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## Indigenous Knowledge Within Academia: Exploring the Tensions That Exist Between Indigenous, Decolonizing, and Nêhiyawak Methodologies

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## **Abstract**

Over the last few decades the rewriting of Indigenous knowledge and history has been discussed, debated, and rewritten through the fields of Anthropology, History, and First Nation Studies, to name a few. One of the main tensions that exists in this reclamation process is the differences between Indigenous and Western methodological approaches. However, it has yet to be put forward as to what are the tensions that exist within Indigenous methodologies and their practice. This paper will bring forward three methodological approaches utilized within research for and by Indigenous peoples, as we examine how Indigenous, Decolonizing, and Nêhiyawak methodologies challenge and support one another, and how in order to conduct research, specific views must be taken into account to give a better understanding of the philosophical and spiritual foundations in which the research is situated. Specifically, the article will assess what are Indigenous, Decolonizing, and Nêhiyawak methodologies and why there is a need to incorporate specific methodological approaches dependent on the research in question. Yet, in order to understand the importance and relevance of these differing approaches to find knowledge, we must first discuss how early research and ethics impacted what we know about Indigenous peoples and their way of life. I focus on Nêhiyawak methodologies in particular as a member of the Nêhiyaw Nation in the territory of Maskwacîs.

## **Keywords**

Decolonization, Indigenous, Nehiyawak, Nehiyaw, Plains Cree, Methodology

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## **Indigenous Knowledge Within Academia: Exploring the Tensions That Exist Between Indigenous, Decolonizing, and Nêhiyawak Methodologies**

**Paulina R. Johnson**

### *Abstract*

*Over the last few decades the rewriting of Indigenous knowledge and history has been discussed, debated, and rewritten through the fields of Anthropology, History, and First Nation Studies, to name a few. One of the main tensions that exists in this reclamation process is the differences between Indigenous and Western methodological approaches. However, it has yet to be put forward as to what are the tensions that exist within Indigenous methodologies and their practice. This paper will bring forward three methodological approaches utilized within research for and by Indigenous peoples, as we examine how Indigenous, Decolonizing, and Nêhiyawak methodologies challenge and support one another, and how in order to conduct research, specific views must be taken into account to give a better understanding of the philosophical and spiritual foundations in which the research is situated. Specifically, the article will assess what are Indigenous, Decolonizing, and Nêhiyawak methodologies and why there is a need to incorporate specific methodological approaches dependent on the research in question. Yet, in order to understand the importance and relevance of these differing approaches to find knowledge, we must first discuss how early research and ethics impacted what we know about Indigenous peoples and their way of life. I focus on Nêhiyawak methodologies in particular as a member of the Nêhiyaw Nation in the territory of Maskwacîs.*

### *Introduction: The Representation and Study of Indigenous North America*

Since “contact” with mônîyâw, meaning “not of us” or “strangers”, the beliefs and knowledge perpetuated about Indigenous peoples have been cross-cultural miscommunications and misunderstandings that extend into appropriations through interpretations and representations dominated by non-Indigenous peoples. Through scientific analysis Indigenous peoples found their selves compared, measured, and judged inferior to European standards of civility, language, and culture. This belief permitted atrocities and forced removal throughout Indigenous territories due to the idea that the land was *terra nullius*, a Latin term meaning, *land that belongs to no one*. As Indigenous peoples were ravaged by disease, warfare, slavery, and so many other detrimental experiences to their identities, a belief arose in the minds of European settlers that because the ‘Indian’ could not live or be exposed to civilizations such as theirs they would soon be extinct. This belief was exemplified further through the decay of Indigenous societies linked to “drunkenness, beggary, and savagery” since they were the fallen savages and were unworthy of their heritage and culture (Dippie 1982:25-28 in Biolsi & Zimmerman 1997:67). The fear of extinction drove various individuals to capture, collect, and record all that they possibly could about Indigenous peoples from their language to kinship traditions. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, research on Indigenous peoples had developed extensively. However, the very knowledge that was obtained followed the standard for Western positivist research, where this research was aimed at examining the ‘other’ and found its dominance within ‘institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial

bureaucracies, and colonial styles' (Said 1978:2 in Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 2).

To clarify, 'Western' as Stuart Hall explains functions in four ways: (1) It allows 'us' to characterize and classify societies into categories, (2) condenses complex images of other societies through a system of representation, (3) provides a standard model of comparison, and (4) provides criteria of evaluation against which other societies can be ranked (Smith 1999:43). 'Positivism' is how the natural world is examined and understood through Western scientific method and leads to a 'universal truth' (Smith 1999:42). These approaches led the way for qualitative studies, and soon Indigenous histories and culture were being extracted by research approaches that left those who were studied disenfranchised (Kovach 2009:27). However, one-thing remained throughout academia's salvage of Indigenous knowledge: the Indigenous Nations who were supposed to vanish were actually growing.

