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Are We Seeking Pimatisiwin or Creating Pomewin? Implications for Water Policy

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Abstract

The purpose of this discussion is to describe the worldview and sacred relationship of the Cree people in Alberta, as well as how colonial policy has created despair (*pomewin*) in Aboriginal communities and a state of disconnectedness from the water. It concludes with the presentation of a framework for the development of policies that seek to repair the relationship between Aboriginal people and mainstream society – with the potential to create the good life, broadly defined (*pimatisiwin*) for all Albertans (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). This discussion is based upon the findings of a three-year research project entitled “The Sacred Relationship”. The goals of the project were three-fold: to describe the Aboriginal People of Alberta’s sacred relationship with water, to articulate the Indigenous science practices of Aboriginal people, and to find common ground between Western and Indigenous science.

Keywords

water, Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation, sacred relationship, water policy

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Are We Seeking Pimatisiwin or Creating Pomewin? Implications for Water Policy¹

Canadian policy is a reflection of society's worldview and the values that arise from that perspective. The Canadian government's current water policy statement refers to freshwater as an undervalued natural resource that has been historically mismanaged and abused (Canada, 1987). The overall objective of the federal water policy is "to encourage the use of freshwater in an efficient and equitable manner consistent with the social, economic, and environmental needs of present and future generations" (p. 3). This will be accomplished primarily through a constellation of strategies that promote scientific leadership, awareness building, legislation, and the increased value of water within Canadian society. One such policy statement pertains to First Nations peoples and water stating that:

Water is of special value as a sustaining force for the essentials of life for Canada's native people. In recent years, native people have demonstrated they are prepared to assert their interest in, as well as participate in, managing water resources. In this way, they are taking steps to protect their distinctive way of life and to determine their own destiny. (p. 26)

The policy goes further, indicating that the Federal Government of Canada must improve its understanding of the First People's commitment to the water.

This is a departure from the legacy of colonial policy that has been thrust upon the First People of Canada. In this paper, we will discuss how settler policies were formulated to shatter the interconnected worldview of Aboriginal people, attacking their ability to self-determine family, governance, and economic structure. Government policies have undermined the ability of knowledge keepers to pass on their understanding of Natural Law and the rules that govern all relationships and, hence, interrupted the flow of knowledge between generations. The impact of colonial policies has been devastating; many Indigenous people, families, and communities are still mired in social, political, and psychological issues that are complex and difficult to resolve. In addition, the relationship between the People and the environment has been attacked, and the ability to teach the process for building and renewing a sacred relationship with water has been compromised. In 2009, BearPaw Research, a division of Native Counselling Services of Alberta began a three-year research project investigating the Aboriginal People of Alberta's sacred relationship with water, articulating the Indigenous science practices of the Aboriginal people and seeking common ground between Western and Indigenous science. We have found many instances where Aboriginal Elders and knowledge keepers have corroborated the Canadian government's policy statements about the state of our collective relationship with water and how we misuse it. There is also common ground between the goals of the Federal Water Policy pursuit of excellence in scientific leadership and our research endeavours; we have sought to understand the philosophy and corresponding science that the Aboriginal people in Alberta have used for millennia and how this scientific paradigm can be mobilized to help solve complex water issues that Albertans currently face.

¹ Note: This discussion is written in English, the language of the colonizer in Canada. Thus, the terms used to refer to the people who were here before European settlers will be in the language of the colonizer. We chose to use the term "Indian" when referring to the policies between 1763 and 1982 for consistency, as that was the term used in all of the legislation to which we refer. In addition, many Elders use the term Indian in their interviews and we have respectfully left those quotes unchanged. In the Federal Water Policy, the government uses the term Native, which we have left unchanged in the quotes. We have also included quotes from authors that use the term First Nation. In the rest of the paper, we used the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, and First Peoples interchangeably to promote flow and readability in the paper. All of these terms have colonial connotations and thus can be problematic, but they are the words available in the English language. When we refer to specifically Cree worldview, we were finally able to use a term that was specific and contextually appropriate. In addition, we used Cree terms to describe important concepts within this worldview.

In this article, we will use the findings of this research to describe the worldview and sacred relationship of the Cree people in Alberta. We will look at how colonial policy has created despair (pomewin) in Aboriginal communities and a state of disconnectedness from the water. Finally, we will discuss how policies can be developed to create resilience instead. Indeed, policies that seek to repair the relationship between Aboriginal people and mainstream society have the power to create the good life, broadly defined (pimatisiwin) for all Albertans.

Ethics as Protocol

When seeking knowledge within the Indigenous worldview, the first step is to observe protocol. For the Cree, protocol is stated as “kihceyhtakosowin,” which means “the act of showing respect.” This first step is critical in an interconnected worldview; it is the acknowledgement that learning occurs in the context of relationship. Before learning can be commenced, we must first ensure that we begin or renew the relationship between the learner and the teacher in a good way. Respect is shown through the presentation of a “gift” to a teacher when asking for help. The gift is a type of sacrifice the seeker makes, and it demonstrates that (a) the request is important; (b) the seeker understands that something must be given up to receive help; and (c) the seeker holds the knowledge the teacher possesses in high esteem. The presentation of the protocol is also an acknowledgement of the time and effort the teacher has dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. Observing this protocol, therefore, affirms commitment to – and enhances – the learning process.

Throughout the research project, respect protocol was offered to all research participants who represent Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, and Stoney Elders, leaders, scientists, and knowledge keepers, as well as Western scientists and leaders. The protocol offerings were carefully chosen for each individual. We then smudged the protocol offering before we presented them and were careful to first state our gratitude, humility, and willingness to learn. After our protocol was accepted, we were then able to begin our interviews or teaching circles. During one Teaching Circle of Cree Elders (TCE) (focus group, 2007)², the Elders responded to the offering of respect protocol, describing what it meant to them to receive it:

I am very grateful for the offering that is placed upon me. It is a high honour and respect when you give an offering when you are seeking and asking for – in that way I pray with this offering for guidance to speak about the proper things that are needed here for our people. So that is how I take this offering. I work for the Creator. For me I just want to say that part – I respect this and I thank you for that proper protocol. (TCE, focus group, 2007)

In the Indigenous research process, respect protocol also serves as a means of acquiring informed consent. When the protocol offering is accepted, it signifies a profound commitment to the knowledge seeker. When addressing a Teaching Circle of Elders, one of the researchers explained:

In the [non-Aboriginal] world, people have to sign a paper to give permission to record on camera. In the traditional way when we make an offering and an offering is accepted – people don’t understand that that is our consent – traditionally. I think it’s one of the differences of our laws – when we do research in Indian country or when we ask a question of an Elder – when they accept an offering, that’s giving consent to give knowledge. (TCE, focus group, 2007)

The Elders responded in affirmation by saying:

It’s very important to do that – to make that gesture to give a gift and to receive a gift. In this case, the gift of knowledge and the sharing of that story.... When protocol is done, like in this case, it is opening the door for that relationship – to be open and of giving – sharing. And that’s what is very important in our traditions – more important than me signing a piece of paper. Because a paper is a

² All references to data collected are described in the method section.

paper to us – it is something that was brought to us – it was foreign. In our way this is what guides us. I think you have done the proper thing – we are willing to share as much as we can with respect to the questions that you have brought before us. (TCE, focus group, 2007)

In their response, the Elders further clarified the role of the respect protocol in Indigenous research; the spiritual dimension of the offering brings a strict requirement of accountability both to the knowledge seeker (who must use the knowledge in the appropriate ways) and to the teacher (who after accepting tobacco must follow through on his or her teaching obligation). In this way, respect is realised by the spiritual connectedness between the seeker and the teacher, as well as between the individuals and the spirit world. The Elders described the seriousness of this commitment:

I have many times accepted one cigarette and travelled a couple hundred of miles because of that cigarette. Not knowing what was on the other end – only I know my commitment was when I took that cigarette. It is an unwritten thing – you have made a commitment to it and you follow up on it. And when you finish that ceremony or whatever is required of your service – only then is the commitment complete. (TCE, focus group, 2007)

In summary, there were five aspects to the offering of protocol in this research project: (a) protocol acknowledges the essential nature of relationships in the learning process; (b) it allows the researcher entrance into the knowledge seeking process; (c) it is required to ask permission to seek knowledge; (d) it is the process whereby informed consent of the teacher is acquired; and (e) it is the bridge that promotes accountability and unity between the teacher and the seeker in the research process.³ Thus, respect protocol provided the strict ethical framework within which research and learning can occur.

