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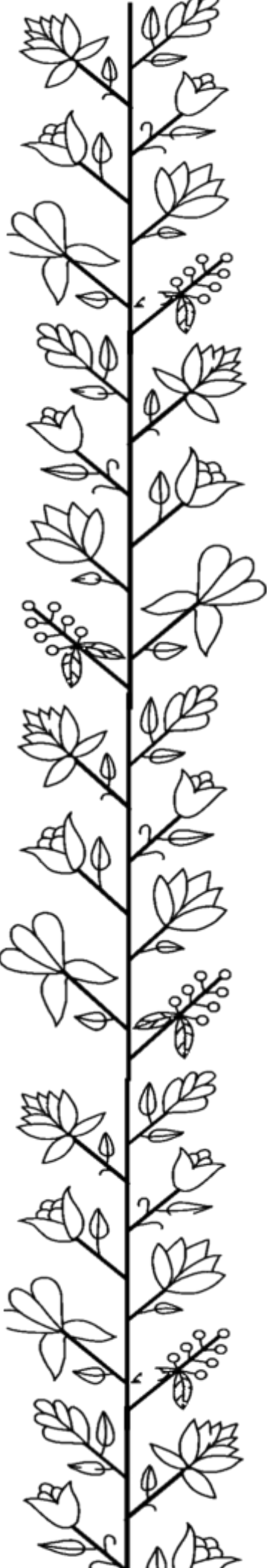
Head and Heart Indigenous Research
Fellowship

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NINAABINOOTAN OWE DIBAAJIMOWIN: I'm passing on this story

Misko Banaishe Kicknosway

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NINAABINOOTAAN OWE DIBAAJIMOWIN

I'm passing on this story

Abstract

This research project begins from an understanding that Indigenous knowledge is a practice, as Deborah McGregor describes- what one does. Using this description as a starting place, we will explore the “doing” or the practice of traditional Indigenous research, through three interconnected Indigenous practices: storytelling, mark making and participating in ceremonies. Exploring the interconnections between these practices and how knowledge is braided together through participation in these Indigenous ways of coming to know. This is for the future generations to come.

Key Words

Indigenous tattooing
Storytelling
Indigenous Resilience
Gift Giving
Bkejwanong (Walpole Island)
Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake)
Ceremonies

Misko Banaishe Kicknosway



Ninaabinootaan owe Dibaajimowin

(I'm passing on this story)



(my sisters, Banaishe-Kwe, Waawaasamoshka-Midewagomin. July 2019, Prairie Island Minnesota)

*Boozhoo Misko Banaishe nindizinakawz, Wahbahshayshe n'doodem, Bkejwanong guyeh
Qamani'tuaq indongaba Ojibway, Potawatomi, Odawa Inuk Mide Kwe indow.*

Hello, my name is Red Bird, I am from the Marten clan, and my parents are from Walpole Island First Nation and Baker Lake, Nunavut. I am an Ojibway, Potawatomi, Odawa Inuk Mide woman. I wanted to introduce myself in Anishinabemowin, because it is a part of who I am. On my father's side I am Ojibway, Potawatomi, and Odawa from Walpole Island (Bkejwanong – *where the waters divide*), and on my mother's side I am Inuk from Baker Lake, Nunavut (Qamani'tuaq – *where the rivers widen*). On both sides of my family, I have a connection to the water and also a strong sense of belonging to the community. My mother's community is where





the Thelon River and Kazan River collide, and my father's community is where the St. Claire River divides. Through this book I have included my pictures, not only of myself but, also of my family, where I come from, my tattoos and other images that represent my understanding of Indigenous pedagogies and who I am as an Indigenous person.



(Qamani'tuaq, August 2013)

Learning about where you come from assists in learning about your gifts and how you should carry yourself as a person. For myself, I grew up with a strong sense of who I am and where I have come from; I never had to ask about who I was. My parents made sure that even before I was born, I knew my clan family and shortly after I was born (when I was 4 months old), I had my naming ceremony so that I would know my name. My name, Misko Banaishe, was gifted to me by my grandfather. My name means red bird and he talked about how I will be/am a great singer. I was brought up to learn what it means to know your clan and to know your spirit name. Both of those things continue to guide who I am today.





