday life?
8. What are the roles of wellbeing and mindfulness in leadership and politics?
9. What role does the Land and Waters have in your personal wellbeing?
10. What are the conditions necessary for you to feel well and embody your leadership?
11. What is your body's relationship to the Land/Water?
12. How do you embody governance, self-determination, culture, wellbeing and identity? (sexuality, health, tattooing, physical health, dance, arts, expression etc).
13. Any other thoughts or reflections?

Phase 4: Preliminary Reflection, Analysis, and Transcription - Preliminary analysis comprised of immediate transcription of the interview which allowed for reflection of the conversation. In this time, I would identify major themes in the interview and would later return to the transcribed interview to chunk the transcript into thematic subject statements. This phase can be described through seven steps: 1. Transcribing the interview in a verbatim transcript while re-listening to the interview 2. Re-reading the transcript along with a re-listening of the interview 3. Highlighting and significant quotes and or teachings within the interview 4. Organizing and chunking the transcript into thematic subject headlines 5. The construction of a preliminary 'story map', based on the employment of narrative analysis, which includes a process of inserting code labels onto a map within the structure of content, timeframe and thematic subjects. 6. The refinement of mapping process through with the use of NVIVO

software. 7. Final identification of meta-themes presented throughout interview body and analysis of the story map body.

With the use of storied-maps, and meta-theme categories, I was able to clearly identify the common or central pillars regarding themes of wellness, healing and governance, as dictated throughout all interviews.

Phase 5: Collaborative Research Circle: Visual Media and Arts-based Component - The participants were invited to participate in a secondary interview process over the phone and/or Skype if they wished, so that I may share findings within the first stages of Research. Many participants expressed the interest in reflecting about these themes through an Arts-based mode of expression. Listening to the needs of the participants, I facilitated a collaborative Research Circle, including nine of the 17 participants, where we would be able to share our own thoughts and reflections based on these themes together and then translate them to individual, yet co-creative, representation through Arts-Media narratives. This phase included four major phases: 1. The opening of the Research Circle as grounded in cultural protocol, starting with those from W̱SÁNEĆ territories beginning introductions, Land Protocol and Opening Prayers in their Languages. This stage was important as it grounded the circle to the Lands and Languages where we gathered for the Research itself. 2. The circle began with brief introductions in which each participant included "I feel my best when...." in their introduction 3. I then provided a summary of preliminary findings based on

the interviews from each of the participants and shared with them what I had identified as major or meta-themes across the data 4. I then reintroduced reflection questions on wellness, well-being, leadership and embodied governance and asked for each individual to craft a statement or phrase which to them represented what Land-based wellness means to them. They were encouraged to be as specific or as abstract as they wished and to use their own words and Languages. 5. I would then ask for each participant to choose a visual representation of this statement to be depicted through film, art and or photography. They would each choose a visual representation of their statement ex. running water, breathing, a portrait, a drawing or an image of something that represented personal well-being. 6. I would then work with the participant to film or capture this visual with their direction. 7. The final stage will be to edit and post-produce a small film narrative which will offer a visual representation of the meta-themes presented at the Research Circle, and perhaps draw out additional or new themes from secondary reflection through narrative analysis. It was essential for me to employ mixed-media narrative methods in order to uphold the true authentic voices of each participant, as co-researchers within the overall project. Through allowing for deeper reflection and personal voice, visual representation and oral projections of their own experiences, the research serves as not only a tool to foster Indigenous womxn's experience within the academic landscape, but also serves as a tool of self-determined expression, actualization and meaningful representation through diverse means of articulation.

Visual Narrative Storytelling

Situated as a research tool, mixed-media storytelling can prove as highly effective in the authentic representation of experience, knowledge and voice of the participant. Regarding the participant as co-creator within the context of research, challenges processes of

extractive research which designate the 'subject' (researcher) in a position of authority and often regards the participant as the 'object' of study and therefore secondary position of agency within the research. To ensure that research is embedded within frameworks, practices and values considered "Indigenous methods", it is necessary to use research methods as a tool to restore balance in how we tell stories, share knowledge and produce theories regarding the lives, bodies and governance of Indigenous womxn and their communities.

Mixed Media Storytelling - Indigenous Research Methodology Principles

To centre relationships and challenge extractive research methodologies and journalism practices, it was crucial to ground our collaboration in Indigenous research methodologies. Some key concepts which grounded the integrity of my own research relationships includes: 1. Relational accountability - The Cree-Michif notion of Miyo-Wîchêtowin, means good-relations and the responsibility we have to maintain them as such. In each step of the secondary phase of research (Research Circle) each individual had complete agency to decide if they wanted to participate or not, and all information regarding the research project was optional and by invitation. The number one priority was that each individual experienced a sense of safety, comfortability and personal agency within the space. We also had a community member from Tsartlip First Nation to hold space for cultural support and personal healing if necessary. The teaching of Miyo-Wîchêtowin upholds the Cree-Michif teaching of Wakitoowin, which is a belief system of interconnectivity based upon kinship and relationship. These frameworks were essential in ensuring ongoing accountability to each of the research participants before, during and after the research phases. Employing the teachings of Miyo-Wîchêtowin and belief systems of Wakitoowin located myself, as researcher, in a place of central accountability to all others. It was my responsibility and privilege to ensure that each individual experienced feelings of meaningful participation, respect and reciprocity throughout the entire process; and I often would check-in individually and thanked each participant for their time and energy. Throughout the research phases I upheld protocols of knowledge exchange, which included tobacco and a hand-made beaded item in preliminary interviews and the gifting of a wellness basket (including handmade Epson Bath Salts, Lavender Plants, a Gift Certificate to a Restaurant, Candles and other items) in the Research Circle. 2. Self-location - While the concept of self-location is ostracized, disregarded and even forbidden within positivist Western research paradigms and journalism, it is a prerequisite within an Indigenous research framework. In the context of Land as Body: An Examination of Indigenous Womxn's Leadership, Land-Based Wellness and Embodied Governance, self-location was an essential part of building healthy and safe relationships with the participants. Self-location is integral to building trust and respect and to ensure that their presence is safe and positive within the community. While I did have existing relationships with a majority of the research participants, through diverse capacities (visual and performance arts, academia, community health programs and other), it was essential for me to re-introduce and locate myself within the research so that each participant could gain a deeper understanding of why I was pursuing this project and to whom I am accountable in my own learnings and personal growth. 3. Honouring Community Language and Protocols - The research participants are from over 17 different Nations and each individual has their own relationship to their Native Languages, homelands and protocols. It was necessary for me to learn about each of these governance systems before I conducted primary interviews; so that I could be accountable to the context from where we were conversing and could ground their teachings to their own personal

context and storied-landscape. I would encourage for each participant to use their own words and experiences and did not ask or suggest for translation into the English language, as the language itself carries their own intended meanings.

Visual Narrative Praxis

Stories, although breathed into the oral landscape, also takes shape in the visual world of our own imaginations, visionaries and personal forms of self-expression. While I provided the tools, materials, technical support and any other type of direction the co-researchers required to produce a mixed-media production, the process itself was determined by each of the individuals. Central themes produced through visual narrative reflection and representation differed from those expressed through oral interviews, and it became clear that experience, knowledge and self-expression requires more than one venue of articulation in order to assume authentic representations of each individual's reflection. While oral interviews allow for others to examine and assess diverse themes presented through the data collection phase, the production of visual narrative bodies allows for those who encounter research to instead bear witness to the community-driven narratives. The act of bearing witness challenges extractive research and storytelling processes, and replaces them with meaningful opportunities for co-creation of alternative narratives.

This section shares reflections and teachings offered from the participants. The learnings presented in these sections flow from Land-Water based experiences of governance and demonstrate the intrinsic interconnectivies of experiences of personal healing, community wellness and embodied governance to Land/Waters.

The following reflections are excerpts from the entire research project, however not all learnings/teachings are included in this specific collection. These reflections presented represent four themes of embodied governance and Land-based wellness. They include:

1) Spirit and Culture
(sense of personal balance mental, spiritual, physical and emotional bodies),

2) Creative Self-Becoming
(self-actualization and purpose)

3) Relational Accountability
(belonging and accountability to others)

4) Kitaskînaw î pî kis-kino-hamâkoya
(Relationship to and Knowledge from Land/Water).

SPIRIT AND CULTURE

(personal sense of balance, alignment of emotional, mental, spiritual and physical bodies).

"We do absolutely have a physical experience, we do absolutely have and emotional experience, a spiritual experience and a mental experience...and we need to understand how we live through each quadrant. And the Soul runs it all. The Great Spirit, the Great Spirit. Life only wants more life. Life force is a concept of wholeness, because when you understand that everything exists and there has to be multiple types of trees, of birds, or landscapes or people, the soul as an entity needs to understand itself. In all of these ways. Thats how complex the soul is. It needs me, it needs you, it needs that golden eagle on that tree, perched. Because this is the way that it sees itself. This is the power of spirit....its endless." (Lindsay Delaronde, Kanien'kehá:ka)

When asked about personal well-being and wellness, participants often spoke about their personal sense of balance within the context of cultural wellbeing and with focus on spiritual wellbeing. While many participants talked about personal sense of wellbeing as being physical state of wellness, a majority of participants consistently regarded their overall mental, physical and emotional health as being first and foremost grounded in a sense of spiritual well-being. Spirit was often described as being contained within the context of their own subjective culture.

"Wellness has a bunch of different components, but I think for me that my main focus of wellness has to do with my inner wellbeing. So how my Spirit feels. And whats going on for my spirit at the time. So, you know, for example I may have a roof over my head and I may have access to food and be really safe and secure that way, but if I am no spiritually feeling satisfied or well than I don't really feel like I actually have wellbeing. It kind of just depends on the way that you, or how you focus what well being means to you. And for me wellbeing is spiritual first." (Jessica Day, Anishinaabe).

"wellness, as your spiritual, emotional, physical and mental stability or sense of well-being, is how those parts of one's self are connected or in alignment. How and if they're nourished, whether they are expanding, and giving life, and whether the Soul is nourished. Or whether they are out of balance, starved, abused or undernourished. And I think that our well-being, is being connected to all of those parts of ourselves, because I have learned that those are all intimately and inherently connected. When would you say you feel at your best. I feel at my best when these four parts of myself are balanced, but most importantly when I am spiritually nourished" (Emilee Gilpin, Nehiyaw-Michif).