The assumption that Indigenous peoples would eventually cease to exist has created various problematic narratives and Western standards of discourse have continued this legacy throughout academic studies of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous history has largely been conducted by the non-Indigenous, who stand outside Indigenous worldviews and comment in a language that is unsuitable for the topic and often does not translate effectively (Miller & Riding 2011:1). Western academic institutions and scientific disciplines have continued this trend by marginalizing Indigenous worldviews and discourse from Indigenous histories and present-day national narratives. Indigenous scholars trained in Western institutions still find their voice marginalized, as Historian Mary Jane McCallum (2009) indicates that often Indigenous writers are relegated to the sidelines of commentary or

left solely to review books and articles on Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous scholars have worked continuously to challenge the hierarchy of domination and suppression that they have been placed into by colonial forces, in addition to marginalization through biased legislation and educational initiatives and policies that promote Western knowledge systems at the expense of our own (Bishop 1997). Dominant is often used as an adjective to describe the culture of European-descended and "Eurocentric, Christian, heterosexist, male-dominated" society, and does not include those who fall "outside" (Wilson 2008:35). Indigenous peoples and their allies have taken a stand and begun an indigenizing and decolonizing process that includes the retelling of cultural pasts and practices, and have advocated for their own value systems, traditional governance, and way of life in relation to the cosmos, nature, and landscape. Neal McLeod in *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (19-20) forwards that part of the Christianization process in Canada involved the erasing of previous Nêhiyaw memory which had been marked in the landscape by *mistasiny*, sacred stone also known as grandfather stones. These stones were markers within the landscape that held intuitive power and were a place for Indigenous peoples to gather and have ceremonies and pray for the spirit within the stone is a listener and as old as Mother Earth (McLeod 2007: 20). Put simply, the *mistasiny* were physical reminders of the relationship including the kinship ties of the Nêhiyaw people and the rest of Creation (see McLeod 2007:23). Understanding these concepts that challenge the very essence of our Western education systems, Indigenous peoples have taken on the politics of our society in North America and abroad, and revealed for the first time, who Indigenous

peoples are through their own way of life rooted in cultural tradition.

From the increase of Indigenous scholars to the revitalization of Indigenous languages, the narratives that surround Indigenous peoples and their histories have begun to be reclaimed, reinforcing and reinstating who they are through their own narratives. In turn, this knowledge is challenging and reinterpreting stories that often were mistaken, taken out of context, or simply made to fit the assumptions of the writer. Granted this paper could be entirely devoted to the injustices of the past or focus on the “tensions” between Western and Indigenous science including the problems with reconciling different knowledge systems and worldviews. But as an initiative to push Indigenous studies forward, I will focus on tensions that exist between Indigenous, Decolonizing, and Nation-specific methodologies. I advocate for the use of Nation in relation to specific Indigenous cultures and groups, because “community” and “tribe” does not adequately indicate the complex dynamics of Indigenous peoples. Specifically, “tribal” is Eurocentric in nature and the term overlooks important networks of relationships that exist between ethnic groups (Innes 2012 using Binnema 2004). “Community” as told to me by Nêhiyaw knowledge holder Joseph Deschamps is the lowest form of government, and for First Nations who have long held and practiced a way of life through laws gifted by Manitou, Creator, this term does not accurately indicate the interconnected relationships between us as people and the universe. However, in order to fully grasp the nature of methodological approaches and those related to spiritual worldview, understanding what exactly is a methodology is vital and this must also include the differences between epistemology and ontology.

Shawn Wilson (2008) in his work *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research*

*Methods* argues that *epistemologies* are the nature of thinking and knowing and where we have come to know something (i.e. how do I know what is real?) (Wilson 2008:34). *Methodologies* refers to how knowledge is gained (i.e. how do I find out more about this reality?) (Wilson 2008:34). Methodology includes the techniques used to obtain knowledge, and can include archival research, interviews, and so on, while epistemology relates to worldview or philosophy. Though epistemology is linked within methodology we will witness that epistemology dominates the methodological framework of Indigenous study because it includes entire systems of thinking that are built on ontologies. *Ontologies* look at the theory of nature of existence, or the nature of reality (i.e. what is real?) (Wilson 2008:33). These are part of an axiology that is the ethics that guide the search for knowledge and judge what is worth searching for (i.e. what part about this reality is worth finding out and what is ethical to gain such knowledge?) (Wilson 2008: 33). The term *tension* is used quite often in Indigenous studies as it explores distinct differences between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. In that vein, I will bring forward the distinct differences between the three methodologies but also point out where these methodologies converge and diverge from one another. This insight is critical for scholars who intend to work with Indigenous communities and for the settler-nation state of Canada to begin the process of reconciliation and understanding as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples move forward.

Therefore, this paper will examine how Indigenous peoples have utilized Indigenous, decolonizing, and Nation-specific methodologies to rewrite what is known and can be known. The Nation that I will focus on in this paper is of my own: the Nêhiyawak Nation who govern the region of Western Canada and live within the territory of

Maskwacîs. Yet, I must state, the methodologies that will be presented by no means are to dismiss the work of previous scholars. To begin, we will take a look at the early beginning of Western scientific knowledge systems, specifically those within the discipline of Anthropology, and explore how they have impacted perceptions of what it means to be Indigenous and why it is important to look beyond qualitative methodologies used by present day researchers as we push the boundaries of what we already know. These methodological approaches challenge the very core of knowledge production since they do not follow Western terms of research (Kovach 2009:29). In order to understand why this is critical to Indigenous and non-Indigenous studies, we need to evaluate past research ethics and relationships that will allow us to conceptualize the need for collaboration, inclusion, and respect for Indigenous peoples and their way of life.