(Bkejwanong, May 2022)

Learning and understanding the stories about my ancestors and their teachings is meaningful for me; it helps me to understand where I came from, which will guide my path forward. Storytelling and passing down knowledge/teachings comes in various ways such as: visual inscroll drawing; and wampum belts. Storytelling can also be experience in clothing patterns. For example, each Potawatomi family had a particular design for their own family, just like their clan. Storytelling also occurs through the sharing of oral stories where one speaks from personal experience, sharing others' stories; this experience lets you figure out the meaning/teaching of the story yourself.

Through Indigenous learning there are often repetition of sacred images or symbols. Understanding the meaning and significance of shapes and repeated characters is vital to Indigenous epistemology. Symbols are a part of Indigenous pedagogy because we were an oral and visual society, and symbols aided in our memory of our sacred stories.

Many Indigenous nations around the world used tattooing to mark important phases in physical and educational development, these tattoos are constructed of sacred symbols and hold significant





meaning. During times when it was dangerous, or illegal to practice customary traditions such as ceremonies, the use of symbols in clothing design assisted in informing people who had the rites and knowledge to conduct ceremonies.

Other Indigenous groups use storytelling or visiting as a way of methodology, to share and pass down knowledge. Indigenous scholar Deborah McGregor describes Indigenous knowledge as a cultural practice. In her article, “Coming Full Circle. Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future,” McGregor encourages readers to consider, what would happen if we understood that:

“Indigenous Knowledge is something one does, rather than simply something one knows, how is it acquired? What is the process of "coming to know"? Indigenous Knowledge is not simply a product (knowledge) or commodity; it is a process as well. Cajete also Establishes that it is rooted in place, and Battiste and Henderson state that IK cannot be separated from the people themselves. Thus, Indigenous Knowledge represents an integration of person, place, product, and process. This means that who you are matters! How do you learn IK? How do you re-spect IK? How do you share IK? And most importantly, are you ready to receive IK?”

(McGregor (2004), p. 391)

This Head & Heart fellowship project represents just a starting place, of my own journey exploring the “doing” or the practice of symbols and visual representation, an acknowledging the interconnectedness of **storytelling, mark making, and participating in ceremony**. Recognizing





the connections between these practices and how they are braided together through participation in these Indigenous ways of coming to know is in fact Indigenous methodologies.

Dibaajimowin (Story telling)

The importance of storytelling is something Thomas King addressed in his book *“You’ll Never Believe What Happened” (The Truth about Stories. 2010)*. King discusses how meaningful and important it is to share and tell stories not only with each other but to also carry for the younger generations. Looking into King further, I have realized that listening and telling stories is a powerful way to learn. Telling our stories and standing up to our oppressors is a sign of resilience and the strength of Indigenous people. Storytelling is a way of passing down knowledge through oral traditions. McGregor writes in: *“Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future”*

“Our stories inform us about our beginnings. All our stories have value and offer insights, but the stories I choose to enhance student understanding of Indigenous Knowledge are the Creation stories of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe. Like any story, there are different versions that vary with storytellers or cultural traditions”

(McGregor (2004) p. 386).

Here, McGregor is acknowledging that stories are a way of knowing, passing down knowledge and understandings of the world. Ensuring that future generations are able to learn about traditional ceremonies and teaching is important to me because the life that was giving to us from Kizhay Manido is beautiful. I love the life of attending ceremonies, knowing and learning Inuktitut and Anishinabemowin and I want that for my children and for the future.





Indigenous people all around Turtle Island use storytelling to relay anything about life and the decisions you make every day. Reflecting on my life, there are many great teachers like my DeyDey, countless aunties and uncles, and Grandparents who have taught me how to be an Anishinabe and Inuk. I have been taught many things in my life through attending ceremonies and visiting with Elders and Knowledge Keepers; I have learned some Inuktitut and Anishinabemowin, how to pick traditional medicines (like berries, and cedar), and sewing and beading techniques.