"Wellness And identity and connection to who you are as a person in the world is that despite all these things all these barriers all these struggles that. Spiritual connection that your spirit has to the universe can never be severed. Knowledge comes through through spiritual relationships how ways of knowing are embodied through spiritual relationships, and for Anishinaabe teachings this - is like this umbilical chord that connects you to creation, and even any kind of physical severance can never separate you from where you come from" (Estrella Whetung, Anishinaabe/Lucbanin).

The description of a connection of self to the world around us was repeatedly described as "sacred" or meaningful. One Cree participant who was raised in Foster Care and then adopted by a non-Indigenous family shares that her own understanding of personal wellness and well-being is,

"very physical and spiritual to me. I feel like I'm in a relationship with God and I feel if I want to hear from him I go outside and also it's a place for me to let go of everything all the garbage I've been picking up and carrying it because it's like it's almost like a detox or you just had to be forced to breathe in goodness in life. Like there's your sense you come back to being in Sensorial, you come back to being simple and like that's when everything else falls away and you're like well what matters. And it's like oh it's sacredness" (Angela Poundmaker Cooper, Nehiyaw).

When asked about significant barriers to access personal wellness and well-being on participant identified spiritual violence as being an explicit mechanism of colonial dominance. She shared that

"I think a lot of times like for first nations people you know that child that's child stage was taken right out of the equation. Right. There's no. So that's I think a lot of like First Nations people aren't well they weren't brought into this they were taken out of and put into a system that you know just really destroyed them spiritually" (Holly Grosbeck, Chippewa Anishinaabe).

When spiritual conceptions are understood as a sense of connection, belonging and sacredness of these connections, it is necessary to identify the ways in which colonial dominance works to sever these connections and therefore displace Indigenous womxn from a larger spiritual network of governance. Participants spoke about the need to make space for spirituality within wellness practices and often stressed about the crisis of spiritual absence within health-care services and community governance practices.

A common thread amongst all of the participants was that spirituality and spiritual well-being was often contained within a cultural context. Many of the participants did not separate the two: to attain spiritual wellness requires access to culture and cultural practice requires an understanding of the sacred. While each participant came from a diverse and different set of cultural norms and teachings, many of the participants shared a sense of personal pride and purpose when they discussed their own relationship to reclaiming or embodying their own cultures. One participant shared,

"I look at my little grandchild, and i think, you come from a family that is very grounded in culture, but also you come from a very educated family- no body can ever tell you that you are dumb or you cant do it. you know people that in this very western society, that honours hierarchy of credentials- you know somebody that works in that world, and that comes home and is no different than anybody else." (Sherri Pooyak, Nehiyaw).

Another participant shared their thoughts about culture as an ongoing form of self-discovery and roadmap towards self-acceptance and spiritual belonging. They shared,

"So I'm always in that dance of being in between. I get that cliche of "in between worlds" 'cause I am! The way I feel inside and express my individuality is only something a select few people get to see. There is different layers of identity and different layers we express our identity. So embodying culture is still something that I am working towards but is also something that I've let go of of being right and wrong and there are certain ways that people do things and thats beautiful because thats their teachings. And I can learn from those teachings and I can create my own teachings" (Jessica Day, Anishinaabe).

Another participant shared that it is through her spiritual connection to Creator and Creation that she discovers her own culture in what feels like an authentic and protected way, outside of the traumas inflicted on her and her family through colonial enterprise. Her reflections situate the jingle dress as a spiritually significant symbol and culturally grounded practice of spiritual wellness. She shares:

"In Ojibwe, the jingle dress is a healing dress, traditionally, it's like more than just a powwow dress. It started with an old man and his granddaughter was really sick and he really wanted to help. They didn't know how. So one night this jingle dress came to him in a dream and a bunch of women were wearing it and dancing to the dance and wearing the prayer. They were able to heal his granddaughter. And so when he woke up with the dream, he shared that dream and made the dress with his wife and they were able to heal his granddaughter in real life not just the dream world. So I was taught by one of my Ojibwe Elders, who also taught us that a traditional Ojibwe woman only dances to go once they have that dream. So one day, I actually had a dream of a jingle dress of my own, which was purple pink and white. I was really like happy. I had always wanted to dance jingle but I never learned to do it like the right way where you did dream.

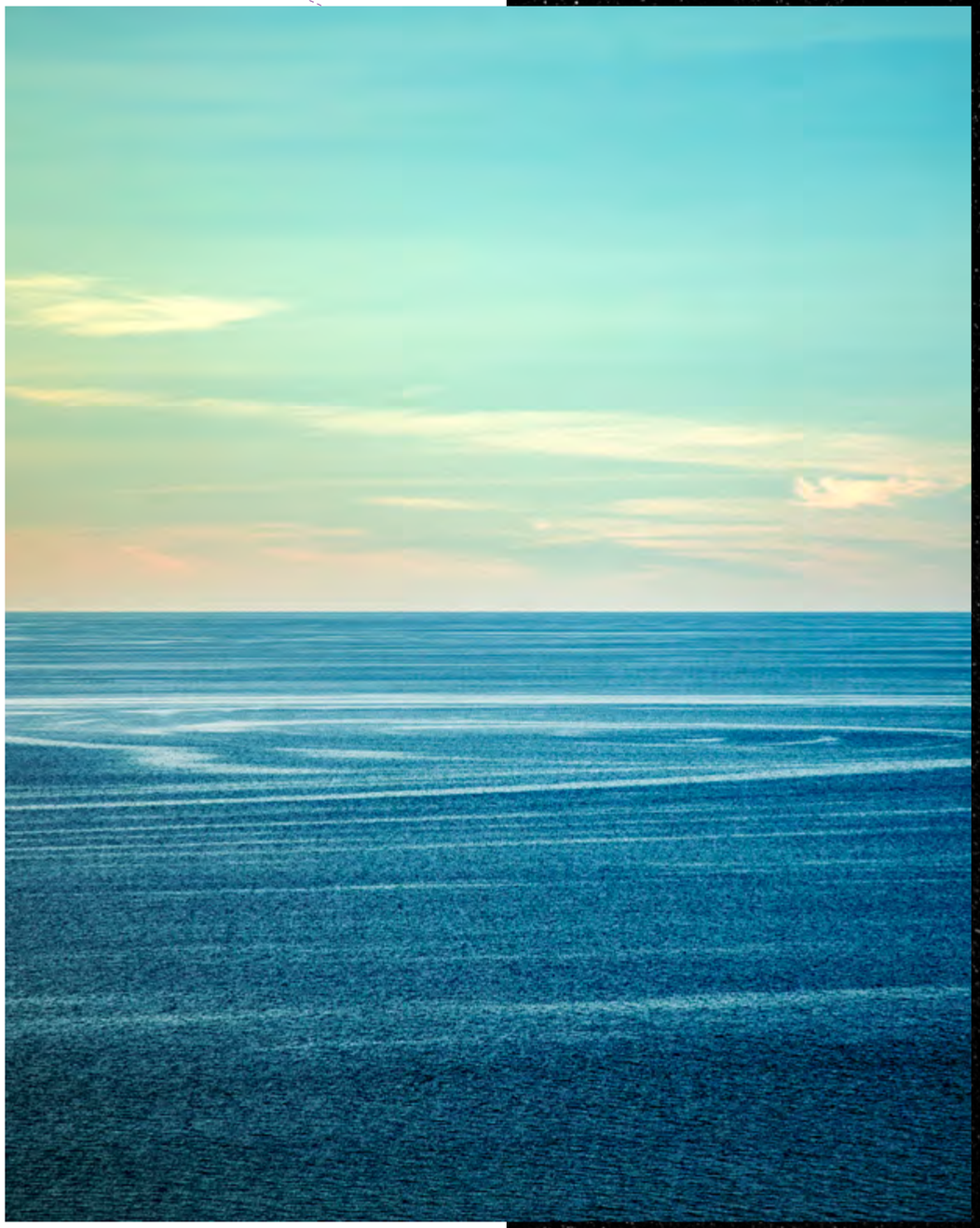
So like to leave the Mino bimadiziwin, which is leading the good life in Ojibwe, which means leading the good life. Or living the right way. And being well yourself. So a part of that means living a traditional life, which is not to do drugs or alcohol, and going to ceremony and embodying the seven teachings. It

wasn't until, I had parts of that figured out: I went to ceremony, I tried to live a life of the seven teachings, but like the the one big part of me that was on while I think was like my mental and physical aspect which drugs alcohol I think affected me way more than I realized. So I completely cut that out of my life too and felt like I was truly living Mino Bimadiziwin, that the dress came to me. So I really truly believed like if I hadn't healed my my spirit that way I probably would have never gotten the dress because I really feel like you have to be well healed yourself before you can help others be well and healed. So that's a long story but, I think it just really illustrates the point that to be a leader and to help others you have to first help yourself" (Ashleigh Thompson, Anishinaabe).

Because Colonial dominance is predicated on the undermining of Indigenous Spiritual Governance, personal healing and community well-being requires authentic restoration and attention at the spiritual levels. When the Spirit is nourished, vitality and healing will resound out into the emotional, physical and mental bodies of the individual, constituting the groundwork for regenerative wellness and strength at the community level.

Experiences of mindfulness can be understood as the ways in which we consciously determine how to move our bodies through space and relationship. This extends into our ability to make choices which are conscious of others and contribute to a comprehensive understanding or felt experience of interconnection of mind, body, heart and spirit within our community governance and wellness practice. Yellowbird introduces a framework of neuro-decolonization, from which we can begin to clear out the cacophony of colonial voices and detoxify our bodies so that we can successfully develop an understanding of individual self-determination, "beyond rhetoric to a meaningful and effective political project" (Yellowbird, 2008). The physical detoxification of colonial influence, the mental clarity necessary to free the mind, and the spiritual strength essential to the protection of land and knowledge, must be a mindful process. John Mohawk further describes how Indigenous traditional governance "express[es] positive relationships to all others- and to recognize that we are not separate from them" (qtd. in Nelson, 2008). The Cree-Michif phrase Chee-Itayhtamawk can be translated to "Let us be of One Mind".