### *Examining Early Academic Thought in Anthropology*

In order for Indigenous peoples to break from misrepresentations of their historical narratives, including the confrontation of categories they have been placed into, we need to address the problems that exist in academia today. Anthropology is a young discipline rooted in global expansion and colonialism that has endured significant changes to its research paradigms, ethics, and relationships with Indigenous peoples since its beginnings. Nevertheless, it is within its early inception that anthropological interpretations and understandings began to drive general knowledge about Indigenous peoples. Anthropology emerged simultaneously as explorers, fur traders, missionaries, and colonial regimes spread around the world. Through these early journeys of enlightenment, Indigenous

peoples were documented, observed, and their cultural objects and material possessions were collected and analyzed. In *Indians and Anthropologist: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology*, Biolsi and Zimmerman (1997:3) attest that anthropologists tend to reproduce “self-conforming, self-referential, and self-producing closed systems with little, if any, empirical relationship to or practical value for real Indigenous peoples”. Anthropologists descended every summer onto Indigenous communities because they intended to “climb the university totem pole” (Deloria 1970:98-99 in Biolsi & Zimmerman 1997:3). This academic hierarchy and progression saw anthropologists come in and out of communities and the research conducted rarely, if ever focused on the needs of the Nation, but rather the anthropologists’ self-interests and desires that would later result in the presumed assumption that they knew more about the Indigenous Nation than the citizens themselves. This in-and-out relationship was an abuse of trust on Indigenous peoples and many refuse to share their knowledge since they witnessed their history manipulated firsthand. This approach was the ideal for field research and often persists in present-day studies.

The scholarly knowledges that were created about Indigenous cultures, language, and objects and remains have been subjected to appropriation and (re)presentation (Biolsi & Zimmerman 1997:7). Anthropologists often act as stewards of the past and this results in the cutting of ties with present day Indigenous peoples, and creates a myth that Indigenous peoples no longer exist today or that in order to find an “Indian” you must search for the feathers and traditional regalia. The use of the term “Indian” in respect to every Nation contradicts and groups Indigenous people together, and voids any differences that make them unique including regalia, art forms, and language. During the

early period of anthropological research, there were rarely any initiatives for collaboration and consultation with Indigenous peoples. Any agreements with Indigenous participants or informants were rarely, if ever regulated by an ethics board. Today, the request for written permission or a signature from a participant is still problematic, since many Indigenous peoples come from oral cultures, and the relevance of a signature is not as binding as ones given word. For various Elders and Nation members, there is a chance that they do not understand the formal context of forms asking for their signatures or do not have the ability to read or write. In many instances, many students are not required to complete an ethics approval, since they are working with artifacts of a prehistoric era, which causes concern in relation to worldviews and conceptions of time and whether these items are alive and animate. All of these factors play into present-day fears about, and relations between Indigenous peoples and scholars. Even if a scholar is Indigenous themselves, this creates tensions between the home Nation and the scholar by revealing knowledge and concepts that are only shareable in certain ceremonies or times of the year.

With that said, the dominant approach in taking back Indigenous narrative is best expressed in the policy statement of the journal *Indian Historian*: “Indians have good reason to distrust and even scorn the professional researcher. Too often have they misinterpreted the Indian history, misrepresented their way of life. It becomes necessary now to correct the record, to write the history as it should be written, to interpret correctly the aboriginal past” (Miller 2011:20). This statement does not limit the study and research of Indigenous peoples solely to Indigenous peoples. Non-Indigenous scholars may join Indigenous peoples in producing and creating great

pieces of work, but cannot lead the movement since they may take part but not take over (Miller 2011:21). Understanding the importance of Indigenous peoples within this reclamation process is important to the study and emergence of Indigenous studies. The Indigenous Renaissance, as Mi’kmaw scholar Marie Battiste (2013) has called it, allows Indigenous peoples to share and document their research by bringing back of theory and culture, and therefore, creating a new realm of Indigenous study.

### *Indigenous Methodologies: Challenging the Constraints of “Research”*

As Indigenous peoples have grasped for the ability to represent their selves through their own narratives and intellectual traditions, we have witnessed a shift in the academic landscape as studies move away from the binaries of Indigenous-settler relations to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action (Kovach 2009:12). Indigenous methodologies have been first and foremost the reaction against research and its effects on Indigenous peoples’ knowledge and history. It is out of this relationship with research that Indigenous peoples developed “alterNative” methodologies that ‘construct, rediscover, and/or reaffirm their knowledges and cultures...represent the aspirations of Indigenous [peoples] and carry within them the potential to strengthen the struggle for emancipation and liberation from oppression’ (Rigney 1999:114 in Ladner 2001:37). A battle cry of “Indigenize!” relays in the minds of activists, lobbyists, and even one’s own self as Indigenous peoples bring forward their knowledge to shift how our world thinks and learns how to reason (Battiste 2013:71; Ladner 2001:35). This shift is caused by the *Indigenous Renaissance* since it is an agenda for the present and future and is a movement that works collaboratively

toward Indigenous peoples' goals for sovereignty, self-determination, and treaty and Aboriginal rights (Battiste 2013:73-74).

All of those that experience this movement attempt to bring light to how Indigenous peoples reason with the world, since our society has been instructed to reason in only one fashion, and that is through scientific analysis that dictates a specified way of thinking (Ladner 2001:35). Incommensurability impacts the discussion of Indigenous methodologies. Through this way of thinking, tensions arise amongst Western scholars and Indigenous peoples struggle to share their knowledge due to how they have been educated in Western institutions that limit the ability to see outside fact and evidence. As James Youngblood Henderson affirms in *The Mi'kmaw Concordat*, it is the 'transformation of consciousness' that is required in order to escape colonial legacies and Western-Eurocentric thought (1997:24). By incorporating Indigenous alterNative ways of thinking we react to intellectual colonialism and reaffirm Indigenous knowledge by respecting Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies (Ladner 2001:37).

By incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems and research frameworks that are distinctive of cultural epistemologies we are able to challenge and transform the institutional hegemony of the academy (Kovach 2009:12). This institutional transformation is how Indigenous knowledge systems and research frameworks open up new ways of interpretation and understanding since these offer broad overviews and frameworks for research; but since they are based on beliefs and assumptions about reality, they are intrinsically tied to value (Wilson 2008:33). Therefore, these methodologies are based on Indigenous knowledge that is derived from the spirit, heart, mind and body; where intuitive

knowledge, and metaphysical and unconscious realms are possible channels to knowing (Abolson 2011:31 using Colorado 1988; Deloria 2002; Little Bear 2000). Channels can come from meditation, dreams, and visions, and all of these are gifts from the spiritual realms that allow a researcher to learn through nature and maintain the relationship between creation and the Creator. As Leroy Little Bear states: "the function of Aboriginal values is to maintain the relationships that hold Creation together. If Creation manifests itself in terms of cyclical patterns and repetitions, the maintenance and renewal of those patterns is all-important" (2000:81 in Abolson 2011:49). Cyclical patterns that reflect a continuous connection that is never broken are important since Indigenous worldviews are 'cyclically governed by natural and spiritual laws' and bound by *wholism* (Abolson 2011:59). Wholism as Jo-Ann Archibald (1997) stated in her dissertation:

"...refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behavior/action) realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of wholism extends to and is mutually influenced by one's family, community, Band and Nation. The image of a circle is to show the synergistic influence and responsibility to the generations of ancestors, the generations today, and the generations yet to come. That animal/human kingdoms, the elements of Nature/land, and the Spirit World are an integral part of the concentric circles" (Abolson 2011:59).



This wholistic view is embraced by multiple Indigenous Nations around the world and incorporates a mindset that looks beyond scientific research as it attempts to bring in-depth qualitative research of knowing how and why. To exemplify this further, the terms used by scholars for “research” should not reflect a Western view of collecting and finding, but instead should reflect the views of obtaining through past traditional practice and include terms such as searching, harvesting, picking, gathering, hunting and trapping (Abolson 2011:21). By incorporating Indigenous intellectual traditions of how knowledge is gained, researchers allow themselves to view the world through different lenses and open their selves to a new way of thinking, learning, and understanding. Researchers who do not share these mindsets can begin with understanding cultural protocol since this is not only a method to obtain knowledge but the creation of a mutual relationship with Indigenous Elders.

As Margaret Kovach states in *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context*: “we need only to look to the importance of protocol within Indigenous communities to recognize that how activities (i.e. methods) are carried out matter. Protocols are a means to ensure that activities are carried out in a manner that reflects community teachings and are done in a good way. The same principle ought to apply to research” (2009:40). Walter Lighting defines “protocol” as:

“... to any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request. The protocols differ according to the nature of the request and the nature of the

individuals involved. The actions and statements may be outwardly simple and straightforward, or they may be complex, involving preparation lasting a year or more. The protocols may often involve the presentation of something. It would be a mistake to say that what is presented is symbolic of whatever may be requested, or the relationship that it is hoped will be established, because it is much more than symbolic” (1992:210 in Kovach 2009:37-38).

Indigenous teachings and cultural protocol encompass the importance of Indigenous methodologies. Since they both relate to the act of sharing, and since each personal narrative, story, and song is a method that allows each generation to transmit knowledge, these approaches are vital to cultural persistence and continuity. Cultural longevity depends on the ability to sustain cultural knowledge, and many Indigenous scholars emphasize methodological approaches that respect cultural knowings (Kovach 2009). These cultural knowings drive Indigenous research through three distinct characteristics including: the cultural knowledges that guide one’s research choices, the methods used in searching, and a way to interpret knowledge that gives back in a purposeful, helpful, and relevant manner (to the Nation and the wider audience) (Kovach 2009:43-44).

Susan Abolson presents an example of an Indigenous methodological approach that incorporates all of the previously mentioned. Abolson’s “Petal Flower” is a wholistic framework in search of knowledge and is comprised of six parts:

1. *The Roots*: That is the foundational elements, where all methodologies are rooted and

- informed in varying degrees by Indigenous paradigms and worldviews.
2. *The Center of the Flower:* The center represents self and self in relation to the research. Indigenous re-search is as much as who is doing the research as to the how of the research.
  3. *The Leaves:* The leaves enable photosynthesis of knowledge: the transformative journeys of self through research. Indigenous researchers are on a journey of learning who they are and what they know. The leaves are connected to the stem and to the ways Indigenous searchers navigate academic channels.
  4. *The Stem:* This is the methodological backbone and supports all parts of the whole. The backbone of Indigenous research comprises a critique of colonialism, imperialism, and euro Western research on Indigenous peoples. The stem is the connecting pathway between the paradigms, researcher, process, academia, and methodologies. Critical Indigenous research agendas are actualized because of the strengths, supports, skills, and roles of Indigenous scholars.
  5. *The Petals:* The petals represent the diversity of indigenous research and methodology. The diverse ways of research for knowledge.
  6. *The Environment:* This is the academic context of the framework that influences the life of Indigenous methodologies in the academy and affects Indigenous researchers who are

trying to advance their theories and methods. Predominantly, Indigenous research and the inclusion of an Indigenous methodological approach brings uncertainty and unfamiliarity since it is unfamiliar in the academy, and therefore within the environment a researcher can share their experiences and strategies for employing Indigenous research in the academy (2011:50-52).