TUNNITT/MARK MAKING

I love to craft, to create things with my hands and see my ideas come to life. Through my time as a Head and Heart fellow I have created a lot over the summer, some things as gifts (for my family), and some as reflections as a part of my learning journey. This is a skirt panel I made with Potawatomi designs in mind about duality and balance. It is representing how the heart is at the middle of myself and how I branch out from what my heart wants. Sewing is not the only way Indigenous people use visual symbols to represent traditional teachings.



Before contact with Qallunaat (which is the Inuktitut word for Europeans describing those with big bellies and large eyebrows), Inuit young women would first get their first Tunniit on their





wrists and/or hands when they experienced their first menstruation cycle to symbolize that they have become a woman. Once the woman became pregnant, she would get her thighs tattooed as the belief is that as the baby is being born that they would come into the world seeing something beautiful; that the tattoo would show them from where they were coming from and to where they were going. Lastly, a woman would get her face tattooed once she was recognized by others as an Ananaciatch (Grandmother with wisdom to share with others). Facial tattoos were only done when a woman was recognized by the community that she was worthy to get her face tattooed.

There are two traditional common ways the Tunniit would be tattooed; one way is where the skin would be pierced with a sharpened ivory or bone. Then, soot would cover the holes and create the tattoo. The second way would be when a soot covered sinew would be sewn into the skin leaving the black behind and creating the tattoo.

Each Inuk woman's tattoos are different, and they vary in patterns, sizes, length, but the symbols all represent the same gifts and all Tunniit tell a story. For example, in Althea Arnaquq-Bari's documentary *'Tunniit: retracing the lines of Inuit tattoos'* Althea talks to Ananasach (Grandmother) from different communities in Nunavut about Tunniit and the different symbols and their meanings. There are different symbols described in the documentary like: straight (horizontal and vertical) lines, 'Y' shapes, triangles, semi-circles, and dots. Each symbol has a different meaning and teaching behind it. For Inuit, the Tunniit represent the gifts, skills, knowledge and understanding that the woman carries in her life; if she knows how to take care of the Igloo, if she is able to take care of the kudlik (seal oil lamp), if she is able to sew and perform delicate tasks with her hands, skin/take care of a dead animal (for food, clothing, and shelter purposes), which community she comes from, and if or how many children she has.





Every Tunniit tells a story about that woman, her talents, her gifts, about the knowledge she carries, and responsibilities she holds in life. Below are photographic examples and explanations of my Tunniit and followed by my mother's Tunniit:



The two outside thicker lines represent where I am from (Qamani'tuaq) and Bkejwanong, the two rivers.



The strawberries I put the design as a reminder of completing my berry fast (a rite of passage for an Anishinaabe girl).



The 'Y' represents the splitting of sinew to show I can sew and skin animals and to help take care of the hunt.



The little dots signify the Seven Grandfather teachings.

Finally, the domes symbolize the Igloo (home); they are a part of my Tunniit to show I am able to take care of the Igloo, meaning I know how to take care of the home.





For my Tunniit I added two symbols that would represent my Anishinaabe side (patrilineal) because it is a part of who I am and my story as a woman. The berry fast is something that I completed a couple of years ago signifying I am now a woman. As for the coloured in dots: they symbolize the Seven Grandfather teachings described in Dr. Edward Benton-Banai's book entitled '*The Mishomis Book*' (Truth, Love, Honesty, Bravery, Respect, Humility, and Wisdom) is the way I would like to carry myself in everyday life; as well as they represent the teachings that are carried on one of our sacred drums, the Little Boy Water Drum. Benton- Banai was my grandfather, the one who gave me my name, and one of the greatest Midewiwin teachers.

Below is my mother's Tunniit, they are different than mine but have similar symbols and meanings.