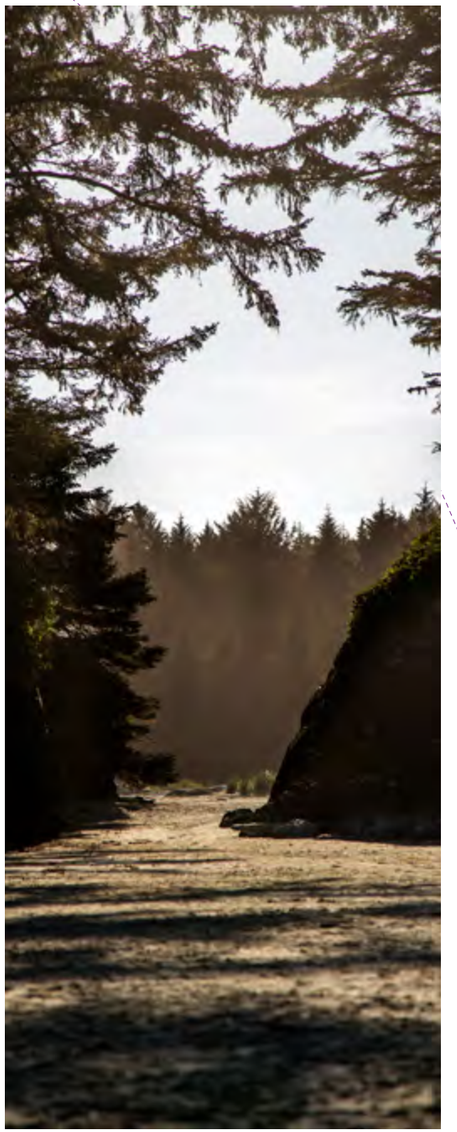
Co-researchers often described that when they feel aligned with cultural and spiritual teachings, they access a clear mind and calm heart. When spiritual conceptions are understood as a sense of belonging and sacredness, it is necessary to identify the ways in which colonial dominance works to sever these connections and therefore displace Indigenous womxn from a larger spiritual network of governance. A significant learning gained from these reflections is the role of mindful, conscious and calm internal mental states when enacting Miyo-Wîchêtowin. The co-researchers applied a clear mind to leadership, they described the importance of stillness and calmness in leadership responsi-



bilities. Shelby Blackjack (Tutchone) shares,

"You need a clear head to make decisions that are impacting thousands or hundreds of people or two people. If you're a leader in your family then you need to be aware of that. You in your leadership and in every case they see every day. It's one of the ways that you act leadership in your everyday life". Co-researcher Emilee Gilpin (Nehiyaw-Michif) also contributes an important teaching in her reflection which defines leadership as something that requires *"a spirit of doing good and creating change in a good way. We can go through our day feeling distracted and this can lead to feelings of disconnection. For me, this is definitely real and it's important but it's not something that we can just do. It's something that takes a lot of work and it's very related to the present moment. And it's very related to actually taking the steps necessary to be still and quiet, and enter a more natural organic state. So in terms of defining leadership, which is hard, I don't know. But I know how I feel when I am clear, and that happens for me when I am on the Land and in cold Water"*

A clear mind, healthy body and calm heart are necessary in our commitment to honour all relations. It is from this place of clearing that we can employ regenerative governance of self and community, in a way which reflects our own values, morals and landscapes. It is only with an organized mind, calm heart and peaceful clarity that can we establish a meaningful connection with ourselves, others, with spirit and the Land. The ways we care for our minds and bodies are often depoliticized within decolonial discourse; however, the Indigenous body is a site for resistance (physical), politicization (mental), remembrance (emotional), and determination (spiritual). In doing so, we regard the mental body as a site of co-creation, agency and ultimately as a tool towards our shape-shifting phsycial, emotional and spiritual manifestations of the self; in relationship to others, Spirit and the Land/Waters. When the Spirit is nourished, vitality and healing resounds out into the emotional, physical and mental bodies of the individual. A meaningful spiritual foundation constitutes the groundwork for regenerative wellness and strength at the community level.



(Conscious Indigineity and creative self-actualization, Vitality)

"Its through creative expression that I learn, and I learn, and I learn.

And thats another thing thats been taken out, its creative expression, I mean and the educational field, thats been beaten out of us.... like algebra, whats algebra do?

another thing is applied creative expression, cause applied means that it does function on your own journey, has relevance to your own learnings,

Think its so simple but, do you remember the sun rising in the morning?
Do you remember that there is grass here and roots below?
Yeah, its so simple, whats the constellation up there?

Do you know?
Do you know the planet ruling our solar system right now? And our present walk? And its to show other people, this is how to live a simple life....

... and Creation is made on vibration, so how important is music, how important is our own balancing and our .... positive expression? Its individual, its collective, it's Universal" (Mohawk)

Creativity, as described by many of the participants, is the creative life force that surges out of relationship to the Spiritual (through culture, ceremony and phenomenon) and takes root in the body through expression, creation and articulation of self through externalizing the internal. One participant expressed her wellness as being facilitated by the very ability for her to express herself. She said for her, wellness is the articulation of,

"Connection with the Universe through creative expression. So that includes, visual arts, music, moving body... it's a way of life" (Kanien'kehá:ka).

The ability to make ones own story come to life, is an act of personal agency and self-actualization often described as a mode to experience wellness and governance by many of the participants. Alfred and Corntassel remind us that, "there is a danger in allowing colonization to be the only story of Indigenous lives. It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler's power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on the power" (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005, pp.4.) This notion was reflected in the words of Lindsay Delaronde when she shares:

"We need to be attracted by things and propelled by desire, not pain all of the time, so, where do we really cultivate desire, and my Art practice has given me my life. My Art has saved my Life. Saved me. Saved my life."

Anishinaabe co-researcher Jessica Day shared the possibilities of expression through the creation of her first jingle dress. She shared that she so often felt bound by the limitations of societal norms, as dictated by systems of colonial dominance, and felt a new sense of freedom in being her own agent of creative expression. She shared,

"I remember thinking like, how interested i was in learning about making a dress and the right way to do it: how many jingles are on the dress? whats the right way to make one? what colours should i use? and it was this whole exciting world of self expression - how you express yourself culturally and i remember asking all these different ways to make

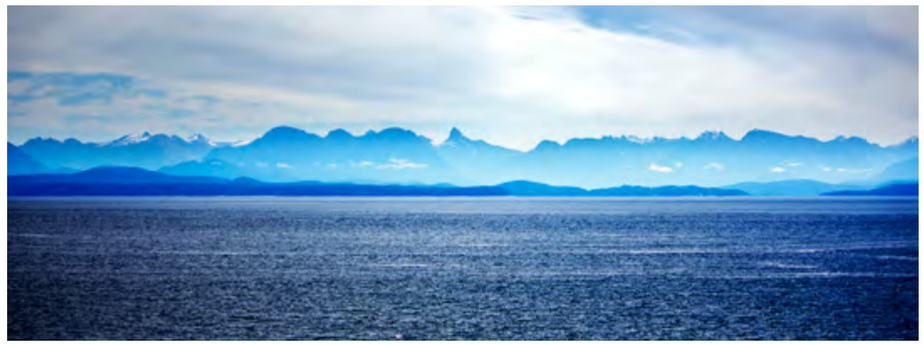
dresses and she said, 'you know what you make the dress however you want to make it! You can have squiggles, you can have lines, you can have five rows, three rows, waterier you want, because its your prayer, its your dress and there is no wrong way to do that' and I was like WOW! How beautiful that idea that there is no wrong way to be yourself. In those colonial mentalities around right and wrong and punishment, its very difficult to swing against because its such a norm in the way that we function as a society" (Anishinaabe).

Self-actualization, creative expression and cultural resurgence can be understood as pathways of emancipatory liberation in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms of being. There is no one true definition of this, as it will shape shift dependent on the individual, and the individual in relationship to the outer world. In their article, In their Own Words: First Nations Girls' Resilience as Reflected Through their Understandings of Health (2013), Chad et al. describe that meaning, as interpreted by different individuals is "shaped and inform by culture and societal norms but also a site of sovereignty and individual expression or interpretation social body and individual body [implications of each on one another] (3). When individuals experience a sense of personal agency, as opposed to isolation and or immobility, they are able to engage with co-creative processes which make meaning in their own life, experiences and stories they tell the world. As an active agent of creation, the use of creative vision as a form of resurgence is a deeper practice of personal self-actualization within the context of decolonization and making Indigenous meaning. Not only is creative self-becoming a way to resist, re-act and destruct against colonial violence, but also provides pathways for imaging beyond the confines of the colonial story. Creative self-becoming situates the subject at the centre of their own unfolding and requires for a self-expression which transcends colonial imaginary, in material and socio-landscapes, and produces futurisms defined by projecting the self into time and space as determined by each individual themselves.

Co-researcher Lianne Charlie (Tutchone) recognizes the importance of ancestral guidance in daily acts of Miyo-Pimatisiwin and Miyo-Wîchêtowin. She says,

"We have to sort of think of these ways is how can we sort of prioritize our ancestral values and principles and have these seems to be guiding our day to day. Day to day interactions decisions all these things. And I feel like if that were the case collective level even like Chance indigenous chance nation first nation level across the nation we would be moving in perhaps slightly different direction"

Creative self-becoming situates the subject at the centre of their own unfolding and requires for a self-expression which transcends colonial imaginary, in material and socio-landscapes, and produces futurisms defined by projecting the self into time and space as determined by each individual themselves. As an active agent of creation, the use of creative vision as a form of resurgence is a deeper practice of personal self-actualization within the context of decolonization and making Indigenous meaning. Not only is creative self-becoming a way to resist, re-act and destruct against colonial violence, it also provides pathways for imaging beyond the confines of the colonial story. A pathway to reclaim our mental, physical, emotional and spiritual bodies and project them into new possibilities, kinship networks and futures of inter-being.



(Belonging, Purpose/Responsibility)

Everything is relationship.

(Rebecca Watts, Inuit)

Participants described their personal wellness as being interdependent with the well-being of their families and communities. Indigenous ontology and epistemology grounds knowledge interpretation, transference and the ability to make meaning of phenomenon through frameworks of relationship and interbeing.

