

Ogichitaakwe Regeneration

Tricia McGuire Adams

B.A., Lakehead University, 2002  
H.B.A., Lakehead University, 2003

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Supervisory Committee

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by

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## Abstract

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This thesis explores regenerating Anishinaabekwe (women's) empowerment. The teaching of the ogichitaakwe (an Anishinaabekwe who is committed to helping the Anishinaabe people) was investigated to gain knowledge of how this aspect of the Anishinaabekwe ideology can be used to challenge the effects of colonialism in community. The goal of the thesis is to frame solutions to the effects of colonialism from the foundation of empowerment via the Anishinaabekwe ideology. The thesis examines how the Anishinaabekwe ideology in collaboration with radical indigenous feminism is useful in challenging colonialism. To this end, the utilization of self-consciousness-raising groups or Wiisokotaatiwin (gathering together for a purpose) provides the opportunity to address personal decolonization and regeneration. The author will show that by committing to the Anishinaabekwe ideology, the effects of colonialism will be addressed from a place of empowerment and ultimately regenerate the Anishinaabe Nation.

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Niinwendimaaginatok – All my relations.

Dedication

To Bishigweneb and Makoons

## Chapter One

### Introduction

I locate my purpose for being in the Indigenous Governance Program to my people and communities. I am here to gain the knowledge necessary to assist the Anishinaabe Nation to strive to overcome the effect of colonialism on our lives. My communities are Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek and Anemkii Wekwegong on Thunder Bay, Ontario. I place my responsibility with the Anishinaabe Nation because I am Dibikgeezhigokwe from Mishkwaadesi (turtle) clan. I sought to understand the history behind my communities as I struggled to be complete in my Anishinaabe identity while being raised in the city. Although my family ties are strong, I felt a loss inside of me because I was not raised on the land. I began to leave behind the loss, loneliness and disconnection I felt to the land when I met my partner, who was raised to understand the Anishinaabe connection to the land. My partner (from Couchiching First Nation in the Treaty 3 Nation), along with my mother- and father-in-law, brought me out on the land where I began reconnecting to it; I felt like I was home. It is actually difficult for me to put this feeling into words. I relate it to being a piece of a large puzzle; it was only by finding my place in the puzzle that I felt complete. I know my words cannot do justice to the feeling I have in my spirit every time I am on the land because it is a spiritual experience. As this thesis will show, the connection Anishinaabe women have to the land stems directly from our existence as Anishinaabekwe, which can be seen in our stories. By reading stories and learning from my elders' knowledge, I came to realize that indigenous women have been able to maintain strength despite the brutal imposition of colonization.

I remember being so full of hope when I learned that indigenous women were not always disempowered by colonialism. I took it upon myself to read as much as I could about how we were once strong leaders, the pillars of nations and families. Eleven years ago, I wrote a short essay reflecting on how indigenous women have gone from strong leaders to being voiceless in our society by means of the Europeans. The two indigenous women writers I turned to were Paula Gunn Allen and Janice Acoose; they, too, were writing about indigenous women's experience of colonialism and empowerment.

Our lives have a path to follow so I felt inspired when I found this old college essay in the midst of writing this first chapter, which also focuses on the "resurgence of women's power" [taken from my college essay]. I am compelled to write about the regeneration of Anishinaabekwe ideology in order to combat the effect of colonialism on our being. This is my path and I have come full circle.

I agree with Dr. Waziyatawin Wilson's articulation of responsibility. She explains:

While the hard work for our internal decolonization remains, a project that can only be taken up by the people from within our communities, Indigenous scholars have the opportunity and obligation to utilize our research, analytical, writing and teachings skills to facilitate that process in whatever way we can.<sup>1</sup>

My objective in undertaking this research is to commit to the regeneration of Anishinaabe womanhood. By using the inherent strength of Anishinaabe womanhood, we may be able to overcome Anishinaabe women's oppression and disempowerment. Our identity as Anishinaabe women has sustained an immeasurable injury from the impact of

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<sup>1</sup> Waziyatawin Wilson. "Reclaiming Our Humanity: Decolonization and the Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge." *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*. Ed. Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London. 2004. 84.

colonialism; by regenerating our Anishinaabe teachings, we will be able to address the effects of colonialism.