This methodology is significant in a number of ways: all of its components are interrelated and interdependent; it is earth centered and harmoniously exists in relationship with Creation; it's cyclical and changes from season to season; the environment it lives in impacts its life; and it has spirit and a life (Abolson 2011:49). Predominantly, this Indigenous methodology brings the core of creation to the center of its importance while acknowledging and validating Indigenous leadership and scholarship displayed within a climate that is often foreign, alienating, and marginalizing (Abolson 2011:49). This methodological framework is one of many that may be utilized by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars because it intertwines Anishinaabe protocol and intellectual traditions. As promising and important as frameworks such as these are, there are limitations and tensions within Indigenous methodology.

Tensions that arise from attempting to conform to an outsider's view of the 'Indigenous Standard' (i.e. 'all Natives are this, all Natives are that') have failed since each Indigenous Nation is different and unique and has a multi-layered tradition of customs borrowed from other Nations and employ strategies to understand their own places (Kovach 2009:5; Oliveira 2006:6 in Louis 2007:133). Quite simply, there cannot

be a single Indigenous methodology that is universal since, as Kovach states, a common language puts Indigenous peoples at risk (2009:24). As Little Bear states, “there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply concepts generally” (2000:79). Therefore, each Indigenous Nation is bound by their cultural philosophies, worldviews, beliefs, customs, and protocols, and though a general methodological approach assists through research, it cannot however be a universal truth for all Indigenous peoples. To exemplify, Indigenous languages often have multiple meanings associated to one word and when you give a translation that becomes the sole definition it compromises the word entirely, since it denies other possible meanings to be associated with the term.

Indigenous methodologies have allowed Indigenous ways of knowing to emphasize the cultural, spiritual, and intangible importance of Indigenous ways of life. These methodologies allow Indigenous histories and pasts to be told through Indigenous knowledge systems that put the heart of the people at the forefront rather than on the margins looking in. These are valuable and critical research frameworks and epistemologies that can assist in enhancing, rewriting, and challenging what we know and have yet to learn about Indigenous peoples. The overall principles of Indigenous methodologies include the incorporation of Indigenous worldviews and cultural knowledge systems, but these are simply not enough. The foundations of academic hierarchy are rooted in colonial thought and this requires us to decolonize academic and larger societal systems.

### *Decolonizing Methodologies*

In order to assess what decolonization is and how it relates to methodologies, I believe we must examine what colonization/colonialism is by assessing

imperialism. Imperialism frames the ‘Indigenous experience’ and still hurts, still destroys, while reforming itself constantly (Smith 1999:19). Extending backwards all the way to the arrival of Christopher Columbus, imperialism allowed for a vast array of military personnel, imperial administrators, priests, explorers, missionaries, colonial officials, artists, entrepreneurs, and settlers to leave permanent “wounds” on the Indigenous Nations, and allowed them to name and claim traditional lands (Smith 1999:21). Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that imperialism tends to be used in at least four different ways beginning from the fifteenth century:

1. Imperialism as economic expansion: The system of control that secured the markets and capital investments,
2. Imperialism as a form of subjugation of ‘others’: Exploitation and subjugation of Indigenous peoples that has created a struggle to recover histories, lands, languages, and basic human dignity,
3. Imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization: Particularly, this way incorporates the promotion of science, economic expansion and political practice, all of which have impacted the study and research of Indigenous peoples, and
4. Imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge: This way has been generated by writers whose understandings of imperialism and colonialism have been based either on their membership of and experience with colonized societies, or on their interests in understanding imperialism from

the perspective of local contexts (1999:21-23).

Imperialism was the beginning of what would become colonialism and the driving force for settlement of colonies. As Susan Miller asserts in her article "Native Historians Write Back," colonialism refers the planting of colonies outside of a Nation's land base that suppressed and manipulated Indigenous peoples through military assault, concentration on reduced land bases, the taking of children, re-education, criminalization of Indigenous culture and incarceration of its carriers, and so on (2011:33). Though Miller's statement traces the impact of colonization through time, the colonial policies reflect an agenda that attempts to remove Indigenous sovereignty and rights from the outset.

Colonialism therefore is 'the historical process whereby the 'West' attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-West' (Gandhi 1998:16 in Hart 2009:26). Colonization however, connects directly to Indigenous knowledge through three means: *exclusion*, or the absence of Indigenous knowledge, methodologies and practices, and with Eurocentric scholars identifying their knowledge as superior; *marginalization*, where peoples, individuals, and ideas are put to the sidelines; and *appropriation* that connects colonialism to Indigenous knowledge through the misrepresentation of partial representation of an idea or artifact without recognition of the sources or inspiration, while at the same time gaining prosperity, success, and/or the benefit from others' ideas (Hart 2009; Graveline 1998 in Hart 2009:27). The question for Indigenous historians is not what colonial peoples have done but how Indigenous peoples have experienced them (Miller 2011:33).

To challenge the constraints of colonialism, academics and new learners

who are allies to Indigenous peoples in the protection of our knowledge must step outside their privileged positions and challenge research that conforms to the guidelines of the colonial power structure (Hart 2009:32 using Simpson 2004:381). Specific topics concerned with decolonization include Indigenous ways of thinking such as: "ideas about citizenship, governance and organizational structures, education, oral traditions, language, repatriation, images and stereotypes, and diet, as well as the role of truth telling..." (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird 2005:4). In order to understand why we must decolonize Indigenous thought, we can focus our attention to the context of African colonization and where we first witness decolonization emerge through diffusion and anti-colonialism.