Opaskwayak Cree Resaercher Shawn Wilson describes, that "reality is relationships or sets of relationships" (15) and that "we are not in relationships, we are the relationships we hold and are a part of" (80). When applied to personal wellness and conceptions of self-care, the wellness of an individual is suspended in a larger constellation of inter-being. Therefore, the overall well-being of the collective determines the wellness of the individual, and the wellness of an individual either nourishes or hinders the overall well-being of the collective. In the article, Self-determination in Indigenous health: A comprehensive perspective (2011), Hirch describes that an Indigenous "view on health is one of harmony, a state of balance and equilibrium within a person's body, psyche and relationship with others" (13). They go on to describe that "Ill health is a sign of imbalance in any of these relationship s and the healer is to restore that balance seeing the disease in a wider personal social and cosmic context" (13). Many of the participants demonstrated these same values and beliefs in their shared knowledge and teachings based on personal healing/wellness and community well-being and governance. One participant who is currently houseless and a recipient of Indigenous mental health services shared,

"Wellbeing is taking care of yourself. Waking up in the morning, having a shower three times a day, brushing your teeth, flossing, getting where you need to go and leadership is taking care of others." (Nuu-Chah-Nulth).

Many of the co-researchers reflected that their experiences of wellness are often deeply interrelated with the well-being of their loved ones and family members.

"I feel at my best when I'm surrounded by my family when we're outside when we have the space when we are spending time playing together. Like for me and well-being it always reminds me I'm always brought back to I have this thing about babies and kid for some reason like I'm always brought back to that. And well-being for you know for me and my family it's about having a healthy childhood you know being brought up in the space for your authentic self like, who you are. Like who you've grown up to be, is respected. The thing is is to like we as human beings like we need that community. We really need a healthy community. Right that's we're social beings we're spiritual beings that need that energy from everyone else " (Holly Grosbeck, Chippewa Anishinaabe).

Norther Tutchone co-researcher Lianne Charlie described her ability to feel accepted, and loved through the experience of healthy relationship. It is from this base that she shared she was able to self-express and explore her own governance to others in her life. She said,

"And just thinking like you know you can get really you think about when they think about governance and body governance and think about relationship and how people interact with each other. When I was there and allowed to do what I needed to do andthink about where people were standing in that it were just it was just finally like free" (Northern Tutchone).

In this section of research, when asked about wellness, wellbeing and leadership, most participants shared that their personal sense of wellness was dependent upon relationships predicated on interdependence. However, many of the participants focused their reflections on describing the colonial imposed barriers which sever healthy relational networks. According to participants, personal wellness, positive mental state, and the conditions to self-actualize requires the belonging within a social and cultural network of interbeing, and it is the disconnection from these relationships which are at the root of personal suffering. One participant shared the pain of lateral violence in her community, and acknowledged this as a direct product of colonialism,

"What I think is at the root of that is a lot of community un-wellness is so much lateral violence in our communities and people who aren't, you know...it's hard because I come from a super tiny community. And like we're only 200 members and a good chunk of us are down and Lummi in Washington we've got people on the mainland. And just you know it's so easy to gossip when it's such a tiny community and to try and pull each other down because I think part of that is being separated from each other and not having like a home base where we can you know be together all the time" (Shayli Thompson, Lyackson)

"Well I think about a relationship like just in between people and in personnel and how they say a basic requirement to having a good relationship is consent. It's like all these unspoken treaties. But when you look at the relationship between nations you the Canadian State is an abuser. It's an abuser. It is like it used to lead. There's no one to say it's power down it's controlling all those things you know how do you get back how do you get to a healthy relationship. That's never been so you want to get reconciliation to what you don't like" (Tiffany Joseph, W̱SÁNEĆ / Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw)

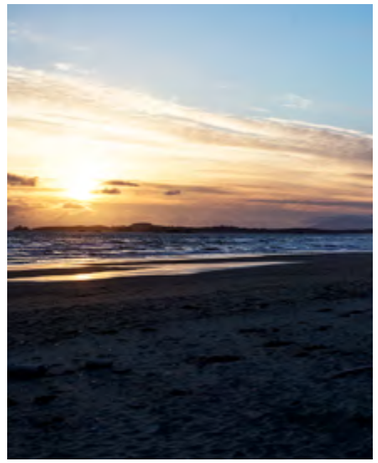
Joseph reflects on how state relationships imposed through histories of colonial legacies have morphed relationships on the ground, in community and family life. Toxic relations, were described repeatedly by participants as those without a foundation of respect. These relationships proved to be significant barriers to personal wellness and to the ability to construct a sense of personal confidence and acceptance; as echoed by one participant:

"I think its important to locate myself in the time that we're in, in our world. Because community is something different than what its ever been, community involves family and close relationships and here we find ourselves in this new millennium, this period of time where our relationships have been severed

Because we are a relationship-based people, toxic relationships is what creates barriers to my own health. It's the toxic relationships, like it's the people that are jealous and the people who say stuff or think like 'oh, you're so much better than us', but I've never acted that way. These kind of people stand in your way when you are growing you know like when you're trying to move forward where in your career or your life, you know they step in the way. Or they don't promote you ... you know do all those things stand in my way bully me don't support me when I needed them they have it. And they're like you know all of that stuff." (Holly Grosbeck, Chippewa Anishinaabe).

Another participant identifies the remedy for toxic relationships as being the restoration of basic respect and attitudes which reflect reciprocity and the ability to hold up one another,

"I'm always trying to support people and promote them and move them forward. And you know they because I know for me that's so important and valuable to have somebody dothat like and stand with them and. I'm so relationship focused so being respectful having that underlying layer of respect in all your relationships is absolutely important" (Sherri Pooyak, Nehiyaw).



"If you're not like mentally stable and those relationships aren't going to be stable and then I don't think that there's time in the work that I do to be unstable or like spread like toxic or unhealthy especially like if you're around like young minds and stuff like that and they're so like they are like sponges they taken so much from me and it's not fair to children" (Rebecca Watts, Inuit).

Integrity, belonging and accountability to relationships is an essential component in the achievable of personal wellness, community well-being and vibrant governance. One participant expressed that it is through relationship of being a sister, that she has learned the processes of accountability, reciprocity and respect. She shared,

"I only know this world through the lens of being a younger sister like that's. That's also important to identify myself as a sister. Like when I identify who I am I identify myself the way that I know this world and have known this world in this life cycle has been of a sister. And it's been in relationship in that way as well. And that's taught me about sisterhood through all my life. It's taught me a bow you know reciprocal relationship. taught me about responsibility to other. It's taught me how to know myself through the reflection of another. My spirit is shared and connected. So I know the world in that way. And everything that I have spoken about is grounded that is being an essential foundational part of who I am and where I'm speaking from" (Emilee Gilpin, Nehiyaw-Michif).

KITASKÎNAW Î PÎ KISKINOHÂMAKOYA. SÂKIHITO-MASKIHIY Î PÎ KISKINIMÂKOYA

(RELATIONSHIP TO LAND AND WATER)

When I am with the trees,
they tell me I am worthy.
And that I have a place
and that I belong.
And that I am beautiful.

(Cheryl Henhawke,
Afro/Mohawk)

The Cree-Michif phrase above can be translated as Our knowledge as a people (who relate to one another) come from the land. How we relate to the land, determines how we relate to one another. We know that our genealogy extends into the Land and in turn extends into one another. When asked about personal wellness, community well-being and leadership, the participants recognized that they could not separate their personal wellness, and therefore ability to uphold leadership roles, from their relationship to Lands and Waters. In Western, non-Indigenous studies of social dimensions of health and wellbeing, scholarship recognizes the concept of a healthy environment to be one of the many determinants. However, as described by the participants of this project, Indigenous worldview determine personal wellness and collective wellbeing as being absolutely predicated on meaningful relationships to healthy Lands and Waters.

Land theft is at the heart of colonialism. Disconnection of Indigenous communities from kin-centric relationships to Land and Waters is a colonial technique used to sever our belonging to Land and Waters. Relationship and belonging to our home-Lands and Waters inform cultural value systems, passed down by knowledge keepers as well as healing authorities and medicine keepers. McGuire (Kishebakabaykwe) asserts that "Land-based knowledge is practiced knowledge, knowledge that is used on the land. This becomes tied to the personal identity, spiritual development of people, and their overall relationships with others (McGuire, 2010, pp7). The prominence of relationship to Land is further asserted in the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the statement: "The spiritual aspect [of traditional knowledge] is integral to the cosmological and ethical beliefs of Indigenous societies... the second feature of traditional knowledge is its practical basis: traditional explanations of the environmental phenomena are based on cumulative, collective experience, tested over centuries by people who require a sophisticated and practical knowledge of the land on which they depended for every aspect of life" (Tagalik 2010 pp 2). These assertions proclaimed throughout Indigenous scholarship and literature are reflected in the voices of the participants in the context of personal strength, cultural integrity and embodied governance. Many participants expressed feelings of authentic peace, wellbeing and love when they spent time in their homelands and waters or just out on the Land.

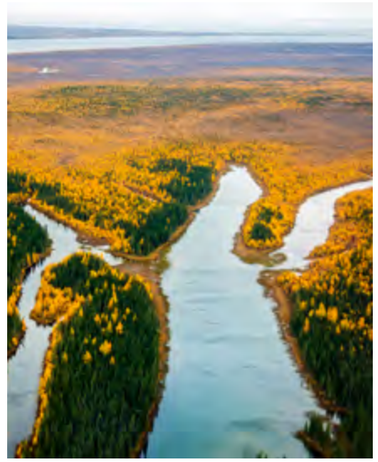
In their reflection, Tiffany Joseph shared that they identified barriers of health through the challenges in understanding and processing her own emotions, however found that her relationship to Land and Water was a healing practice she has reclaimed.

"My barrier is sometimes not knowing how to deal with them in a good way, but thatswhy I have been going out on the Land is to pray to get - I know that I can't find these answers until I come out on the Land and to the Water. My parents didn't teach me ways to get through my emotions, they escaped, so I am trying to do something new: but I am reclaiming it, from something that was taken from me and my parents. And I am reclaiming it in the Land and the Water- and I really emphasize Water .... being out in cold water, knowing that I am safe, I will survive and I am strong." (W̱SÁNEĆ, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh snichim).