I advocate that indigenous women in Canada who seek to overcome their subjugation must choose to challenge the oppression in their lives. If we can individually achieve a transformation, together in solidarity, I believe we can make great changes in the lives of our people. The teachings that flow from understanding the Anishinaabe way of life come from our communities. To be aware of the concepts in our teachings of womanhood and the ogichitaakwe, the Anishinaabe women and men who still carry this knowledge have been interviewed.

### Anishinaabekwe Ideology

I have chosen to use the term *Anishinaabekwe ideology* in this thesis to refer to the cultural and ethical understandings of Anishinaabe womanhood as a foundational philosophy of the Anishinaabe worldview.<sup>2 3 4 5</sup>

The teachings of Anishinaabe womanhood offer a profound way to regenerate empowerment in the lives of Anishinaabe women. Kim Anderson in her work, *A Recognition of Being: Restructuring Native Womanhood*, recognizes that “if we can revive the female teachings ... practices and traditions, we will regain our sense of purpose”<sup>6</sup> as indigenous women. Included in the Anishinaabekwe ideology is the

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<sup>2</sup> Renee Elizabeth Mzinegiizhigo-Kwe Bedard. “An Anishinaabe-kwe Ideology on Mothering and Motherhood.” *Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*. Ed. D. Memee Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell. Canada: Demeter Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Basil Johnston. *Ojibway Heritage*. Canada: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Winona Laduke. *Last Standing Woman*. MN: Voyageur Press, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Solomon. *Songs for the People: Teachings on the Natural Way*. Ed. Micheal Posluns. Ontario: NC Press, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 38.

teaching of the ogichitaakwe.<sup>7</sup> The guiding question for my research is to understand how the teaching of the ogichitaakwe could be used to confront colonialism. In addition, indigenous feminism provides a theoretical and community viewpoint from which to explore how it may connect to the teaching of the ogichitaakwe by creating dialogue.

The research on the teaching of ogichitaakwe builds on Dr. Taiaiake Alfred's, a Kanienkeha scholar, construction of the warrior ethic in *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* and Winona Laduke's conception of the ogichitaakwe in *Last Standing Woman*. Dr. Alfred states:

A warrior confronts colonialism with the truth in order to regenerate authenticity and recreate a life worth living and principles worth dying for. The struggle is to restore connections severed by the colonial machine. The victory is an integrated personality, a cohesive community, and the restoration of respectful and harmonious relationships.<sup>8</sup>

Confronting colonialism, regenerating authenticity and restoring relationships are central elements in addressing colonialism and regenerating personality and community. Dr. Alfred also explains that we must first analyze the root of our problems before we can create solutions for them. By addressing the roots of colonialism as the cause of the disempowerment of our identity as Anishinaabe women, we may regenerate our power.

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<sup>7</sup> Ogichitaakwe is explored in Chapter 2. There is no one definition of the word into English but many different representations of being an ogichitaakwe. However, it can be generally understood as an Anishinaabe woman who is committed to helping her people.

<sup>8</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. ON: Broadview Press, 2005. 45.

Laduke expresses the same connection in *Last Standing Woman* by showing how disempowerment caused by colonialism occurred for the characters in her story. The root problems were their forced displacement from the land, the imposition of patriarchal violence and cultural teachings targeted towards our cultural extinction. She shows that for Anishinaabe women to combat the effect of colonialism, their Anishinaabekwe identity and teachings must be regenerated. She illustrates how her Anishinaabe women characters were ogichitaakwe before the assault of colonialism and how they fought to carry on those teachings. Laduke notes that the essential elements in regeneration are the acceptance of the values of ogichitaakwe, the loss of identity, and its regeneration through the teaching of the ogichitaakwe, the influence of the ancestors, ceremony and culture. Both Dr. Alfred and Laduke demonstrate that the ethics of the warrior and the ogichitaakwe open a door to challenging colonialism. Dr. Wilson's (Wahpetunwan Dakota Nation) description of empowerment and decolonization is essential to this discussion. She states:

Decolonization becomes central to unravelling the long history of colonization and returning well-being to our people. As Cree scholar Winona Wheeler explains, decolonization offers a strategy for empowerment. A large part of decolonization entails developing a critical consciousness about the cause(s) of our oppression, the distortion of history, our own collaboration, and the degrees to which we have internalized colonialist ideas and practices. Decolonization requires auto-criticism, self-reflection, and a rejection of victimage.