Methods

From the outset of this project, even before the research proposal was completed, the research team made a commitment to a research process that was grounded in an Indigenous worldview and guided largely by a group of four Cree Elders. Based upon the previous research experience of team members, we understood that this meant employing and deepening our understanding of *wahkohtowin*, a term referring to kinship in Cree, but also to the doctrine or rules that guide our relationships with all living things. Elder Fred Campiou described the interconnected, relational nature of *wahkohtowin*:

Our relationship with our mother the earth, the water, with all of the different plants, medicine, the herbs, the animals, the birds, all the four legged being[s]. Everything we encounter in our lives there is a relationship that we are always reminded of and are mindful about. We see ourselves belonging to the entire existence of our world; we are not separated from anything. *Wahkohtowin* talks about embodying that entire holistic idea of how we exist. (Interview, 2012)

We understood that to explore the sacred relationship Indigenous people have with water we needed to understand our *wahkohtowin* with water and the natural environment.

The research team had an existing learning relationship with a core group of Cree Elders, which was renewed and strengthened throughout the current research project; therefore, the first action undertaken by the research team was to ask the Elders to reconvene the earlier teaching circle. After observing protocol, we asked for their guidance regarding how to proceed in the project and also to share their knowledge on the nature of the sacred relationship between Cree people and water. The Elders decided that, as part of the process, we also needed to hold a pipe ceremony on the second day of the teaching circle – to ask the spirit world to provide the team with help and guidance throughout the research process. Hence, these Elders were

³ This is a modification of the three aspects of protocol put forward by Couture, Parker, Couture, and LaBoucane (2001).

our project advisors and they shared information for the team to reflect upon and to consider in the creation of the plan for data collection.

All of the methods employed throughout this project, therefore, flowed from our prior understanding of wahkohtowin, as well as the first teaching circle. These methods included the following:

- Teaching Circles. The research team hosted teaching circles with the core group of Cree Elders: William Dreaver, Issac Chamakees, George Brernton, and Fred Campiou. Two circles were held before this project began, one in November 2007, and another in March 2008. They are included here because each circle built upon the teachings of the previous circle. The first circle held for the Water Research Project was held in January 2010.
- Interviews. Thirty-three interviews were conducted between July 2009 and May 2012. The individuals included Aboriginal people from across Alberta (Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, and Stoney Elders, leaders, scientists, and knowledge keepers) and non-Aboriginal leaders and Western scientists.
- Sharing Circles. Two sharing circles were hosted. The first circle was held with Elders Violet Poitras, Mary Poitras, Percy Potts, and Francis Alexis at Lac St. Anne (Sharing Circle of Elders [SCE], focus group, July 2009) and the second circle with Elders Barb Faichney, Mary Powder, Roy Ahyason, Emma Faichney, Elizabeth Stokes, Celina Harpe, Ed Harpe, Walter Orr, Zachary Powder, Harvey Rolland, and Frances Orr in Fort Mackay, Alberta (SCE, focus group, July 2010).
- Reconciliation Circles. Finally, the research team hosted discussions between several groups of Aboriginal and Western knowledge holders. They included the following: (a) Western water scientist Chris Le, Aboriginal leader Allen Benson, Western water scientist Alexander Zender, and Elder/Cree scientist Fred Campiou (February 2012); (b) Elder Violet Poitras and Western water scientist David Schindler (August 2011); (c) Allen Benson and Albertan political leader Lorne Taylor (October 2011); and (d) Wetlands Scientist Susan Bailey and Cree Scientist Len Benson.

The deliverables for this research include two peer reviewed research papers, the production of evidence-based documentaries, and the development of educational resources for grade school and university students. All participants were recorded using professional video equipment operated by experienced technicians. The resulting data, over 100 hours in total, were transcribed as they were collected. Interviews, circles, and discussions were semi-structured, free-flowing, and guided by both the researchers and the participants, in that the researchers set the focus of the interview and the participants determined the content (Bernard, 1995), without any “a priori categorization” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 653) that might have limited the information the teachers shared.

Further, in the videos we are completing, all individuals who speak will be identified by their name and their affiliation as they wished. For this research article, participant quotes will be presented in two manners. First, any quotes from Teaching or Sharing Circles, as advised by the Teaching Circle of Elders, will be attributed to the collective, rather than an individual, because they are products of the group’s discussion. Thus, such quotes will be followed by a citation to the circle (i.e. TCE, focus group, 2010). Second, any quotes from interviews will be cited using the individual’s name and affiliation.

Thematic data analysis was completed by the co-investigators both individually and as a group. Code identification, labelling, and integration were data-driven (Boyatzis, 1998) and emerged as a result of working extensively with the raw data. In addition, the researchers moved back and forth between data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002), beginning with the 2010 Elder’s Teaching Circle. Finally, the guiding value at the commencement of the project was humility. The research team began by asking the Elders for their advice on how to proceed with the research. Indeed, it was not until the final year of a three-year project that we were able to come back to the Elders with more specific questions; that is to say, we had learned enough to ask the right questions. The research team was also transformed in this process. We have grown individually (personally) and professionally, and our relationships

within the team have been strengthened. The results achieved show a greater depth of learning than if we had not followed this process.

Pre-Contact Worldview

A worldview is the overall perspective from which one sees, experiences, and interprets the world. A society can hold a common worldview, including a collectively held constellation of philosophy, basic assumptions, values, and ethics (Palmer, 1996). This worldview serves as a framework that helps us to understand reality and our place in society, the world, and the universe. Cree beliefs about creation teach that the Creator (wiyoh̄tawimaw) gave the people sacred gifts as a result of a sacred relationship between the people and the Creator. The first gifts were physical in nature and included the people, land, animals, and plants. The second gifts were metaphysical in nature and included the rules and values that guide our many relationships (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). The rules referring to the laws of nature that are unchanging and irrefutable (Natural Laws) are described by Fred Campiou:

The people in our ceremonies express our gratitude to the Creator for the water. The rain that comes to replenish life, the sun that helps make life happen, the wind that makes that life happen. All of these are in the natural order of law. The Creator, through his creation, put down the law – this is the way it will happen. He gave entities, grandfathers, the power to make life work. As a human being, we are part of that – we are linked into that. You can't be separate from it, otherwise you won't exist. We need that connection - that relationship with the natural world... There are laws that govern that world that do not belong to us, that we cannot overpower, we cannot manipulate or even attempt to have any say over. They have their own way. So what we try to do as a people is to fit into that, become a part of it. And not to try to control it – if we ever try that, then we will bring demise to ourselves. (Interview, 2012)

In addition, the people must adhere to the Creator's laws that govern relationships between all things (wahkohtowin) and the laws that direct us to have good relationships between people (miyo-w̄icehtowin). Living within the boundaries of these laws will ensure that the people will feel safe, secure, and able to live "the good life" (pimatisiwin). These laws are informed by, and based upon, the values that were gifted to the people as well. The most common values include the following (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000; LeClaire & Cardinal, 1998):

- Kisew̄at̄isiwin: compassion; loving kindness.
- Tapwewin: speaking the truth with precision and accuracy; honesty.
- Witaskewin: living together in harmony.
- Man̄at̄isiwin: respect.
- Miyotehewin: generosity.
- Tapateyimis̄owin: humility; humbleness.
- T̄ipeyimisowin: self-determination; freedom; liberty.
- W̄ic̄ihitowin: helping one another; having a partnership or friendship; unity.