When asked about relationship to Land and Waters, Nehiyaw co-researcher Sherri Pooyak shared the profound experience of knowing that she and her family are literally from the Lands which raised her and her People. She acknowledge this connection as sacred and as a constant reminder to give

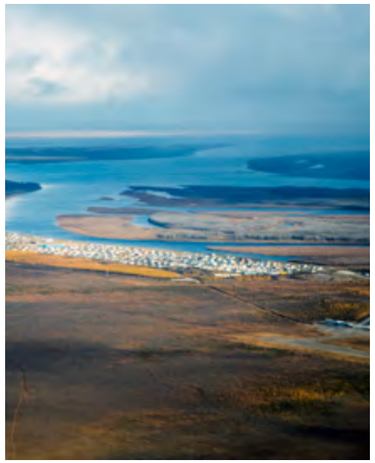
thanks and embody feelings of gratitude in her daily life. She shared,

"you know and i fly over the mountains and i can cry- i get so touched, being able to see what the mother earth has created and being so connected to that! And I am so thankful to see what she has accomplished and created- and that i get to walk around on it...and it goes back to being thankful every day- i get to wake up and walk around on her, So when I am praying, I don't get people to stand, when i am in ceremony- its a very colonial concept- because when we are in ceremony we sit and we are close to the earth- if anything we should be sitting on the ground" .



As reflected in the section above regarding Relational Accountability, one participant reflected about the ability to grow food and feed her family as a gift given to her from the Earth. Just as Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua reminds us that self-determination can not be divorced from the ability to feed ourselves (2009), this participant shared her ability to feed her family as,

"a sacred responsibility. You could have no money but as long as you could grow that means that you could feed and feed your family and community. So through having that relationship with my mom's parents growing up. They really taught me like how to grow food and how to grow medicines and. All those kinds of things like I'm in I'm an urban kid. Like don't mistake that I didn't grow up in the bush or anything like that. Completely urbanized kid. But my my grandparents wanted to make sure that I knew how to take care of myself. That I knew I had fundamentally had to feed myself from the earth" (Estrella Whetung. Anishinaabe/ Lucbanin).



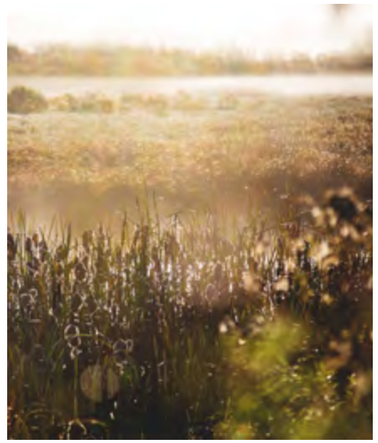
Co-researcher Emilee Gilpin (Nehiyaw-Michif) shares the pain she experiences from not having been raised in her ancestral homelands and the spiritual displacement she feels from that dispossession. She shared,

"I think I embody many worlds, which is both a gift and a curse. Sometimes it feels like I think I embody that displacement. You know of not really having a home land and waters that I am living on every day and connected to it. Like upholding my own responsibilities too. And that's that's not a good or bad thing, it just is what it is. But I definitely feel that within myself that sense of confusion and displacement. And you know seeking, and journeying, constant. Like I said that's both a gift and a curse. I can walk through many worlds. I can carry messages. I can humble myself. You know I can veil my head. I can sit down and I can take off my shoes. I can kneel. I can lay. I can drum. I can sing. I can learn. You know that's many different gifts. But I embody that. And that's my journey and that's my story and that's the story of my family and my sisters and that's that's in me it's a part of every fibre of who I am".

She goes on to acknowledge the importance in reclaiming her own relationship to Land and Waters and acknowledges their spiritual authority in her life,

"the land is in the waters like, it's even a strange thing to just like categorize. Just like medicines and non-human life. And all of our relatives and just like those two words which we often are forced to do in the English language. But I mean, we are Nipiy (water), we come from nipiy and we can relate in so many ways to

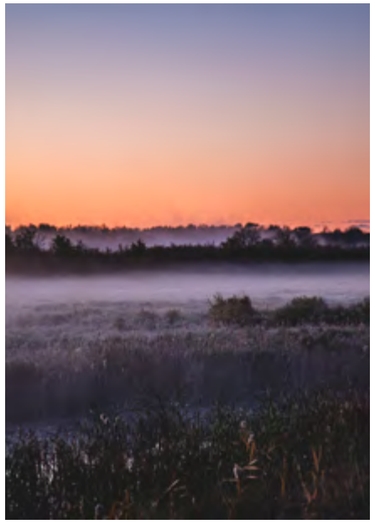
her. The constant flow the constant giving the life giving aspect to the life giving energy. You know, all the different forms that she presents herself in and exists in. So, it's only natural that I feel like got home in bodies of water. That water's very cleansing. It's healing. Forgiving. Powerful. You know can also take life away. Can be very intimidating. Like I think there are just so many lessons. In water and in the land like. Whether we're talking about being around non-human beings like animal relatives or whether we're talking about witnessing the beauty of nature like witnessing the colour or the expansiveness the vastness the immensity. Whether we're in awe of the wisdom, and reverence or complexity"

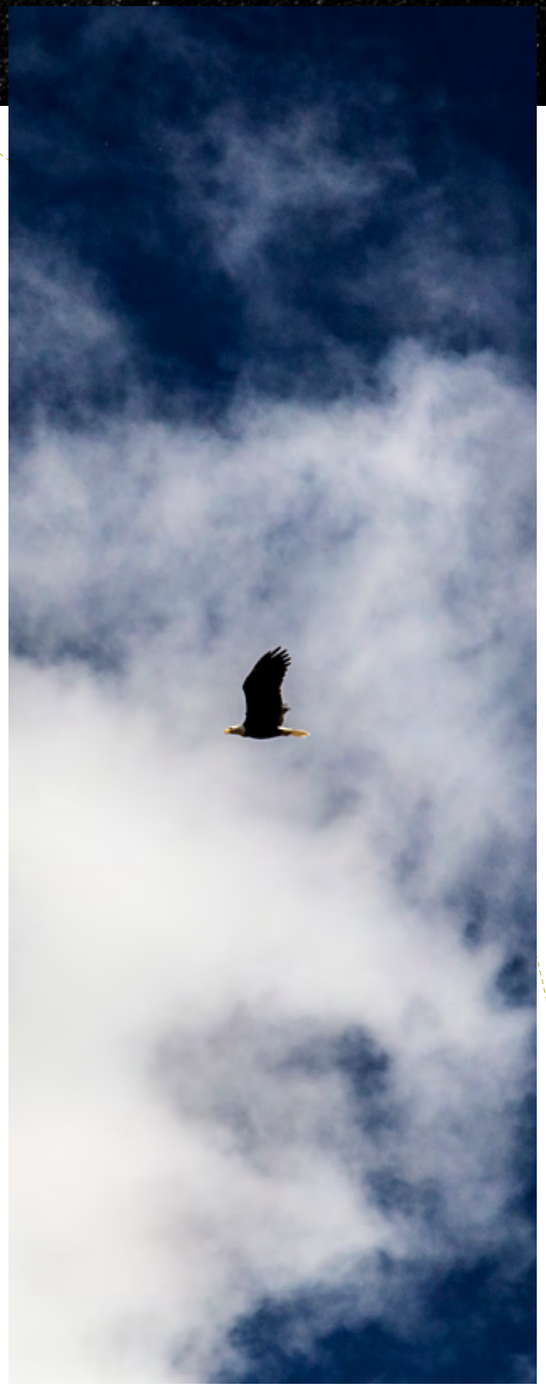


Waters be quantified in order to authentically describe the fundamental importance these relationships have to the overall wellbeing and cultural integrity of Indigenous womxn? Where can the wisdoms and embodied teachings of Indigenous womxn address what Manuel describes as the "struggle between two ideals of the earth-commodification and life source (Manuel, 1974, pp.6); especially when "the current system does not allow us to define the process of our own healing" (Goodyear-Ka'opua, 2014, pp.178)? For many Indigenous communities, ceremonial life is the backbone of community governance, and ceremonies flow from living relationships to Lands and Waters. Jacob claims that in order to enact authentic resurgence models of liberatory praxis, Indigenous communities need to "strengthen our ceremonies. We need to go back to the old ways of living healthier, being more in touch with the Land. All life is sacred" (2013, pp. 85).

When asked about their relationship to Land and well-being, many participants reflected on the roles that ceremony has in their lives, and how their ceremonies are embedded in relationship to the Land and Waters.

"You know going to ceremony means to have it and to be on the Land. That is wellness, having ceremony and going to ceremony and being really grounded in that and doing what I need to do for that day; whether that's smudging or making a little offering for the ones that I missed seeing or actually you know going to our ceremonies that we have in the summertime...It can be any of those things like those are that that contributes to to my well-being" (Sherri Pooyak. Nehiyaw).





Co-researcher W̱SÁNEĆ/Lekwungen Beangka Elliot describes how her cultural teachings regards the Land and Waters as familial relations or kin. In this way, she recognizes that she belongs to the Land/Waters in the same way that she belongs to her family, Nation and community. Her conscious belonging and kinship to these networks provides a pathway for her to embody her own teachings through the ways she enacts governance in her everyday relationships to self and others. She says:

"Self-love and acceptance is rooted in everyday acts of consent. The Land is sacred. So, you are sacred. When we learn that we are from the Land we can learn how the Land teaches us consent and how consent from Land teaches us relationship to self and others. In this way, we are fully embodied in culture (worldview) in teachings with medicine, plants. Respect for Land, place and context; on the land is consent work, how do we honour the land (prayer humility gift song) lack of consent for lands translates to lack of consent on Indigenous bodies."

Elliott offers a framework to enact everyday acts of consent as an ethics within relational accountability. When asked about what ways relationship to Land/Water feels most meaningful, many co-researchers reflected on the roles that ceremony has in their lives.