Decolonization is about empowerment – a belief that situations can be transformed, a belief and trust in our own peoples' values and abilities, and a

willingness to make change. It is about transforming negative reactionary energy into the more positive rebuilding energy needed in our communities.

Decolonization in its farthest extension moves us beyond mere survival and becomes a means of restoring health and prosperity to our people by returning to traditions and ways of life that have been systematically suppressed.<sup>9</sup>

To achieve empowerment, our focus must be shifted to a commitment to the ideology of womanhood such as that of the Anishinaabekwe. Central in the fight to overcome the effects of colonialism is personal decolonization. Until this is achieved, we, as Anishinaabekwe, will only maintain our oppression. I will provide an example of how this can occur in my discussion of Aboriginal organizations in Chapter 3.

This thesis has considered the teaching of the ogichitaakwe to learn how the Anishinaabe knowledge may be applied to combating colonialism through regenerating empowerment. In addition, the thesis investigates how the Anishinaabekwe ideology in collaboration with radical indigenous feminism<sup>10</sup> is useful in challenging the effects of colonialism in the lives of Anishinaabekwe. To this end, I investigate the use of self-consciousness-raising groups. While the function of the groups is apparent, I nonetheless changed the name to *Wiisokotatiwin* – gathering together for a purpose. Through

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<sup>9</sup> Waziyatawin Wilson. “Reclaiming Our Humanity: Decolonization and the Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge.” *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*. Ed. Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 71.

<sup>10</sup> Radical feminism can provide an avenue to challenge and overcome the inherited patriarchal underpinnings of our teachings while also articulating the problems associated with seeking solutions in the political/colonial system. Combining radical and indigenous feminism together provides an essential tool in the struggle to overcome the effects of colonialism, and keeps our foundation rooted in our worldview and teachings.

Wiisokotatiwin, the groups examine the Anishinaabekwe ideology, personal decolonization and regeneration founded in empowerment.

The goal of the research is to find solutions to the effects of colonialism from a foundation rooted in empowerment. This research is important because the Anishinaabe Nation must rely on our own beliefs and teachings when confronting colonialism on a personal level in our communities. The teaching of the ogichitaakwe is inherent in the research question. In interviews, I have asked the Anishinaabe elders *about the teachings of the ogichitaakwe and its application to combating colonialism in the lives of Anishinaabe women.*

#### Literature Review

The Anishinaabe teaching of the ogichitaakwe is not widely known in the literature. In her novel *Last Standing Woman*, Winona Laduke fictionalizes the only reference found to the ogichitaakwe. Indigenous feminism is a viewpoint from which to examine the problem of colonialism and then devise solutions that are relevant to our political reality. As there was no other literature on the ogichitaakwe, indigenous feminism was researched for topics such as Anishinaabe womanhood,<sup>11 12 13</sup> feminist and indigenous approaches to decolonization,<sup>14 15 16</sup> and community and political strategies in addressing

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<sup>11</sup> Winona Laduke. *Last Standing Woman*. MN: Voyageur Press, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Solomon. *Songs for the People: Teachings on the Natural Way*. ed. Micheal Posluns. Ontario: NC Press, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Joyce Green. "Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism" in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Devon Abbott Mihesuah. *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Annette M. Jaimes and Theresa Halsey. "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America." in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*. ed. Annette M. Jaimes. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992.

oppression.<sup>17 18</sup> It became apparent that the politics, identity and values of indigenous feminists are present in the writings and provide appropriate ways of examining oppression, decolonization and traditional teachings. I proceeded to look at each indigenous feminist viewpoint to determine a link to Anishinaabekwe ideology and the teaching of the ogichitaakwe.

The words of Art Solomon, an Anishinaabe elder from Killarney, Ontario, best represent the subject of this thesis. In one of his poems, he captures the dilemma of indigenous women seeking “rights” in the colonial system rather than searching for the Anishinaabekwe identity given them by Gitchi Manitou (Great Spirit).