The spiral in Figure 1 is used here as a symbol of the Cree interconnected worldview and the nature of the relationship between the people and all beings in their world - animate, inanimate, and spiritual (LaBoucane-Benson, 2009). The spiritual dimension, which is common within Indigenous societies globally, is acknowledged as being a significant part of the everyday reality of the Cree. Joe Couture (1991) quoted an anonymous Elder, "there are two things you have to know about being an Indian. One is that everything is alive. Two is that we are all related" (p. 206). This simple statement signals that the spiritual dimension of reality exists and we have a continual responsibility to our reciprocal relationship with it, whether we are hunting, working, playing, or learning.

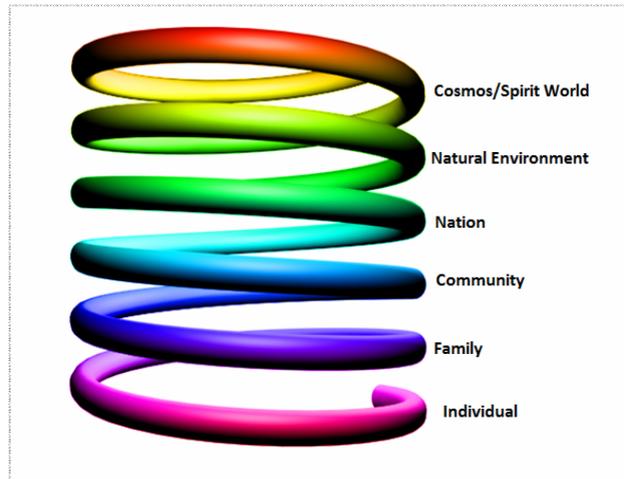


Figure 1. Symbolic representation of Cree interconnected worldview.

The spaces between the rungs of the spiral are equally significant. The spiral is supported, kept beautiful, and kept whole by the strength of the metaphysical gifts from the Creator. By observing the rules of *wahkohtowin*, *miyo-wicehtowin*, and living within the irrefutable Natural Laws, the people keep in place the scaffolding that ensures the spiral moves upward continuously – perfectly – and that we have equality, harmony, and balance in all relationships throughout the spiral. Indeed, this spiral is the actualization of the best possible life we can attain. The on-going act of building, strengthening, and renewing our relationships is, thus, the essence of *miyo-pimatisiwin* – seeking the good life.

The Nature of the Sacred Relationship

The sacred relationship between the Cree and water can only be understood through the relationship between the Creator and the people. Cardinal and Hildebrandt (2000), in working with several Elders in Treaty 6, describe this relationship:

The Cree word “*iyiniw miyikowisowina*” (that which has been given to the peoples) and “*iyiniw saweyihtakosiwin*” (the people’s sacred gifts) are used to describe those special gifts that originate in the special relationship that First Nations peoples have with the Creator and the blessings or gifts that devolve to the peoples collectively and individually from that relationship. (p. 100)

Thus, water is a part of the sacred physical gifts bestowed upon the Cree by the Creator, and through *wahkohtowin* (an aspect of the metaphysical gifts) the Cree were given the rules regarding how they were to build and renew a respectful relationship with water.

During a Teaching Circle of Elders the story of how the Creator bestowed the gift⁴ was shared:

⁴ The Elders were careful to share only what they could, within the rules of Cree pedagogy, about this creation story. To transgress the rules would be to bring negativity to themselves, their children, and their grandchildren. To be learned properly and completely, the reader would have to become a seeker of this knowledge, which is learned through ceremony and apprenticeship.

It makes a lot of sense what we are told about these origins. In particular with water, it's in the [creation] story... It talks about these women, the grandmothers, which were selected or asked by the Creator, which ones will come here to make this world... This happened in the spirit world before this world was made... The first one the Creator asked, he made that one - the Moon Grandmother. Second one, he made into Mother Earth. The third one, he made into Water. That's all the water we see in the world, the oceans, streams, the river. That's the life; there's lots of life in that water. It's a woman, a Grandmother. The fourth one he made into the image of woman you see walking around on earth today. That one to carry life into this world for the Creator; that's what we're born from. (TCE, focus group, 2010)

From this perspective, water is regarded with reverence because it is connected to the people's relationship with the Creator, and it is perceived as a sacred being – a Grandmother in the spirit world, with whom we are to be in relationship. As the Elders described, “water is a very, very powerful element, [a] grandmother and I think if we look at her that way, learn to respect her that way, then we will have life for our children” (TCE, focus group, 2010).

In addition, water is venerated and considered sacred by the people because it is one of the life-giving and life-sustaining gifts that are absolutely necessary for survival. The Elders spoke at length about their regard for water:

Our people had high reverence, still today, high reverence for water - respect for the water. [Pointing to another Elder in the circle] He spoke about the quality of the water and in the old days they used to go and even to have a swim in the pond where they know it was clean. They used to put tobacco in that water and pray for that water and to show respect for that water. That's how much the people had such high regard for the water. (TCE, focus group, 2010)

Many of the Elders also acknowledged the power of water stating, “I talked about the rivers and the streams and the places where the people knew it was safe to cross the river. They didn't just cross anywhere, and when they did they made a prayer for safe passage on that water” (TCE, focus group, 2010). The Elders also taught that the name “Canada” was derived from the Cree word *Kanatan*, which means “pure and clean.”⁵ They stated that, in the past, “the water was pure, the land was pure” (TCE, focus group, 2010). Further, the Elders reflected that, when water is respected, it remains pure, thus, it holds the power to heal the people who are sick and also grow medicines that heal illness:

Wherever it was used, wherever it was accessed, there was always a moment in time when our people would take the time to make that prayer, giving thanks for this beautiful water we were given and this gift. And the medicines that go in the water as well and those ponds – there is medicine there that we use. When you take that water, even to make some tea with it, that medicine comes with that water...and it heals, becomes part of your healing, your system. (TCE, focus group, 2010)

As well, the Elders shared that “the rain would fall on one's back and in our Indian worldview, it was viewed as sacred medicinal water that was there to cleanse” (TCE, focus group, 2010).

Finally, the Elders taught that our bodies are made up of water; therefore, there is no separation between the water and human beings. The sacred water that births our babies is a part of our bodies as well. We are the water, and the water is us; if we respect the water, we are respecting ourselves. To pollute the water is to pollute our bodies, which will eventually put our very survival at risk. The Elders also referred to the sacred water at birth. “In our worldview, we are born from our mother and in the process of bath; it is water that

⁵ For the Cree, cleanliness is an important way of being and a part of everyday life. *Kanacisowin* refers to clean living and *Kanateyimew* refers to an individual with a faultless, pure, unblemished character (LeClaire & Cardinal, 1998).

comes first in that sacredness of given birth” (TCE, focus group, 2010). As well, there are rituals and procedures performed at the birth of a baby.