And beyond the ability to hold space for good relations to others, the Land also offers a framework for how we treat ourselves or reflect back on our own personal growth, challenges and well-being; just as described by Nehiyaw co-researcher Angela Poundmaker Cooper:

"Its funny but I don't really use the same principles of respect I have for land and water towards my own body. I could draw a lot of parallels between that and how for example, I hate seeing litter, and when people leave their garbage around, in beautiful places, but theres been a lot of times in my life when I've been abused in sexual ways, where I wasn't using that same mentally of care for my own body and own self. I've felt really angry about that, because its kind of one of those things ere, wouldn't it be nice, if you were just born with that sense of self, knowing what you deserved, knowing your threshold of boundaries and healthy love - what does that look like? So, I think my relationship to land has been one of the main things that has helped me through the most difficult experiences in my life. I've had a lot of other spiritual experiences out on the land, and with medicines, that are powerful, I don't have words for. They don't make sense in a western way, they don't make sense in a western, analytical or logical way, because spirit doesn't act like that. Spirit is intangible and exists in a very fluid way that the rigidity of colonialism cant understand....and I think that that respect for Land I have is also respect I have for my own home, I like being clean,

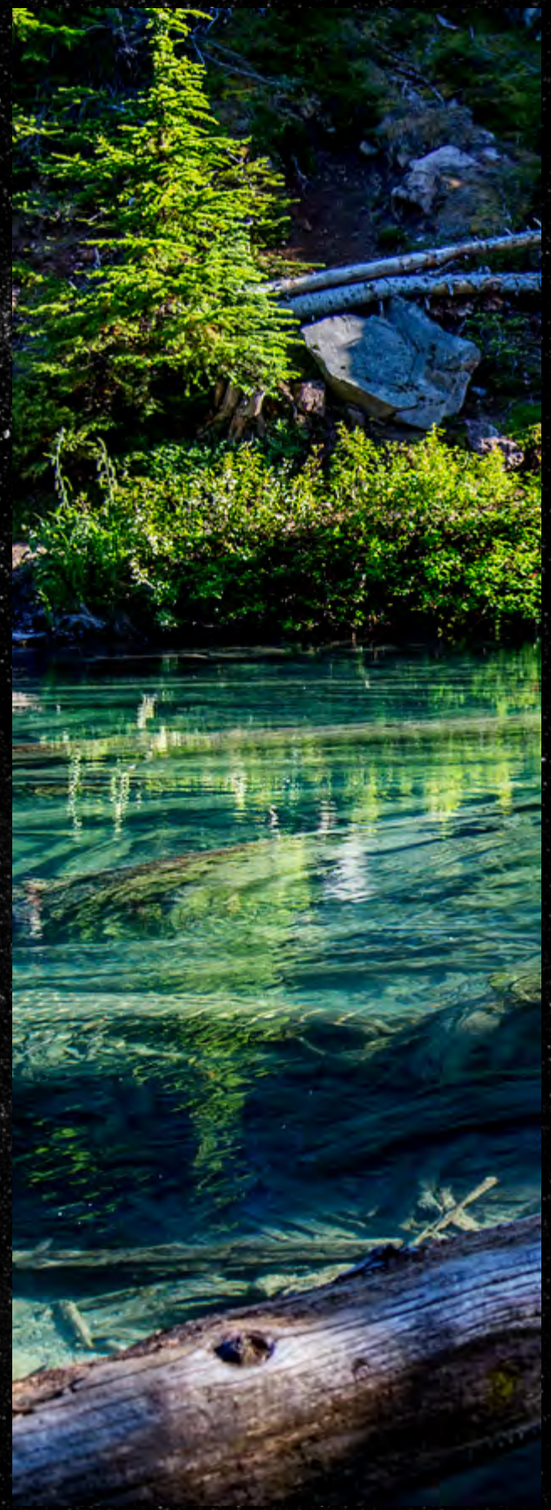
I like being safe, I like things to look nice and orderly because it helps me have inner peace of mind when my outer world is not in chaos. there are a lot of parallels there, and I can see why often when my body was not being respected, how that hurt me in the deepest place that it could- which is my spirit and my heart".

Another participant echos the teachings shared above in recognizing the importance of making time and space to enter into personal ceremony for their wellbeing and self-care. They share the importance in:

"making sure that I give myself time for the physical ceremony and when I am on my moon time to take care extra care myself to make sure that I am not over exerting myself to make sure that I'm feeding myself in really good ways, whether that be you know through physical sustenance or through how I relate to people and making sure that I'm giving myself those kinds of things. To celebrate that connection that I have to to Creation" (Estrella Whetung, Anishinaabe/Lucbanin).

The reflections on well-being in relationship to Land through ceremony reveals that personal experiences of wellness reflect feelings of connection and relationship to the world around them. Another participant says,

"Like when I am in ceremony, many of our ceremonies in the prairies, or across different peoples, like Ojibwe, Cree or Haudenosaunee have ceremonies like the Full Moon or fasting ceremonies that are very connected to Our our non-human relatives. And I felt that spiritual nourishment has been really good grounding and bringing me back and also just lessening that focus on self. Like that's kind of the intent of some ceremonies or just the natural thing that happens and they're very connected to you know full moon connect to the moon connected to water. You know that fasting ceremony connected to. That, you know having that space to find gratitude again for the land for water and for all of Creators like gifts of sustenance. And then I've also felt a sense of well-being when I'm in a more prayerful state. And I find not truly being able to access a more prayerful state when I am in non-human spaces, not urban spaces. So you know quieter spaces. Yeah when I'm like Im speaking about ceremony as well not just water but also fire as well, has always been an essential part and ceremony on the Land. And these teachings give a place for you to let go, a place to find strength in the ways that I've been taught, to use medicines to work through certain things." (Emilee Gilpin, Nehiyaw-Michif)



The model of Indigenous wellness governance reflects both personal and community practices that is grounded in Indigenous Land-based cultural teachings and offers frameworks for regenerative individual healing and collective well-being. It is clear from the teachings of the participants, that personal wellness and community well-being are woven into the fabric and, furthermore determine the integrity, of individual and community governance practices.

Indigenous paradigms of governance and political agency can no longer be divorced from discourse and personal experiences of wellness, well-being, health and healing. Braided together in non-separable entities, the experiences of individual healing, community strength and governance practices form a breathing relationship which extends out of meaningful relationship to Land and Waters.

Spirit and Culture, Creative Self-Becoming, Relational Accountability and Kitaskinow I pi Kiskinohomakoya. Four teachings added to our basket of learning.

Each teaching serves as a pathway towards individual and community oriented governance practice required for efforts of Indigenous liberatory praxis and spiritual vitality. They are designed to reflect the spaces between subjective cultural and linguistic group differences and personal experiences of Indigeneity. While the themes represent the most common themes presented across research data, they are not all-representing, as Indigenous experience and embodied knowledge throughout time is vast, complex, dynamic and ever-evolving. While presented in four different categories, the co-researchers invite for us to reflect through a lens of interconnectivity, inter-being and inter-belonging. One theme can not be severed from another, rather the experiences, knowledges and voices shared breathe through the meta-themes in a natural and unconfined manner. Mussel (qtd in Stewart et al. 2017) writes that understanding the world through a holistic means regards individual experiences as being absolutely interdependent and intertwined with the experiences and wellbeing of all our relations.

Holistic health is the vision most First Nations peoples articulate as they reflect upon their future. At the personal level this means each member enjoys health and wellness in body, mind, heart and spirit. Within the family context, this means mutual support of each other... From a community perspective it means leadership committed to whole health, empowerment, sensitivity to interrelatedness of past, present, and future possibilities, and connects between cultures. (2005, p.26).

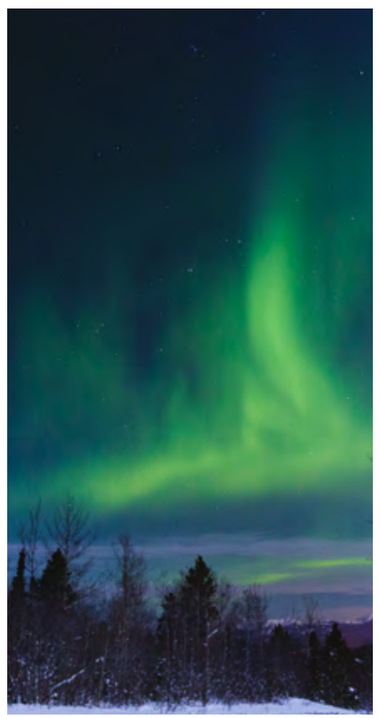
This resistance is represented in Maracle's articulation of women leadership through narration, story and art, Simpson's description of womxn leadership through quiet acts of resistance and motherhood paradigms, Anderson's call for womxn leadership through protecting the rights of water, or Hunt's insights towards womxn leadership through body governance and safe sex work (Maracle, 1988; Anderson, 2011, 2014; Simpson, 2011; Hunt, 2013). The kitchen table paradigm situates these everyday acts of resurgence in the communities, home territories and homes of Indigenous women, locating them in optimal positions for meaningful leadership within decolonization and resurgence (Simpson, 2011; Harjo, 2012). Many Indigenous women occupy positions of leadership within areas of community health and body governance. Due to the fact that so many women and families experience violence against the physical body, Indigenous leadership is exhibited within organized efforts to reclaim, restore and honour the ways in which Indigenous women govern their bodies.