He [Gitchi Manitou] said, here is my gift that I give to you, this woman. I have made her place at the centre of the circle of life, let it always be that way and it will be well for you. So now woman I have to question why are you so concerned to go to that hill where they write the laws about equal rights for Indian women? When you know these laws written on paper will mean nothing in the courts of law just as it has always been? .... Only when you have gone back and searched in the mind of god and in your heart, and in the hearts of other women, only when you have found the meaning of Woman, then you will come back *and command respect*.<sup>19</sup> (emphasis original)

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<sup>17</sup> Grace J.M.W. Ouellette. *The Fourth World: An Indigenous Perspective on Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Activism*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Verna St. Denis. “Feminism is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism and Diversity” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Solomon, Arthur. Songs for the People: Teachings on the Natural Way. ed. Micheal Posluns. NC Press Limited: Ontario, Canada. 1990. 95 – 97.

As I understand Solomon's poem, he says that to become empowered by the Anishinaabekwe ideology is to relearn the values, power and spirit to command respect and challenge the roots of colonialism. Dr. Alfred also argues for this approach. He writes, "The root of the problem is that we are living through a spiritual crisis, a time of darkness that descended on our people when we became disconnected from our lands and from our traditional ways of life," and further, "we will begin to make meaningful change in the lives of our communities when we start to focus on making real change in the lives of our people as individuals."<sup>20</sup> This echoes Laduke's work in *Last Standing Woman*, mentioned above. Influenced by Solomon, Alfred and Laduke, I believe that indigenous people who seek to overcome their subjugation must challenge the oppression in their lives. By relying on the Anishinaabekwe ideology, my research explores how the teaching of the ogichitaakwe can be used to understand how transformation in the lives of Anishinaabe women might occur. The elements of tradition regeneration and using our indigenous worldviews in combating colonialism are not widely found in the indigenous feminist discourse. The next portion of the literature review will show this aspect of indigenous feminism.

Joyce Green has written about the emergence of indigenous feminism in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. She states that indigenous feminism is a subject that is widely understood by critics to be "non-existent or untraditional, inauthentic, non-liberatory for Aboriginal women and illegitimate as an ideological position, political

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<sup>20</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005. 31, 32.

analysis and organizational process.”<sup>21</sup> Green argues that indigenous feminists “exist and they choose the label, the ideological position, the analysis and the process.”<sup>22</sup> Green’s analysis reveals the importance of indigenous feminism,

The emerging Indigenous feminist literature and politics, while the terrain of a minority of activists and scholars, must be taken seriously as a critique of colonialism, decolonization and gendered and racialized power relations in both settler and Indigenous communities .... Indigenous feminism is a valid and theoretically and politically powerful critique of the social, economic and political conditions of Aboriginal women’s lives.<sup>23</sup>

Green is showing how indigenous feminism might provide a dialogue for activists, scholars and indigenous women in the community. The question that emerges from Green’s statement is “When speaking of a critique of colonialism, decolonization and gendered and racialized power relations in indigenous communities, why are indigenous women’s connections to their worldview of womanhood missing?” Although this critique is necessary, what is central to decolonization and seemingly absent in her argument is indigenous women’s connection to their worldview. How can Anishinaabe women, from an indigenous feminist platform, be prepared to analyze colonialism and engage with personal decolonization without womanhood ideologies? Furthermore, how could the teaching of the ogichitaakwe be involved in the discourse on indigenous feminism?

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<sup>21</sup> Joyce Green. “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism.” *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

The absence of indigenous values of womanhood is clear when Green notes, “Aboriginal feminism brings together two critiques: feminism and anti-colonialism to show how Aboriginal peoples, and in particular Aboriginal women, are affected by colonialism and by patriarchy.”<sup>24</sup> She continues, “Aboriginal feminism provides a philosophical and political way of conceptualizing and of resisting the oppressions that many Aboriginal people experience.”<sup>25</sup> Green’s emphasis on aboriginal feminism as a way to address colonialism, patriarchy and oppression is an important contribution in understanding how indigenous feminism may provide an avenue to explore these important issues. Problematic in Green’s use of indigenous feminism and clearly missing in the dialogue are indigenous worldviews. The focus must be shifted away from relying only on indigenous feminism to provide a “philosophical and political way of conceptualizing and of resisting the oppressions.” In fact, indigenous women should use their worldviews and values regarding womanhood, coupled with radical indigenous feminism, to address colonialism, patriarchy and oppression.