Even when a child was born, they used that pure, clean water to bathe the child. And it was a healing for the little one; as well when they used to use that water for specific purpose when preparing that child for life - so it depended on water. (TCE, focus group, 2010)

In the Cree way, every child needs to be taught to create respectful relationships with all aspects of creation. This is accomplished by role modelling behaviour to young children and then making ceremonies available that would help young adults garner their own relationship with water. For many Cree people, the fasting ceremony, in particular, the depth of sacrifice made in the ceremony, is a powerful teacher about the sacredness of water. One of the Elders, in a Teaching Circle reflected upon his experiences of fasting:

You know the one time I fasted I remember, the only thing I thought about was water. I never thought about food, I wasn't hungry, I was thirsty... I went eight days one time with no water and no food and I was coming down the hill, sort of like this, floating, about half way I had to stop, I was so tired, even just coming down the hill.... And I stopped and I laid down, this was in the summertime, I laid on that hill like this, I was tired, waiting, and I woke up underneath this vine, it looked like a couple of grapes, they were kind of purplish and I've never seen that before in my life (and I've spent a lot of time in the bush). And I took one of them and I put it in my mouth, as soon as I bite it, it's just water, nothing in there but water. And so, once I drank that, my thirst just went away completely, I never had to have water [in my fast] after that. That day I was just replenished with that one grape-like thing. I went around looking for some more, I couldn't find them. To me that was a message, that time - it was sacred water that was given to me, to give me back that life. (TCE, focus group, 2010)

The fasting ceremony is both a personal experience for the person who is participating in the ceremony (the faster) and a communal experience for the ceremonialists. All the helpers are required to put on the ceremony (which includes help for the actual ceremony, as well as maintaining a camp during the ceremony). The participants are put out onto the land by themselves. In isolation, they will learn about themselves and their environment, which will be accomplished through prayer and meditation. In this way, learning is achieved through a connection with the Creator and the spirit world. George Brereton tells this story:

One fast I went to, the first one, this old man made my [fasting] lodge right by a big red ant hill... and I'm looking at this lodge and I'm shaking my head, why this old man put me there, he knows those things are going to eat the flesh right off me in a few minutes, why would he do that, is he playing a joke on me or what... And I looked back and I seen these ants by the thousands all over. Anyway I moved away from them, I took my stuff like this and I started praying, meditating...and then the next thing I knew, I was doing a pipe ceremony. And as I was doing that pipe ceremony I started thinking about these ants while I'm doing this so I offered that pipe to the leader of the colony, the spirit of that colony so that they could accept me as a visitor, that I didn't come out there to harm them, that rather come there to learn from them. So I finished my pipe, got up, took some tobacco, walked around this ant hill and then I offered tobacco to them and I left and went and got my stuff and ...I stayed four days and four nights there, they never bothered me, they walk all the way around me like this, never once did they walk through where I was, even though they had little paths in there, that's how respect they showed me. (Interview, 2011)

In order to ensure that children understood the sacred relationship with water and would pursue their own understanding of the sacredness of water as adults, the Cree had in place a sophisticated, experiential system of pedagogy that included role modelling, ceremonies, living on the land, and personal sacrifice. In this way, knowledge of the Natural Laws and the understanding of wahkohtowin were passed down from generation to generation, ensuring the survival of the people.

Colonial Policies of Domination and Assimilation

James Tully (2000) defined internal colonization as “the historical process by which structures of domination have been set in place on Turtle Island/North America over the Indigenous peoples and their territories without their consent and in response to their resistance against and with these structures” (p. 37). Tully suggests that internal colonization can be considered in four dimensions:

- (a) The arrival and settlement of European people brought war, pestilence, and foreign disease, leaving Indigenous populations in ruins.
- (b) The taking of all power and authority over Indigenous territory and forcing Indigenous people into small parcels of land that were perceived to be of no use to the colonial government.
- (c) Treaty making and periods of cooperation between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government.
- (d) The establishment of European-based governments on North American soil resulting in the development of legislation (i.e. the Indian Act), policies of domination (i.e. Residential School policies), and the subsequent formation of colonial band councils that are controlled by the Canadian federal governments.

This section of the discussion will focus on the fourth dimension of internal colonization and how legislation and policies have caused chaos in many Aboriginal communities across Canada and, for the Cree, a disruption of the teaching of *wahkohtowin*. The result has been devastating, leaving Indigenous people feeling hopeless, helpless, and powerless to self-determine their future.

The Indian Act

Prior to the tabling of the constitution in 1867, many policies and pieces of legislation created between 1763 and 1867 were enacted and amended, then formed the basis of the Indian Act. The first was the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that clearly distinguished which lands were designated for Indian tribes. It determined that the interest in these lands were held by the collective, rather than by individuals (Canada, 2010), thus acknowledging the Indian Nation as a autonomous political entity and giving rise to the tri-partite relationship between the Crown, the colony, and the Indian Nation. Further, the Crown established that Aboriginal people were under the protection of the Crown (Canada, 2010), and only the Crown could buy or sell Aboriginal lands, creating the process whereby Indian land could be purchased for settlement or development.

Between 1763 and 1867, the notion of Indian Nations as being autonomous political entities began to give way to legislation that focussed on defining who was Indian, as well as the “civilization,” control, and assimilation of Aboriginal people. These included the following:

- In 1828, the first formal Inquiry into Indian Conditions in Canada recommended the need for “Indians in fixed locations where they could be educated, converted to Christianity, and transformed into farmers” (Canada, 1996c, p. 244).
- The Bagot Commission of 1844 recommended that Indians be encouraged to become farmers and tradesmen. To facilitate this process they would be provided with education and agricultural tools instead of gifts and payments. Thus, boarding schools were recommended as a way of providing training for assimilation and fostering Christianity. In addition, the Bagot Commission suggested that government officials maintain control over band membership on reserves and, therefore, define who would or would not receive Treaty payments. The commissioners recommended that those who were ineligible would include “all persons of mixed Indian and non-Indian blood who had not been adopted by the band; all Indian women who married non-Indian men and their children; and all Indian children who had been educated in industrial

- schools” (Canada, 1996c, p. 247). The recommendations made by the Bagot Commission ultimately provided the basis for the development of many aspects of subsequent Acts.
- Two Acts were passed in 1850: an Act for the Better Protection of the Lands and Property of Indians in Lower Canada and an Act for the Protection of Indians in Upper Canada. In these documents the government first attempted to identify who was an “Indian,” thus formally taking away the legal right of Indian Nations to determine their own membership. The term “Indian” was defined with then current notions of race in mind, whereby only a person of Indian blood or married to a person of Indian blood would be considered an Indian (Canada, 1996c, p. 248). As this definition evolved, Indian status and residency rights became associated with the male line.
 - In 1857, the Gradual Civilization Act, an Act to encourage the gradual civilization of Indian tribes in this province and to amend the laws relating to Indians, was passed to introduce the process of enfranchisement, deemed a privilege, whereby Indian men (not women) could become full British subjects and be free from the protected status of being an Indian. While this process was voluntary for a man, his wife and children would be automatically enfranchised with him. The underlying assumptions of this Act were that to have Indian status was to be deemed inferior and that it is the natural desire of all people to work towards assuming a British identity. An assault on the Aboriginal psyche, this Act created an environment whereby only Indians who renounced their communities, cultures, and languages could gain the respect of colonial (the Crown) and later Canadian society. The relationship set out by the Proclamation of 1763 between the Crown, the colonies, and autonomous tribal nations was, thus, transformed by the Act into one of current state goals – those of domination, control, and assimilation over Aboriginal people.
 - The 1860 Indian Lands Act centralized control over all Aboriginal people and their lands to the office of the Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Indian nations were no longer recognized in the new tripartite Crown/dominion/provincial scheme (Canada, 1996b).