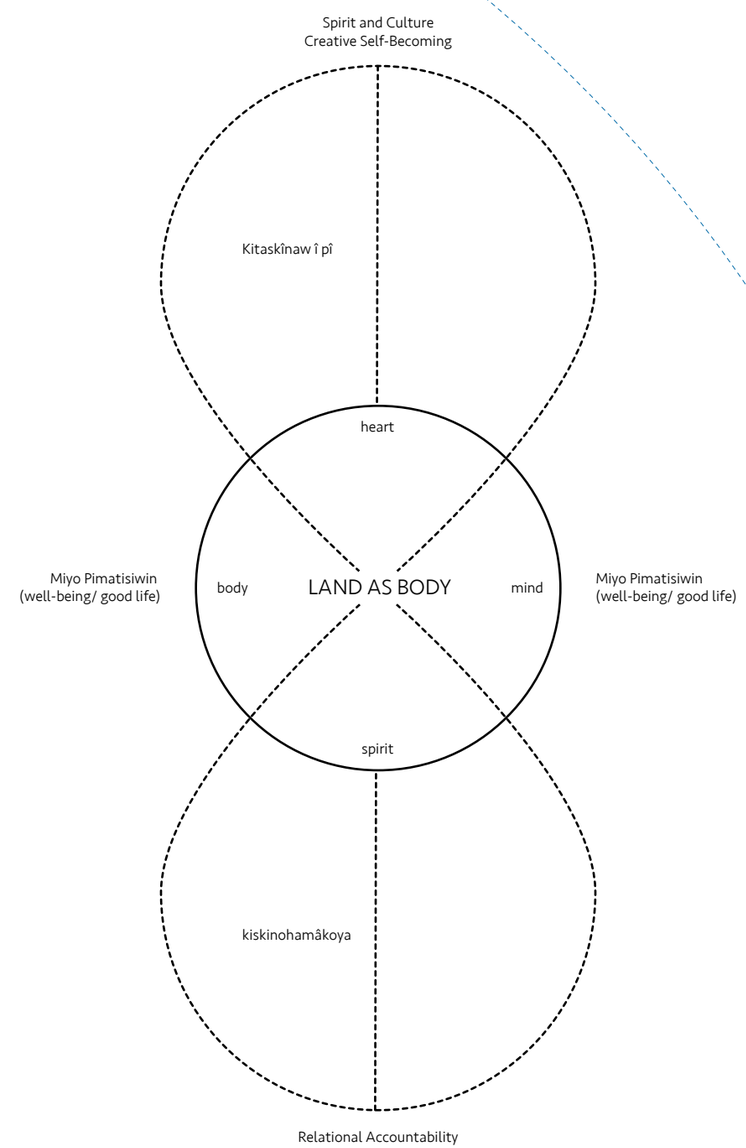
It can only be through an experienced or embodied practice of personal wellness that Indigenous womxn can uphold community responsibilities and enact governance across community and National levels. Indigenous gover-

nance is determined by the well-being and health of Indigenous womxn. Furthermore, the prioritization of Land-Water-based healing practices can not be divorced from political acts of personal emancipation and community liberation from the stronghold of colonial enterprise. Wellness flows into governance flows into well-being flows into political agency flows into healing flows into self-determination flows into health flows into responsibilities flows into ceremony flows into decolonization flows into self-actualization flows into community cultural protocol flows into embodied governance. All flows from the Land and Waters.

Indigenous Governance is enacted on home territories and waters through efforts of food sovereignty, economic sustenance, revitalized medicines and material management. Indigenous womxn embody their home Lands and Waters, and therefore the body is Land. Situating Body as Land supports efforts in personal acts of agency within the framework of wellness and well-being as it asks the questions: "If our bodies are extensions of the Land/Waters, how do you embody your governance practices? Of self-determination? Of relationship? Of sexuality? Of Health, healing and well-being?" Recognizing body as a site of governance allows for a personally defined practice of governance determined by each subjective individual. To recognize the body as Land/Water, recognizes that in order to uphold respect, sanctity and reverence for the Lands and Waters which raised us, we must also assess our own embodiments in the same regard. A sacred entity to protect, to respect, to love.

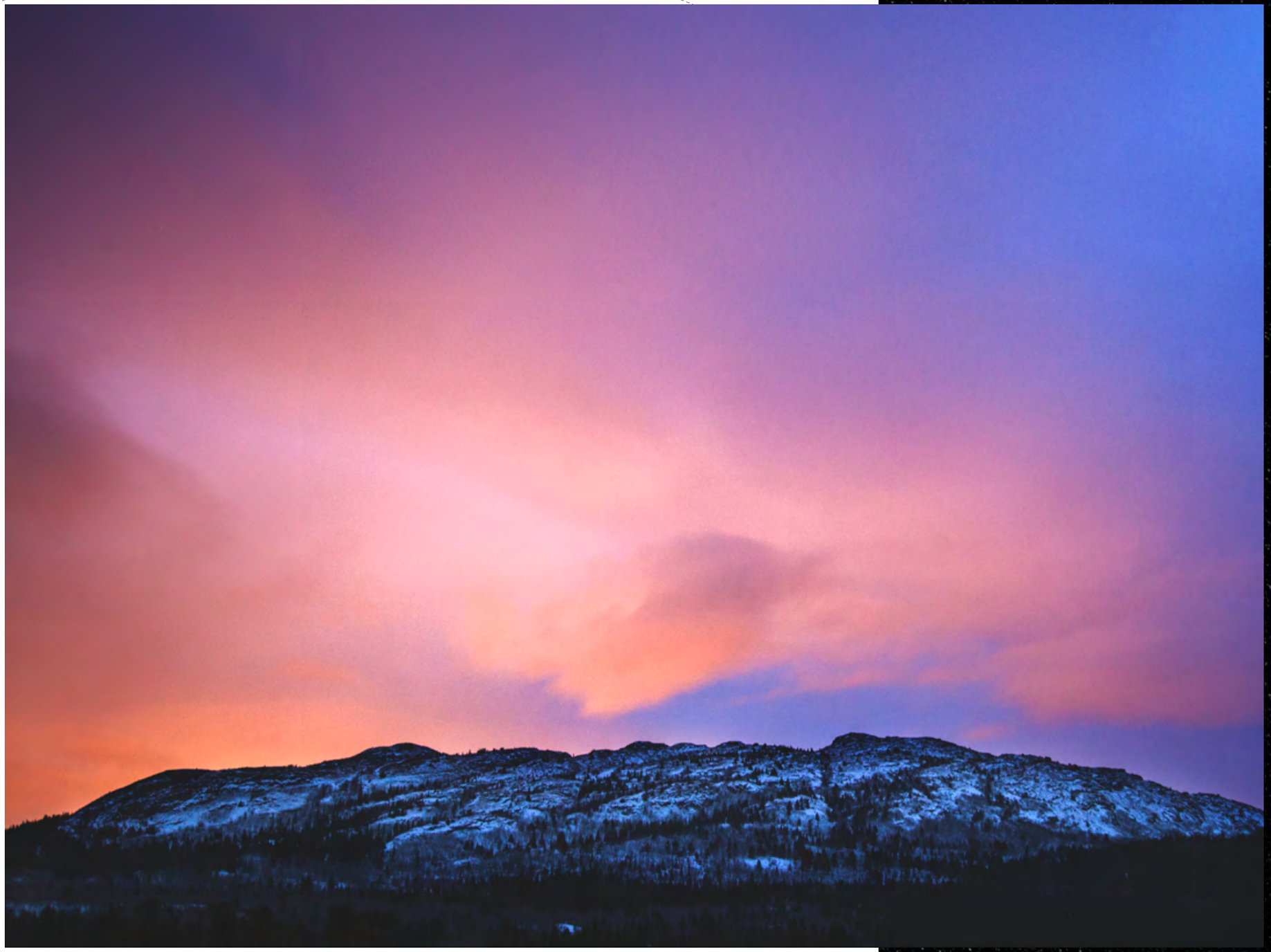
Situating the discourse of governance within the personal land-scape of the body allows for each mental, emotional, physical and spiritual body the space to reflect upon their own abilities, gifts and differences and assess how they can best promote their own agency and community responsibilities.

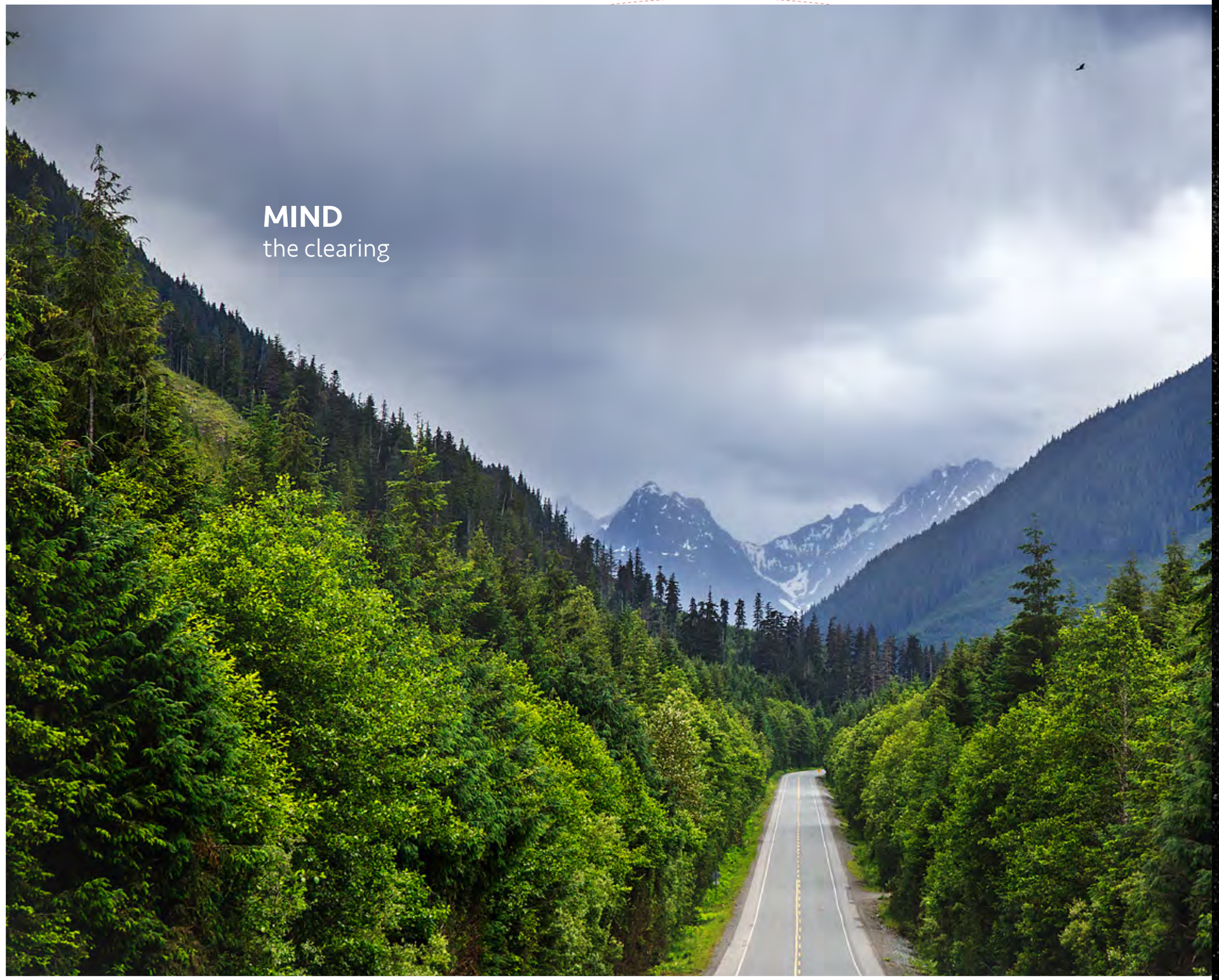




LAND AS BODY - COMMUNITY BASKET

This section is to offer tools to inspire personal and shared reflections regarding the ways in which we each practice and embody healing, wellness and governance. The different sections offer simple reflection questions and guided mindfulness practices to nourish you own community wellness in your own homelands and waters.