Mary Louis Pratt presents "diffusion" as the process of substitution and replication, and this, put simply, is where Western education replaces Native education, and where the modern replaces the traditional and local (Hart 2009:30). The 'superior' or importantly, the Western approach, substitutes for the 'inferior' philosophical belief systems. However, anti-colonial accounts recall a completely different substitution; instead these were structured interventions that combined physical and epistemological violence inflicted onto Indigenous peoples (Hart 2009 using Pratt 2004:452). The anti-colonial approach brings forward anti-oppressive discourses and at the same time, remains aware of the historical and institutional structures and contexts that sustain intellectual projects (Hart 2009 using Dei 2000). Within anti-colonialism lies *Indigenism* that opposes imperialism and colonialism but incorporates the *fourth-world position*. Identified by Manuel and Posluns, the 'fourth-world' calls for empowerment and seeks the ultimate goal of peace (Hart 2009:32). Indigenism can literally mean 'to

be born of a place' and specifically as Hart (using Jamies Guerrero (2003:66)) states: an Indigenous person has the "responsibility to practice kinship roles with his or her bioregional habitat, manifested through cultural beliefs, rituals and ceremonies that cherish biodiversity; this is the contact of Native land ethic and spirituality" (Hart 2009:33). The emphasis of anti-colonial and Indigenism is the recognition of the injustices inflicted by imperialism and colonialism and what we as Indigenous writers and advocates must bring forth as we reflect on the transformation of our worldviews and customs. This is decolonization that looks to resist and challenge colonial institutions and ideologies (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird 2005:2). Decolonization is an important aspect of writing and learning Indigenous pasts, and is critical to the advancement of Indigenous worldviews into mainstream educational systems that are Eurocentric by nature. This is where Indigenous scholars and supporters must break down the layers of colonialism from our education, politics, medicine, and so on, and confront the very foundation Western society is built upon.

Confronting ideologies of oppression is essential in order to decolonize our minds and our disciplines because we are not in post-colonial times (Louis 2007:131 using Smith 2000:215; Moody 1993:xxix). Decolonizing Indigenous research is not the total rejection of Western theory, research, knowledge, and existing literature, but it is about shifting directions into Indigenous concerns and worldviews and how we come to know and understand our theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes (Louis 2007:132 using Smith 1999:39). Primarily, decolonization is by no means an effort to live as Indigenous peoples once did before contact and colonization, but a movement to rid the colonized relations with nation-states and the destructive nature of those relationships

(Miller 2011:34). Simply, it is a movement to 'bring back' that includes the revitalization of language, recovering ceremonies, institutions, technologies, philosophies, games, and various other forms of ancient knowledge, including traditional governance and responsibility (Miller 2011:35).

At the same time decolonizing methodologies do not allow Indigenous peoples to fall into victimization of past injustices but rather demonstrate how we are able to work toward our freedom, transform the world around us, and liberate our lives while at the same time enhancing our cultures, traditions, and state of mind (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird 2005:2). Graham Smith (2000) (in Battiste 2013:70) furthers this notion through showing how Indigenous peoples' struggles cannot be reduced to singular solutions in singular locations but need to be carried out in multiple sites using multiple strategies. Decolonizing methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research (Kovach 2009:33). So far, I have discussed the importance and needs that have driven a decolonial discourse by Indigenous peoples, but to see what methods are implemented in practice we will turn to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999).

Various Indigenous scholars have utilized Smith's work as it details a global experience felt by Indigenous peoples who share a common history. In her book, Smith presents twenty-five decolonizing projects that are not efforts to resume living as our Indigenous ancestors did before colonization but a movement to rid colonial relationships with nation-states and the destructive efforts of those relations. Of these twenty-five projects I will focus on nine that are important for my particular research: storytelling, celebrating survival,

remembering, connecting, writing, representing, returning, protecting, and sharing. Though the other projects will all tie into my research, these nine will bring forth the importance of decolonizing methodologies and reveal the motivating factors of my study.

Storytelling, oral narratives, or oral histories are an integral part of the Indigenous research since these stories “contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place” (Smith 1999:144). Oral narratives and oral traditions allow for Nation stories linked to identity and wellbeing to be brought to the forefront of academic research and analysis. Indigenous cultures have a firm tradition of telling stories, and this is because they are used as teaching narratives, to tell of spiritual beginnings, and to offer words of self-healing and self-reflection for the audience. The majority of Indigenous cultures are oral cultures, and oral tradition and narratives bind Indigenous peoples together. Oral traditions and narratives present the collective of the Nation and as Simon Oritz states:

“The oral tradition of Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that too. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behavior, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. I think at times “oral tradition” is defined too strictly in terms of verbal-vocal manifestations in stories, songs, meditations, ceremonies, ritual, philosophies, and clan and tribal histories passed from older generations to the next...Oral tradition evokes and expresses a belief system” (1992:7 in Archibald 2008:25-26).

Oral traditions and narratives present a look into cultural traditions and custom while at the same time dictating protocol, and this is because of *oratory*. Oratory as a Lee Maracle affirms is a place of prayer, to persuade:

“This is a word we can work with. We regard words as coming from original being – a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive. Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of people” (1992:87 in Archibald 2008:26).

Oral narratives are linked within ancestral traditions, and they are maintained through a systematic process that includes oral footnotes of where the story began, who spoke it, and from where it came. Not only do stories tell of the culture and people, but also they allow for Elders to reach beyond their generation and impact the lives of the youth and therefore impact cultural longevity. Stories such as these offer ‘diversities of truth’ where the storyteller and not the researcher remain in control (Bishop in Smith 1999:145). Linked within storytelling is the celebration of survival that focuses on the positives of Indigenous being and celebrates our resistance and affirms our cultural identity (Smith 1999:145).