In 1876, the first version of Indian Act was passed, bringing together aspects of the past legislation and moving forward an explicit agenda of assimilating Aboriginal people into Canadian society. The Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, 1996c) concluded that:

The transition from tribal nation in the tripartite imperial system to legal incompetent in the bilateral federal/provincial system was now complete. While protection remained a policy goal, it was no longer collective Indian tribal autonomy that was protected: it was the individual Indian recast as a dependent ward – in effect, the child of the state. (p. 255)

As such, the Canadian government expressed its desire to encourage the enfranchisement, education, and “civilization” of the Indian people.

In 1869, the first provision for the election of Chief and Council on Indian Reserves, with very limited power to set bylaws, was set out in an Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian affairs, and an extension of the provisions of the Act 31st Victoria (Makarenko, 2008). This enforced system of government led to the destabilization of family and clan by making them no longer the foundation of economic and political activities (Tully, 2000). Aboriginal women were not allowed to vote in band council elections. The Act also included compulsory enfranchisement for First Nation men, as opposed to being voluntary. Notably, only one First Nation man was enfranchised between 1857 and 1876. In addition, the Act made it law that if an Aboriginal woman married a non-Aboriginal man, she and any children born from this marriage would be excluded from Indian status, thus moving forward the colonial agenda of assimilation (Makarenko, 2008).

The Indian Act was amended in 1884 to protect Indians from their own cultures (Canada, 1996c, p. 267), prohibiting ceremonies, such as the Potlach, the Tamanawas dance, and later the Sundance. A jail term of two

to six months would be given to anyone engaging in or assisting in these ceremonies. In 1918, Indian agents were given the power to prosecute anti-dancing, anti-potlatching provisions (p. 268), acting to suppress the entire ceremony, even though it was only certain aspects of the ceremonies that were criminalized (p. 269). Eventually, Indian agents were allowed to conduct trials wherever they thought necessary; all forms of political protest were criminalized and the Indian agent acted as the final word on justice issues (p. 266). The Indian Act was in no way a fair or equitable piece of legislation; rather, it was an Act to institute internal colonization. Aboriginal people living on reserve could not vote in federal elections until the 1951 amendment to the Indian Act was passed. Aboriginal people could not manage their own reserve lands or moneys and were under the constant supervision of the federally appointed Indian Agent (Canada, 1996c, p. 237). When the first Indian Act was passed it made no reference to the treaties that were in existence or were being currently negotiated (p. 255), and there was no importance attached to the nation-to-nation nature of the treaties (p. 256). Almost every year after the Act was initially passed, amendments were brought forward to adjust the Act to further the ultimate goal of assimilating Aboriginal peoples. Many of the provisions were enacted solely to increase the power of federal bureaucrats – specifically the Indian agent who became a powerful figure and came to dominate all important aspects of band life (p. 259).

Until the 1982 amendments to the Constitution, the Indian Act was the most prominent reflection of the distinctive place of Aboriginal people in Canada. When the government attempted to repeal the Indian Act in 1969 by issuing the “White Paper”⁶ and in 2002 with the First Nations Governance Act, Aboriginal people throughout the country protested and, ultimately, caused the withdrawal of both attempts. The reason for these protests can be seen in the following quote from the late Dr. Harold Cardinal (1999): “No just society and no society with even pretensions to being just can tolerate such a piece of legislation, but we would rather continue to live in bondage under the inequitable Indian Act than surrender our sacred rights” (p. 119).

Residential School Policy

The 1828 Darling Commission and the 1850 Baggot Commission both made strong recommendations that, in order to assimilate Aboriginal people into British society, both education and conversion to Christianity were required. After the adoption of the Constitution in 1867, the Department of Indian Affairs instituted policies that would aggressively promote the Aboriginal people’s assimilation and conversion to Christianity. The purpose of the policies was to separate Aboriginal people from their identity, culture, traditions, and language, and thus transform them into a labouring class of British subjects. In 1920, while tabling a bill that made it mandatory for all Indian children between the ages of 7 and 15 years to attend residential schools, Duncan Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, stated:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think, as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department; that is the whole object of this Bill. (cited in Leslie, 1978)

Residential schools were funded by the federal government and operated through contracted service with the different church organizations of Canada. Government policy at the time reflected the assumption that Aboriginal children would not succeed if still under the influence of their families and, thus, gave rise to the justification for the removal of children from their communities, the complete disruption of Aboriginal families, the re-socializing of children in residential schools, and schemes for integrating graduates into a non-Aboriginal world (Canada, 1996a, p. 313). The stated goal and wish of the government was to obtain “entire possession” of Aboriginal children once they reached the age of seven or eight (p. 314). Accordingly,

⁶ The White Paper would have seen the global elimination of all Indian special status, the gradual phasing out of federal responsibility for Indians and the protection of reserve lands, the repeal of the Indian Act, and the end of treaties (Canada, 1996c, p. 238).

residential school policies, at this time, supported the passage of moving from the Aboriginal to the non-Aboriginal world in three phases: separation, socialization, and assimilation through enfranchisement – which entailed a male graduate leaving behind his Indian status and becoming a full Canadian citizen (p. 317) who would not have protected Indian status. Clearly, residential schools were the most powerful instrument in the government's enterprise to civilize Indians with the goal to eventually be rid of Aboriginal identity, Aboriginal tribes, and the “Indian Problem.”

Although the churches were contracted to provide administrative, operational, and educational services at the residential schools, no provisions were made in the contracts to oversee the quality of care and education that Aboriginal children would receive. Although agents raised concerns, schools operated without any regulations regarding how discipline and punishment was administered at the schools (with the exception of a regulation passed in 1949 that encouraged the use of strapping). As such, an environment was created where staff acted without consequence (p. 352). Indeed, regardless of the numerous reports filed over decades, no action was ever taken by either party to correct the substantive proof of neglect, cruelty, and abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual) being perpetrated on the children attending residential schools (Canada, 1996a). Much evidence exists describing the mismanaged, underfunded, and overcrowded conditions of residential schools, which resulted in a high death rate in students, mostly due to the quick spread of diseases (p. 329-330) including tuberculosis. Poor menu planning, combined with a diet that failed to meet nutritional guidelines, left the children receiving “too little meat and not enough green vegetables, whole grains, fruit, juice, milk, iodized salt, and eggs” (p. 345). As a result, children experienced pervasive hunger and, at times, resorted to stealing fruit and vegetables for survival.

It was common school policy that, upon admission to the school, traditional clothing was discarded and replaced with school uniforms, traditional hair braids were cut off (and often boy's heads were completely shaved), the use of Aboriginal language was forbidden, and the practice of Aboriginal spirituality and culture (deemed morally and ethically wrong) was prohibited (p. 316). If children dared transgress these rules, they received punishments ranging from shaming to physical violence. As a result, if any of the children did go home, they were unable to communicate with their family and were unaware, suspicious, or afraid of customs and rituals that had historically strengthened and reaffirmed relationships between family and community members. The disconnect created between children and their families was described in 1913 when Indian agents on reserves noted a cultural gap that was creating people stranded between communities, without an identity (p. 357). Further, the European lecture-style teaching model employed by the residential schools had little in common with the oral, experiential pedagogy of Aboriginal people. Thus, many Aboriginal children, having been accustomed to the latter, struggled to learn the European school curriculum (p. 320). Consequently, they failed to learn either the teachings of settler society or those of the Aboriginal society.