MIND
the clearing

intention:

Our mind is like a body of sweet water. Clear Water. One small movement at the edge of the water reverberates out into the entire body- rippling it's presence into the entire body. Sometimes our minds can be stormy, loud and tumultuous. Sometimes our minds can be like a calm pond or refuge. This section offers small daily practices and reflections to support and calm our mind-bodies.

activity:

This activity is meant to help clear the mind. It can be done alone, or in a group setting, with someone reading out the following text.

Clear Mind

Sit comfortably. If you can, sit outside on the Land, or against a tree.

Take a deep breath. Imagine the breath traveling up from your source/womb/centre, up through your diaphragm, chest, and through the top of your head.

Take ten slow deep breaths: imaging and visualizing fresh and new air moving through each space of your body .

Exhaling out stale old air from your body

Breathing in vitality

Breathing out what you do not need

Visualize your body as a channel or pathway:

moving deep energy (indigo or dark blue colour) from the Land up through the top of your head - and imagining cosmic light energy (bright white light) energy from the stars/Spirit World traveling down through the top of your head and into the earth.

Bring your awareness to your mind.

Just notice what it is doing: like a body of water. Is it chaotic? Is it calm? Are there waves?

As you breathe, imagine your mind-water calming down. Imagine a soft breeze come over the water. Imagine you are in a canoe - sitting on the water, and watch it as it becomes still. Like smooth lake water at dawn. A beautiful mist rises from the water as you pull your paddle through. Release what you do not need. This is your mind. A place of calm refuge. A still lake at dawn.

Come back to your breath.

Inhale: vitality
Exhale: Release

With each breath

Release any weight you are carrying, negative energy or anxiety to the Land with Love You can say: "I release what I do not need, to the Land with Love"

Try to stay in this place of mindfulness for ten deep breaths - You can come back to this simple practice wherever and whenever you need.

Reflection Questions:

1) What does your mind feel like when you first notice it?

2) Do you find it easy or difficult to imagine and visualize it becoming calm?

3) Do you notice anyone or anything else present with you in your canoe?

4) Can you visualize yourself as a channel of light energy?

5) Are there other visualizations that feel more authentic to you?

Dedication:

Your mind is clear water.

You have the ability to choose what can enter and exit your mind. You can give yourself permission to set boundaries

and say “No. You are not welcome into my mind today” or “Yes. You are welcome into my mind today”.

You have full authority and governance over your mind.

When you are overwhelmed, come back to this practice - come back to the Land/Waters.

You are welcome to journal your experiences and what you notice after you meditate in this practice.

Each time you return to this practice, you will have a different experience: and the more you practice, perhaps the easier it will become to calm your mind.

This is your practice!

May you cultivate a clearing practice that best serves you.

BODY
the grounding

intention:

This practice is to re-centre our physical bodies to the energy and source of the Land. It includes a visualization practice and helps the physical body release tension and stress.

activity:

Find a place where you feel connected to the Land. Choose an object to hold in your hand: Perhaps a stone, leaf, pinecone or medicine.

Sit comfortably or Lay comfortably. If you can, sit outside on the Land, or against a tree; or in this exercise lay on the ground on your back.

Take a deep breath. Imagine the breath traveling up from your source/womb/centre, up through your diaphragm, chest, and through the top of your head.

Take ten slow deep breaths: imaging and visualizing fresh and new air moving through each space of your body exhaling out stale old air from your body breathing in vitality breathing out what you do not need

Visualize your body as a channel or pathway:

moving deep energy (indigo or dark blue colour) from the Land up through the top of your head - and imagining cosmic light energy (bright white light) energy from the stars/Spirit World traveling down through the top of your head and into the earth.

Body as Land -

Notice the weight of the object in your hand. Acknowledge its presence. As you visualize yourself as a channel, feel the weight of the Land beneath you. Feel the Land hold you.

Bring your awareness to your toes. Relax your toes and bring the following phrase into your mind "I release. I let go. The Land holds me".

Bring your awareness to your legs, Relax the weight of your legs into the Land below.

"I release. I let go. The Land holds me".

Bring your awareness into your pelvis. Relax and let go any weight in the pelvis and hips.

"I release. I let go. The Land holds me".

Bring your awareness into your diaphragm, ribs and chest. Relax any tension in these areas.

"I release. I let go. The Land holds me".

Bring your awareness to your shoulders, neck and jaw. Release any tension you hold here- let go.

"I release. I let go. The Land holds me".

Bring your awareness to you ears, corners of your mouth, eyes and top of your head. Release and relax these areas.

"I release. I let go. The Land holds me".

Feel the weight of your body held by the Land.

You are safe. You can let go.

Stay here for as long as you need.

When you are ready, slowly bring your awareness back to your toes, legs, pelvis... wiggle your toes, invite slow movement into your body as your travel awareness back up towards the top of your head.

When you are ready- open your eyes turn over on your side and slowly come up to seated position.

Visualize your body as a channel of light. Breathe deeply, and enter into your day.

Reflection Questions:

1) Where do you notice you hold the

most amount of tension in your body?

2) Do you notice any colours or other visualizations in this practice?

3) Some days are easier to let go than others: are there certain things that help you to let go?

Dedication:

Your body is Land. Your home-lands and waters are sacred; and so are you.

In the same ways you care for the Land- you can care for yourself!

This practice is to support you in re-aligning your body to the energy and frequency of the Land. When we feel re-centred we can engage with the world around us in a healthier way. Everything you need to feel centred in your self is in the Land. This is your practice, cultivate it in a way that feels authentic to you.

HEART
the centring

intention:

This practice is to calm our nervous systems. It includes brain-tapping, visualization and breath work. This helps restore the energy we give out to the world and replenish our bodies ability to self-regulate and re-align balance.

Cortice Tapping or Emotional freedom technique (EFT):

A practice that consists of tapping with your fingertips on specific meridian points while talking through traumatic memories and a wide range of emotions.

activity:

Sit comfortably on a chair with your feet planted on the ground.

First Sequence:

Place one hand on the top of your head, and with the finger-tips of your other hand, begin tapping (about 20 x per area) along the following areas:

- Chest (sternum)
- Underarms (armpits)
- Collarbone
- Throat

Second Sequence:

Place your hand at the top of your head, and begin to follow a meridian line that travels from the back of your head (spine) to your forehead (back-to-front). Move your resting hand forward as you travel up this tapping sequence:

- Top of your spine (bottom of you head)
- Back of your skull
- Towards the top of your head
- Frontal skull
- Forehead

Third Sequence:
With both hands lightly tap the following areas:
- Chin /jawline
- Cheek-bones
- Under-eyes
- Forehead

Heart-Centred:

After tapping, use your hands to massage your limbs as if you were brushing your energy through your body towards your heart. Cowichan and Tsartlip Elder May Sam shares teachings that when we are emotionally unbalanced or in pain, our hearts are scattered. By brushing our bodies towards heart-centre, we help our hearts come back together and can feel more grounded (permission was given to share this teaching, January 2019).

Reflection Questions:

1) Are there certain things that cause stress in your life?

As you tap, mentally say "I release ____ _____and balance my nervous system"

2) You can say to yourself, "I am safe. I am loved" as you tap.

3) Reflect upon things in your life that contribute to your sense of person balance. Are there things that create barriers to your sense of personal balance?

Dedication:

Our natural state of being is one of balance, calm, and clarity. As Indigenous Womxn, we face exhaustive impediments to our wellness through state violence, racism, emotional labor, lateral violence and violence inflicted upon the Land and Waters.

Sometimes, we need physical support to re-align our nervous systems and re-centre ourselves to a place of heart-centred being. It is easy to feel like we are alone, isolated in our pain, mentally broken or emotionally exhausted. Your natural state of being is one of centred-clarity, balance and love. Remember this. Know this. Believe this. May this practice, among others be an additional to your self-care took kit!

SPIRIT
the cleansing

intention:

Water is life. Water is medicine. When one asks for the consent to receive medicine, and permission to enter into a good relationship with water, then we are truly healed. This practice is to help re-centre a mindful relationship to and with Water as Medicine.

activity:

A simple yet meaningful practice is to cultivate the habit to pray into water before drinking and or bathing in it. This can be whatever feels right to you, perhaps in your own language and or own words. As an example, when I drink water I always say: "Sacred Water make me whole, Sacred Water bless my soul".

This can also take place when you bathe in water. Be sure to offer gratitude and love to water, as water as relative will hold whatever energy you offer. Water is medicine and this is a medicine that is always available to you when you open your heart and mind to it.

Reflection Questions:

1) Reflect upon a daily prayer or phrase you can use when you drink water.

2) What is one way that you can cultivate a mindful and loving relationship to Water?

3) Water will help remove any energy or negative weight you may be carrying; what are some ways that we can cultivate relationships based on reciprocity - and in turn care for waters?

Dedication:

As womxn, we are governed by water, who is in turn governed by the Grandmother Moon. One practice that can also support our conscious connection to water is that of placing Water out under the full moon. When we offer prayers to water, it in turn heals us. You are water. Your blood, your tears, your rivers. You are Water. You are pure light. You belong to water. When you need to cleanse- go to the waters. They are always there waiting for you.

CLOSE THE CIRLCE

When you have completed one or any of these practices, take time to close the circle with conscious gratitude. The Land, the Waters, the plants and stars all conspire for your healing. They conspire for you to exist at your fullest potential and highest self. You are not alone. You are surrounded by your guides and they love you.

Whatever that means to you, and however your culture teaches you, make space to offer gratitude.

Your Body is Land
Your Spirit is Water
You are Sacred.

Hiy Hiy

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