Both Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies offer extensive frameworks

and approaches to carrying out the reclamation of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. While similar in their ultimate goal, the differences are distinct in their overall approaches, causing tensions to exist. Indigenous methodologies attack the research processes and aim to incorporate “alterNative” ways of thinking including Indigenous knowledge systems, whereas decolonizing methodologies attempt to remove colonial relationships and the systematic injustices that Indigenous peoples are placed into. While both bring forward the experiences of colonialism, one aims to produce a resurgence of traditional knowledges through worldview and intellectual traditions, and one aims deconstruct and decolonize our minds from suppression and assumed inferiority in which we are situated in the idea of the “endgame of empire” (Wazyatawin 2011:76 in Desai et al. 2012:ix). However, neither is capable of successfully reaching their goal without the other since decolonization can only be “achieved through the resurgence of an Indigenous consciousness channeled into contention with colonialism” (Alfred 2009:48 in Desai et al. 2012:iii). Indigenous methodologies that incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems are the starting point for resurgence and decolonization. However, to narrow in our focus, I will present a Nêhiyawak Methodological approach to discuss how certain research frameworks require a specific and detailed approach.

### *Nêhiyawak Methodology*

Indigenous and decolonizing epistemologies both examine the collective experience of Indigenous peoples, yet there are limitations and generalizations that extend out of their initiative. Margaret Kovach explains that applying Indigenous and decolonial methods may actually reveal too much and make available through texts what should have never been written down,

such as sacred knowledge (2009:46). Therefore, there is a need to create and express how Nation specific methodological approaches differ from Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies since Indigenous cultures offer a breadth of distinct, unique, and even multicultural worldviews that are not expressed within a generalized approach. With that said, the Nation specific methodology that I will focus comes from the *Nêhiyawak*, the ‘Four-Body People’. The *Nêhiyawak* are often referred to as the Plains Cree, though we prefer to term *Nêhiyaw* over colonial terminology.

*Nêhiyaw Kiskeyihtamowin*, Plains Cree Knowledges, is an epistemological approach presented by Kovach that has several characteristics including: Nation epistemology, decolonizing and ethical aim, researcher preparations involving cultural protocols, research preparation involving standard research design, making meaning of knowledges gathered, and giving back (Kovach 2009:46). The basis of this framework is in relation to *miyo*, meaning good, and is important for sharing and generosity, and for respect for the earth and all its life forms (Kovach 2009:63). *Miyowichetowin* is good relations and is the center of *Nêhiyaw* culture and the basis of ethical responsibility. Kovach presents a *Nêhiyaw* research framework through the Buffalo Hunt. The *paskwao-mostow*, buffalo, were the main stay of the Plains *Nêhiyaw* economy and an essential part of *Nêhiyaw* life. Peyasiw-awasis, Chief Thunderchild, shares a story that underlines *Nêhiyaw* methodology in relation to the buffalo:

“In the days when the buffalo were many, there were Old Men who had the gift of ‘making pounds.’ Poundmaker’s [one of the Chiefs of the Plains Cree] father was such a one, and he gave the name to his son. Another was Eyi-pa-chi-nas, and

when it was known that he was 'sitting at pound' – that he was seeking the supernatural power to bring the buffalo – hunters would gather.

One winter there were ten teepees, just for these hunters. Working all together, they cut trees to make a circular pound about seventy yards across... The gate was fourteen feet wide, and out from it they laid two long lines of tufted willows that spread farther and farther apart, to channel the buffalo into the pound. In the centre they set a great lobbed tree.

When everything was ready, other Old Men joined Eyi-pa-chinas and sang the buffalo song. Far on the plain, a herd of buffalo was sighted, and two young men rode out to watch. They were to blow whistles as soon as the buffalo started to move in the early morning... The buffalo came on between the lines of the wall and through the gate... Then the hunters closed in, and stopped the gateway with poles and buffalo robes.

We would cut up the meat till late at night, and haul it with dogs to the encampment... Other bands came to join us and to feast" (Ahenakew 1995:36 in Kovach 2009:64-65).

In this story we witness an underlying methodology that is "the preparation for research, preparation of the researcher, recognition of protocol (cultural and ethical), respectfulness, and sharing the knowledge (reciprocity)" (Kovach 2009:65). This is a context of how the Nêhiyaw people did

things, and an epistemological teaching. In order to get at the heart of Nation epistemology, we can relate to storytelling and the teachings within each narrative, and we can also find the cultural protocols within language.

Within *Nêhiyawêwin*, Plains Cree language, we witness how the Nêhiyawak related to their world. We can look at the animacy of animals, tobacco, rocks, trees, and rivers and understand why they are given respect and how wholism ties within Nêhiyaw concepts. English translations often do not convey the full context of the meaning, and as researchers we must be aware that "we are going to lose some of the meanings, and we are also going to change some of the meanings" (Hart in Kovach 2009:68). What we must remember is that a researcher does not need to be fluent in *Nêhiyawewin* but have an understanding of how language influences knowledge. This is an important and critical aspect of Nation epistemology since it speaks to other realms of knowing and the sacred. Sacred knowledge is difficult for Western researchers to accept and is quite often uncomfortable to them, since as Shawn Wilson demonstrates Nêhiyaw research is a ceremony, and the West has struggled to understand the metaphysical (2008:69).