By 1956 federal government policy regarding residential schools changed. Acknowledging the importance that parents played in the children's development, a provision for the creation of parent-school committees was established. As residential schools began to close, the child welfare system became responsible for increasing numbers of Aboriginal children. By the mid 1960s one third of all Aboriginal children were under the government's care (p. 322). The apprehension of Aboriginal children became so widespread and continuous that it is commonly referred to as the 60s scoop. The apprehension of Aboriginal children remains common policy today; currently, Aboriginal children make up 65 percent of the child welfare caseload in Alberta (Alberta, 2010). In 2002, there were approximately 22,500 Aboriginal children in care in Canada (Bennet & Blackstone cited in Lafrance & Bastien, 2007).

Impact of Colonization

For the Cree, colonization has had devastating, pervasive, and multi-dimensional effects. First, colonization has interfered with the creation of a positive Cree identity in individuals and as a collective. During a Teaching Circle, the Elders spoke emphatically about how the colonizer has defined who they are and how this colonized identity is inaccurate and ignorant:

In the Indian world...you have to realise there is an Indian mind...there is an Indigenous mind...I don't like that word Indian, I don't like that word Aboriginal, I don't like that word First Nations - to me that's where we are running into problems. Because we have always allowed other nations, other people from foreign lands to define who we are. We never had the opportunity to define who we are...[The European settlers] had an opportunity over a hundred years to come tell us who we should be and how we should live. They have never heard our understanding of who we are. They don't know our relationship that we have with our Creator and our Grandfathers. They don't understand the stories and the reason why we are here and we are put on Mother Earth here at this time and what our responsibilities are in this country, our responsibilities to our families and children. (TCE, focus group, 2007)

Further, residential school policies caused enormous change that became evident in Aboriginal communities across Canada. Prior to the implementation of residential schools, the family was the all-encompassing unit – a mediator between the individual and the social, economic, and political spheres of a larger society (Canada, 1996b). Government policies that forced children to stay in residential schools, with little or no contact with their families, deprived children of the principal agency that helps them make sense of the world (Canada, 1996b). Parents were also made to feel inferior because, due to their Aboriginal identity and/or the poverty in which they lived, they were deemed incapable of raising their children. They were made to relinquish their responsibility of interpreting the world for their children (Canada, 1996b), and they had to withstand the shame of not being able to protect the gifts they were bestowed by the Creator. The loss of connection and communication between children and their parents and grandparents severely damaged essential family relationships, blocking the transmission of cultural, ethical, and normative knowledge between generations. The Elders in the Teaching Circle of Elders described this history, railing against the inability to teach their children about the rules of *wahkohtowin*, their sacred responsibilities, and the Cree interconnected worldview. They shared:

The laws that the governments have established do not correlate with our understanding of our responsibility and our obligations to our Creator and our families. So that is where we are running into problems – the creation of alcohol, drugs, the needle – everything that we see in society today that people are using. We see the jails being filled up because of that behaviour. It was brought over and our children are caught in that. Because we didn't have the opportunity to teach our children the values we talk about – these concepts – it was stopped – it was blocked – it was manipulated and turned into something. Our people were demonized. By the churches, by the government. By saying our Elders were not important, our teachings, our ways were not important. That's what created the mess today. We have those teachings, we have those understanding. [We have] the stories about the origins how we were created, how we were given this land. [We] can tell stories about before the white man first came here. There is history – [we] know those stories. The truth you can say. What the history really is in this country. The truth from our perspective. (TCE, focus group, 2007)

The Elders focussed on how inadequately First Nation participation in history is taught in Canadian schools; specifically, the fundamental breach of the sacred relationship between the First Peoples and the European lawmakers and Canadian government that was evoked by the pipe ceremonies performed at the time of the Treaty signings. They assert that the process in which laws and policies have been created in Canada has been disrespectful to the First Nations and, thus, have resulted in a transgression of laws of *wahkohtowin*. An Elder in a Teaching Circle stated that:

Regarding the law – Canadian law – as it is – is only made by one side – one party. When the newcomers came to our land – they shook hands – they said they agreed to live with us. They agreed to live in peace and harmony. They had an agreement – they lifted the pipe and made a treaty. Then he went his way and Indians stayed on the land. He started writing laws and using the paper to make things his way. An Indian person should have been there looking over that paper and seeing what it

said. How that law affected Indian people, because we are half of that agreement that was made. It takes two people to make a treaty. Those treaties...that relationship is the relationship we are in today. Everything that the law is doing is affecting us but we have no say. They are not living up to their agreement – because of that there will always be disagreement and conflict. We have a relationship with the White man – a wahkohtowin. If they were to listen to our side, our law and rules about relationships, behaviours in the community and societies – we would have a stronger, healthier society. Their own children are being affected the same ways as we are. Because we don't follow the rules anymore. They are lying to the Creator when they do that. There was three parts to that agreement because the Creator was part of the treaty. It is all connected. The protection that this country is under [is] based on that agreement by our ceremonies and our people. When we lifted the pipe – there was the Creator, the Whiteman and the Indian. Because they are breaking their agreement, the protection of the country itself is becoming more at risk. (TCE, focus group, 2007)

From this fundamental breach of relationship between peoples, the Elders believe that a serious transgression of the laws of wahkohtowin has occurred, which is referred to as pastahowin in the Cree language. When asked to speak about this concept, Elder Fred Campiou stated:

We use the word pastahowin, really what it means is overstepping the bounds, going outside the boundaries that you are entitled to ... In terms of pastahowin, in today's society – there is a lot of that going on... Society is over extending itself into boundaries, and it is creating conflict, division, hardship, animosity and resentment. All of those negative feelings that come up when boundaries have been crossed over. (Interview, 2012)

According to Elder Fred Campiou, the word pastahowin refers to both the action of transgressing the boundaries of wahkohtowin, as well as the intergenerational consequences that come from that action. Many Elders translate pastahowin to English (and Western thinking) as “sinning against your children.” In other words, it is committing a transgression that has dire consequences that you, as well as your children and grandchildren will have to suffer. Fred taught:

Why these words exist is to remind us of the behaviours the Creator expects us to exhibit. Expects us to live. And beware of other behaviours that are going to eventually maybe destroy our environment, destroy ourselves or maybe future generation... That's where ceremony reminds us what the Creator expects from us. That is the point that is being missed. (Interview, 2012)

Many First Nations people today have not been taught to view the land, water, and air as sacred gifts from the Creator. Generations of people have lived who do not understand Natural Laws, nor how to live, innovate, and prosper within these laws. The Elders, who want to teach wahkohtowin to Cree youth, find themselves competing with television, video games, and gangster culture; thus, many young adults have no understanding of their sacred responsibility. Indeed, the Elders have now observed that all of creation is suffering as a result of human pastahowin; the behaviour of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is now destroying the water. Elder Fred Campiou describes the current state of our collective wahkohtowin with water:

I am really concerned about [our pastahowin] with water... The water itself is one of the most important Grandmothers, elements in our world that we need to take care of, we need to respect. Without that water, nothing is going to live. There's a lot of careless people doing things with the water that's creating this poison, this environment where it's not going to be safe. Already, we see it back home, we don't feel safe to drink in our rivers - we don't want to eat the fish... Some of our ceremonial people will not eat the ducks anymore that we used to use in ceremony because of where they are landing. How toxic they are, what kind of sickness might be in those animals. Same thing with the moose... they were very sick, when they opened them up there was this green stuff,

basically rotting within. It's sick. It's everywhere, in every part of our life the water it is there. If we don't look after it, we are going to be finished. (Interview, 2012)

Earlier, a spiral was presented (Figure 1) that illustrated an interconnected worldview that was supported by the Cree teachings of wahkohtowin and Natural Law. When the Cree people were prevented from teaching these values, rules, and way of life, the scaffolding that ensured healthy, respectful relationships was severely damaged, and the spiral collapsed upon itself. The critical relational boundaries were transgressed. The spiral, for some families and communities has become a tangled, chaotic knot as illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Symbolic representation of the impacts of colonialism on interconnections in Cree worldview.