Similar to my Tunniit, my mom also has the 'Y' shapes and two thicker lines to represent Qamani'tuaq (the community in which her patrilineal line is from), the difference is the two sizes of vertical lines and the triangles at the bottom. The two vertical lines are there to signify me and my younger brother (her two children's umbilical cords), and the triangles at the bottom symbolize the kudlik (oil lamp) that women traditionally use and shows she can perform well with tasks that she does with her hands (like sewing and crafting). Even though our Tunniit are different from



each other's they both tell a story and represent us. Each Tunniit have a story and a meaning behind them, and storytelling is something particularly important.

I have another tattoo that represents a teaching I have been taught in the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge. This tattoo symbolizes Mide Bimaadiziwiin (*the way of the heart/kind life*) road of life, but it also acknowledges that there will be distractions in life – that is why the flowers are coming off the straight middle line, but to always come back to that good road of life Mide Bimaadiziwiin.



For me, my tattoos remind me about all the teaching and gifts I have. If I was not able to attend ceremonies, I would have a hard time knowing who I am. Because of the opportunities I have been given at ceremonies, I am able to learn who I am.



PARTICIPATING IN CEREMONY



(Midewiwin Family, Kettle Point First Nation, June 2022)

I have grown up in the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge, that is where I have learned all my teachings and have a big loving family. I acknowledge I come from a place of privilege as I have had the ability to learn my traditional language and the original teachings that were given to the Anishinabek from Kizhay Manido (*The Creator*). During the covid pandemic we could not gather as a larger community and practice our ceremonies, and that was very hard for me. I have grown up attending ceremony and learning from my Elders. This summer we got to have ceremonies and made me feel whole again.

If you learn in a journey, you do not just come to know everything all at once; there are levels of learning and understanding the knowledge that happen over time and in stages. Indigenous knowledge is usually passed down through generations from Elders. Elders are a key member of society for Indigenous people and help to connect the past with the future generations through passing down knowledge. The sharing of knowledge between generations is for the future. Being able to pass my knowledge down to those who come, is my connection to the past and the future, and I know I will one day have a responsibility to pass what I know to future generations. This intergenerational connection is one reason we need to protect our knowledge by practicing



this knowledge. It is important to be clear: Indigenous knowledge is not something for settlers to “discover”- they should not be claiming anything about Indigenous knowledge, because our knowledge was here and alive before settlers “discovered” it. Indigenous knowledge is not new, nor is it for them to take.

RESILIENCE



(Picking traditional berries, London Ontario., July 2019)

Systems like forced relocation, killing of sled dogs, the Residential School era, Sixties-scoop, and the Indian Act were all attempts by the Canadian Government at eradicating Indigenous languages, ceremonies and teaching. But we are strong and resilient people, those systems that tried to wipe us out, did not work, we are still here. My mother and I having Tunniit on our wrists are a significant and important act of resilience by taking back our traditions when we choose to get our traditional tattoos. Learning about our traditional teachings and ways of life and practicing, and performing our traditions and ceremonies is an example of resilience and strength. Resilience is a signal of strength and hope.



Learning about different Indigenous traditions of tattoos, and attending ceremonies gives me the opportunity to show my own resiliency and culture. Showing who you are and where you come from is important to me. This journey of learning about traditional Tunniit, designing my own, then finally getting them done on my wrist was a great experience for me, because it assisted me in reflecting on the skills that I have; where I come from as an Inuk; and this practice connected me to my mother and Inuit Ananasach before me.

Resilience is an act of recovery and strength. Indigenous Peoples have been suppressed and dehumanized for generations. The act of me learning about traditional tattoos, attending ceremonies and listening to Elders' stories is an example of resilience. Every day I can look down at my Tunniit or think of my spirit name, and this helps ground me, and deeply reminds me of who I am. As well, when I am having a hard time my Tunniit remind me that I am strong just like my ancestors in the past.

Tima (that's all for now) mu'na (thank you) for giving me the opportunity to share my understanding and knowledge; for giving me the time to reflect about the importance of storytelling and passing down knowledge that I am still continuing to learn about.



Resources

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