Nêhiyaw ways of knowing are tied to the pipe, the songs, and prayer, and these are integral parts of ceremony. Treaty negotiations were conducted in a pipe ceremony, which is one of the most important ceremonies conducted since it involves spiritual beings and ancestors. How Nêhiyaw people come to know is linked to spiritual knowings and processes such as ceremonies, dreams, visions, and synchronicities (Kovach 2009). The emphasis of a Nêhiyaw epistemology is the importance of "respect, reciprocity, relation, protocol, holistic knowing, relevancy, story, interpretive meaning, and the experiential nested in place and kinship systems" (Kovach 2009:67).



With that said, there is no designated Nêhiyaw philosophy for how we come to know is a process in understanding our own being (Kovach 2009), and the research that is conducted within the Nêhiyaw culture is a learning journey that reflects the writer's experiences. Understanding Nêhiyaw custom and tradition is only the beginning of the whole experience a researcher will undergo, and often we fail to realize that though we may write a dissertation, a novel, or an article, we may not be leading that project and the universe has decided what we should or should not know. That is an important aspect of Indigenous and Nation research that is never accounted for in traditional western modes of knowledge-making.

Nêhiyawak methodologies offer new insights and cultural experiences for researchers, and are valuable to growth of Indigenous literature and study. This specific research framework puts the needs of the Nêhiyawak in the forefront of the research and allows for them to express how they understand and interact with the world around them. A Nation-specific methodology extends out of Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies but at the same time has distinct goals it aims to achieve. The tensions that exist are those that the Nêhiyaw people must forward since it is their way of life being researched, their experiences within the constructs of colonialism, and know what ideologies and traditions are important for their own resurgence and well-being. Nation methodologies are based on the foundations of creation and incorporate the ontological knowledge linked to philosophies that make each Indigenous Nation distinct.

### *Conclusion: Moving Forward*

Indigenous peoples live within two worlds: one is rooted in culture and tradition, and the other is within the colonial indoctrination of the settler-nation state. Finding who we are is an important journey

of self-discovery, reclamation, and liberation, as we are often conflicted between who we feel we are inside and the society we find ourselves in. Nêhiyaw writers Shawn Wilson, Margaret Kovach, Neal McLeod, Michael Hart, and various others have written about their experiences in understanding who they are through their research. Together these scholars have reflected that the research we intend to do does not always follow what we plan because in there is an unaccounted-for element. Kovach points out "our culture, family, kin, kith, clan, and Nation wait for us. We have the right to know who we are, and that this right involves responsibilities – but there are people to help us out, that we are not alone" (2009:10). Often accounted for as skepticism or simply, the idea that "I do not see them so they cannot exist", is the spirits and ancestors that are within Indigenous research including the stories of our Elders who channel the same voice heard millennia ago. The ancestors that watch over our shoulder as we write down traditions and customs, and the other than human entities that witness our everyday actions and live around us and those who watch from the sky. There is a spiritual dimension that is incorporated in Indigenous studies, and for a scholar to experience this embodiment requires them to change the very essence of how they view and perceive the world.

This realization is an important aspect of epistemology, as I begin to understand my self-in-relation to the world, but importantly my role within my Nation. Crazy Bull states that "the most welcomed researcher is already a part of the community, ... understand[s] the history, needs, and sensibilities of the community ... focuses on solutions, and understands that research is a life-long process" (1997:19 in Louis 2007:131). Reflexivity is utilized within qualitative research approaches to reference the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning-making process (Kovach 2009:32).

With the needs of my Nation in mind, I have thought extensively about my role as a Nation member and what I can contribute to academia as an anthropologist. We cannot change what happened in the past, but we cannot forget it either, it is important to acknowledge this in every aspect of Indigenous research and study, but it's also important to remember that these past injustices do not define who we are, who will become, and how we can redefine the society we are a part of and add to the discussion of *where do we go now?* How do we better these relationships, and how can we change our outlook and perspective about Indigenous peoples and their histories?

By incorporating Indigenous knowledge and relation to the universe, we allow for Indigenous peoples to be authors of their pasts, and we decolonize the systems that we are indoctrinated into. As Sylvia McAdam points out: "to begin decolonizing systems of the colonizer we will inevitably lead to a path of Indigenous self-determination, liberation, and freedom" (2015:36). Freedom from the constraints that impact our Nations and wellbeing is the ultimate goal within Indigenous research, something I like those before me have sought. Though there is still much work to be done; examining the differences and similarities between Indigenous, decolonizing, and Nation-specific methodologies allows researchers to be exposed to new ways of thinking and perceiving the world around us. What is fundamental to any Indigenous research is that Indigenous peoples must be the first priority of researchers since this is their history. Without them, there is no research. As Linda Tuhaiwi Smith (1999) points out, 'research' for Indigenous peoples is a dirty word because of past injustices by self-serving academics, and we need to change what research means for Indigenous peoples by incorporating how they continue intellectual traditions and cultural continuity.

Western academia often enacts 'methodological discrimination' that limits the incorporation of Indigenous methodologies, but in order to counter this view we need to increase the awareness of Indigenous inquiry and research (Ryen 2000:220 in Kovach 2009:13). As each methodology grows within Indigenous research and breaks down the borders of academic discourse, there is the hope that the voices of our ancestors will lead the discussion and change the very course of our world. I may not see it in my lifetime, but like those who have come before me, the prayers and tobacco have been said and laid down for the generations to come, and each step forward is for them.

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