This effect on the Cree people, as well as other First Nations and Metis people that we interviewed in Alberta, is a pervasive feeling of sadness and despair (pometasiwin⁷) connected to the water. Pometasiwin, a result of policies and laws that have damaged essential human relationships (including the loss of the sacred relationship between the people and the water) manifests itself as hopelessness, helplessness, powerlessness, and voicelessness. During a Sharing Circle of Elders in Fort McKay, the Elders shared many stories about the way in which development is undertaken and their lack of participation in this process. One of the Elders shared:

When I grew up here, that river was high. We lived off that river. I used to go with my father to go get the nets and bring the fish in. And now when you look at it and that, you can't because there is absolutely nothing there. They've caught fish and reported the fish, you know, it had mercury and other items in it and that. We can't drink that water. We can't live off that water anymore...I don't think the government really understand the importance of our culture, of our living and the muskegs and everything and when the oil companies put up there industry, they took a lot of water out and destroyed our water. And the government is letting them do this without consulting and sitting with the Native people; how important that the water is, that the lakes are, the rivers is and the muskegs and wetlands. Because that was our survival. (SCE, focus group, 2010)

The Elders in Fort McKay also described their powerlessness to use the water in their traditional ways, including the ability to pick medicine that grows by the water. In this instance, the area in which the medicines have been harvested by their people for generations is now under the surveillance of the industry that is developing the land. One Elder described the current situation:

⁷ The creation of despair; people are giving up (Fred Campiou, Interview, 2012).

You've got to go to Horseshoe Lake for the rat root, that's the rat root that we usually pick. Now if I go in there, they're going to bring this security department... to watch me pick that medicine. I wasn't told that way by my mom and dad. If I'm going to make an offering, ask the medicine what I'm going to need it for, to help me; I want to be alone and talk to it. Talk to the Creator at the same time... But I don't want a whole audience watching me, what I'm saying and what I'm doing. (SCE, focus group, 2010)

For Elder Violet Poitras, the medicine that she has picked for years is now poisoned and harvesting these medicines is not possible. In an interview, Violet described the loss she and her community have sustained:

But along over there, where the cattails are... there will be still some medicine there, [in the past] we'd have to dig it out, and some growing like up on top, we'd just uproot it. But because of what happened to our water... that train derailed over there and it spilled some fluid into the water, some poisonous stuff and it killed everything in the water and it killed everything along the shores where our medicines [were]... It's a very unhealthy lake, unhealthy water, so we just don't bother anymore coming to the lake or even the kids coming to swim or let alone picking medicines, we don't do that anymore, so it's a big loss to the community. It's a big loss for us and, of course, for the children. (Interview, 2010)

Elder Celena Harpe, from Fort McKay, described her feeling of hopelessness toward the pollution of the streams and creeks in her community and her concern for the people in the future:

It really makes me sad...I wish this didn't have to happen. We'll say for instance, now our future generations...what's going to happen to the younger generations now, later on in life? How are they going to survive? They can't drink this river water...now you know, they can't be buying water... You want to go to the cabin, you have to take bottled water and that's stupid. I mean that's it not right, it's not natural, it's not our culture; it's not the way we lived. We didn't have to take water when we used to go in the bush and travel for days on end to get to my Dad's trap line. There used to be creeks and little rivers. We used to just go and dip a little water and make tea and drink it and cook with it and wash with it, whatever but that's not the way it is now. (Interview, 2010)

Feelings of powerlessness were also described the Cree Elders in the Teaching Circles. One Elder stated:

Everybody believes they can't do nothing about it because somebody else is in control, someone else is handling that water, we're buying it. The government pours millions of dollars to put water treatment plant on reserve, they're controlling that water, but we are allowing them to. (TCE, focus group, 2010)

Part of the Cree belief is that through ceremonies we can heal the water by reclaiming our wahkohtowin with it. One of the Elders (TCE, focus group, 2010) despaired that, although he has the capacity to perform specific ceremonies for the water, no one comes to him to ask for these ceremonies. He believes that, if the people supported the ceremonies with resources and their participation, the water could be made pure and it could be used to heal the people. By healing the water, the people could simultaneously reclaim their sacred relationship and heal the despair they feel as well. However, people are not going to the ceremonies, and, thus, the Elder worries that there are too few young people apprenticing to take the ceremonies over. Another Elder (TCE, focus group, 2010) stated that we should not only think about what kind of world are we leaving our children, but more importantly what kind of children are we leaving the earth?

Policies That Promote Pimatisiwin

The task that society must now collectively undertake can be visualized as the untangling of the chaotic spiral presented in Figure 2. Drawing on the Indigenous model of building family and community resilience

(LaBoucane-Benson, 2009) the process will include three interconnected dimensions: (a) reconciling our damaged relationships, (b) reclaiming an interconnected worldview, and (c) repatriating the power to respectfully self-determine. For positive change to occur, all three dimensions need to be engaged at many different levels, including the natural environment. In this way, we can begin to seek the good life (pimatisiwin) collectively, in a manner that respects all perspectives. This model suggests actions that can both untangle and support the spiral of healthy relationships, and, thus, inform and transform individual action, family priorities, and government policies. This framework is illustrated in Figure 3.

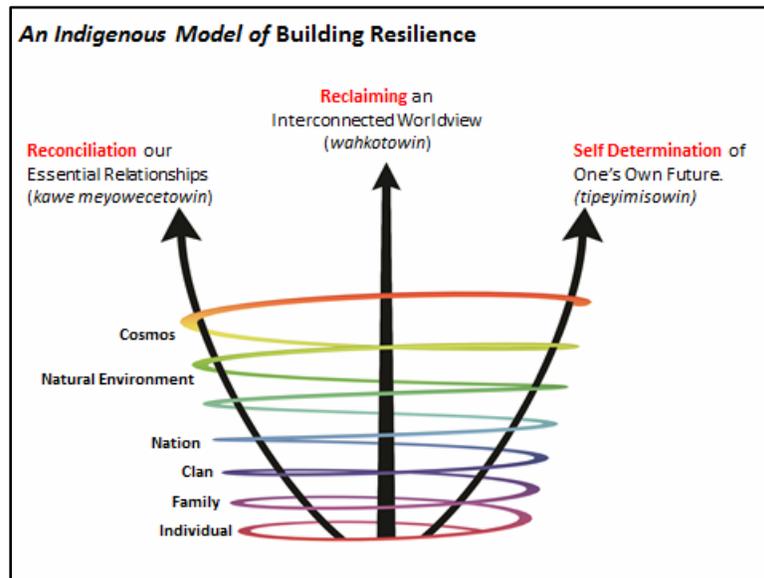


Figure 3. An Indigenous model of building resilience. Adapted from LaBoucane-Benson (2009).

Reclaiming Worldviews

For many of the Elders, knowledge keepers, and ceremonialists, the cornerstone to reclaiming an interconnected worldview is the reclamation of the ceremonies as educational instruments. While a part of parenting is role-modelling wahkohtowin, the ceremonies are the milieu where traditional teachings are imparted in the context of prayer and connectedness to the environment and the cosmos. The Elders we spoke with were emphatic: “We all need to support and participate in the ceremonies. We need to bring our children to ceremonies and provide the opportunities for them to become seekers of the sacred and traditional knowledge.” This requires a change in priorities of individuals and families, as ceremonialists require support and the participation of helpers who continue to learn through their involvement in the ceremonies.

In addition, the opportunity to be on the land and to learn from adults who know the land is critical. All the knowledge keepers we spoke to had garnered intergenerational, longitudinal information about the local, natural world from adults in their lives. For Knowledge Keeper Len Benson, who spent much of his youth with his uncles in the bush, the land and water were important to him. He shared this story:

How I am connected to the land is with the trapping, with our own traditional ways which we follow and that's hunting and gathering which we do every year. Right from spring - with the geese coming - back right until the fall with the moose. I guess the best way to put it is I look forward to every change in the season that's coming because everything is different; everything is new all the time, right from the plants that start growing to when the water melts. I think most First Nations that are raised in this area and have stayed on the reserve are the same way; they look forward to seeing the

green grass. Along with that comes the ducks that come back, and gathering of the eggs and right throughout every season. (Interview, 2010)

Cree people who have lived on the land are able to combine this information with their observations over a lifetime to draw powerful conclusions about the changes they are witnessing in the water and the land. Len Benson shared another story about the change he has witnessed to the water and how people used that water in the past:

As a young lad we would go out fishing, snaring fish, catching them in the springtime, going out shooting ducks, everything at the water and from the water. If you were out playing or you were out doing something you didn't run all the way back, sometimes you were a mile away from camp or something, you were able to drink right out of a muskeg. All you have to do is go there, move the leaves out of the way, take a cup or take your hand and drink it and you felt safe. It never crossed your mind that you would get sick from water... [Now, everything has] changed because there is no way in the world anybody would go and do the same things that we did, like you wouldn't go and drink out of a muskeg or out of a stream, you just wouldn't do it. You can't do it... the shortage of water and the water that is being consumed by industry, it's phenomenal, and it's going to get more and more, they are going to take more and more water as time goes on. And then, the pollution of the water, the erosion that is happening out there, of course it breaks my heart. I think if more people were aware of how serious this is they would feel the same way but a lot of people aren't aware of it, they don't see it. (Interview, 2010)

Len specifically refers to how these change in the water affected the fish in his area:

Like this time of day when the creeks are open and the lakes are starting to open, and along the lakeshore, those jackfish, they spawn in the spring, they go up the rivers, pickerel too, and suckers. [We used to] make a snare there and haul them out. My mom used to make dried fish with those jackfish ... Even around the lakes, and the lakeshore, used to be fish all around the lakes in the spring, just splashing water all over. Nowadays I don't see that anymore. See, where I lived, to go across was about four or five miles from the Beaver Lake and that Beaver Lake creek runs upstream about, there's another lake up there, right in the middle of the reserve, we call it Cross Lake... Fish travel on those creeks too. After they finish spawning they all come back to the lake... Now the creeks are no good, they are not running anymore... they've dried up. (Interview, 2010)

Len's story illustrates the experiential, longitudinal quality of knowledge that is acquired through lived experience on the land. The knowledge of water that Len holds is within the context of a deep connectedness to the water and to a way of life that the water has provided in the past. We conclude that Len's sacred relationship with the water is simultaneously historical, familial, emotional, and intellectual, revealing data that is grounded in his understanding of Natural Law and can be used to heal water. Thus, the findings from Indigenous science can be critical in resolving water issues, and they need to be recognized by policymakers.

The reclamation of the sacred relationship is, therefore, an undertaking that requires collective action. The Elders were clear: we need to teach our children Natural Law and *wahkohtowin* so that they can lead the change required to heal and preserve the water for future generations.

Reconciliation

The essential relationship between cultures, nations, and communities, as well as the relationship between humans and the environment (including water) require renewal and repair, given the history of internal colonization, legislation, and schooling discussed earlier. The Elders in the TCE (focus group, 2010) taught that the arrival of the European settlers was foretold and the outcomes (good and bad) were predicted. As we move forward to heal our *wahkohtowin* with the water, we must also repair and renew the relationship

between the settlers (mainstream Canada) and the First Nations people. In all of our interviews and circles, the Elders and knowledge keepers were united in their message: we need to work together. The Elders (TCE, focus group, 2010) spoke of how willing the first groups of settlers were to listen to the people because they needed the knowledge of First Nation peoples to survive on the land. Today, however, they feel that mainstream society is not interested in what the Elders and knowledge keepers have to say. Still, the Elders (TCE, focus group, 2010) spoke of their willingness to share their sacred teachings with people from other cultures. In an interview, Elder George Brertrton reflected on his fasting ceremony experience and what he learned from the ants:

[In] Cree they say (mâmahwahkamâtowin) what they say is: work all together, let's work all together. Well you know the people who say that should go watch those ants, you'd learn from that, how they worked all together. [Work] titles? Nothing. Work, work as a community. (Interview, 2012)

We understand this story to be teaching the value of humility; that each of us has an important part in the process of healing the water and a responsibility to participate. To really work together, society has to acknowledge the unique and important perspective of the First Peoples and work with the Indigenous scientists to resolve water issues. The solution is based upon our collective ability to develop a wahkohtowin between the Indigenous leaders and scientists and Western scientists and policymakers.

To accomplish this, we must undertake a paradigm revolution in our society. The Elders taught that our children require both Western and traditional education in order to be leaders of change now and in the future. Thus, by creating a wahkohtowin between the First Peoples and society, we can honour both ways of learning and equip our children with the knowledge they need to transform the way in which we use water. These new leaders will have a wahkohtowin with water, and, as a result, they will be innovators, creating new technology and policies that will heal the water.

Self Determination

Self determination, in the context of this discussion, is the ability to make decisions for oneself and manage one's own affairs as an individual, family, and nation. As such, all people (individually and collectively) need to be able to self-determine in ways that are respectful of other's ability to self-determine. The Elders (TCE, focus group, 2012) were clear that the voicelessness in public policy and decision-making of the people must change; for example, they referenced the creation story of the four grandmothers (moon, earth, water, and women) and the importance of women's voice in decisions that pertain to water:

That's how our people lived, strong kinship. If one goes back to that [creation] story and knows where we come from, [then they would know] the woman is strong. But today the woman's voice is taken out of decision-making processes in this system. That's why there's chaos. There's no more balance in that with respect to how the relationships go. (TCE, focus group, 2010)

The Elders (TCE, focus group, 2010) were also adamant that we all must take responsibility for the state of our relationship with water; we all have a sacred responsibility that we must reclaim.

Within an interconnected worldview, individuals, families, communities, and societies are required to be responsible for their own actions, accountable for the consequences inherent in those actions and respectful of the requirement of others to be responsible and accountable for their actions (LaBoucane-Benson, 2009). The findings of this research project suggest that, in order to engage in this type of interdependent system, we must first repair our relationships, and in this process we must carefully listen to each other. Dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal policymakers, scientists, and community members must be pursued in order to build trust and positive relationships (wahkohtowin) within our society and empower all parties in the decision-making process. This message was iterated by many research participants, particularly in the reconciliation discussions that were held. The voicelessness and powerlessness of Aboriginal people can only

be transformed through dialogue and relationship. While there will always be differences in opinions, the findings of this research suggest that common ground in our collective beliefs and goals is achievable and can drive the development of policies that mandate the inclusion of Indigenous people in decision-making processes for water, which will result in actions that reflect the collective voice of all Albertans.

In conclusion, the findings of this research project suggest that the impact of colonization has been a loss of our collective understanding of our sacred relationship with water and with each other. For Aboriginal people, this has created a pervasive feeling of despair (pomewin). These relationships, however, can be transformed through respectful dialogue, and in the process policies can be developed that promote pimatisiwin in our society.

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