The main discrepancy in the indigenous feminist discourse is the lack of commitment to one unifying ideology in an indigenous value system. Rather, indigenous feminism includes many women with different beliefs and attitudes about patriarchy and colonialism “fitting comfortably with feminist and post-colonial thought and critical race theory.”<sup>26</sup>

In *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, bell hooks provides a definition of feminism and explains the issue of lifestyle feminism. I feel her discussion is necessary to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 30.

show the importance of committing to foundational change. bell hooks explains that the lack of commitment to feminism is caused by a lack of people making a conscious choice to become a feminist. She gives a definition of feminism and provides a succinct statement on why it is important:

Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. [This definition] clearly states that the movement is not about being anti-male. It makes clear that the problem is sexism. And that clarity helps us remember that all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action .... To end patriarchy we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action.<sup>27</sup>

hooks's definition of feminism reveals the root of the problem: sexism and patriarchal values. In addition, hooks defined the problem as *white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*. I agree with these definitions and apply them to our decolonizing-regeneration struggle. One important difference in the definition is the way she envisions the end of patriarchy. While we must let go of sexist thought and action, both as indigenous people and specifically Anishinaabe people, we must be careful not to replace it with 'feminist thought and action'. We will be successful in challenging patriarchal values only by replacing them with our own ideologies and by using radical indigenous feminism as a tool to achieve regeneration.

hooks explains the problem of women lacking a clear and conscious commitment to feminism. She stated:

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<sup>27</sup> bell hooks. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000. viii-ix.

Lifestyle feminism ushered in the notion that there could be as many versions of feminism as there were women. Suddenly the politics was being slowly removed from feminism. And the assumption prevailed that no matter what a woman's politics, be she conservative or liberal, she too could fit feminism into her existing lifestyle. Obviously, this way of thinking has made feminism more acceptable because its underlying assumption is that women can be feminists without fundamentally challenging and changing themselves or the culture.<sup>28</sup>

The question our people must ask themselves is where their accountabilities lie. Green advocates that women talk about the fact that not all indigenous people will choose traditional formulas. I agree. Choosing to see your oppression and challenge your current value system is the hardest thing to do. In this regard, it is a choice that one must commit to. In this discussion, I agree with the statements made by Dr. Alfred. He explains that when people commit to changing their colonial mentality in order to challenge the roots of colonialism, they must commit to an indigenous value system.

Meaningful change, the transcendence of colonialism, and the restoration of Onkwehonwe (original people) strength and freedom can only be achieved through the resurgence of an Onkwehonwe *spirit* and *consciousness* directed into *contention* with the very foundations of colonialism.<sup>29</sup> (emphasis original)

Our reality deserves this revolutionary attention because our people are still suffering from the continuing imposition of colonialism and the simultaneous undermining of our values. In the end, it becomes a choice between challenging oppression in order to re-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>29</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005. 131.

emerge as empowered Anishinaabekwe or staying entrenched in the confines of the oppressor's value system.

The omission of using indigenous worldviews on womanhood in favour of indigenous feminism is a recurring theme and it reflects the main critique of M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey have about indigenous feminism: that the use of feminism disconnects indigenous women from their own tribal values.<sup>30</sup> How can the adoption of indigenous feminism (as the only platform for articulating indigenous women's experience with colonialism) be useful or appropriate? Perhaps a collaboration of indigenous worldviews and indigenous feminism would be more effective in challenging colonialism. This thesis will examine this question to show how a fusion of womanhood ideology and radical indigenous feminism can propel the current dialogue a step further to provide (a) an avenue to include the decolonization-regeneration struggle to challenge colonialism, and (b) a dialogue framed by Anishinaabekwe empowerment.

The indigenous feminism literature investigates using the colonial system to achieve beneficial change. Verna St. Denis, in *Feminism is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism and Diversity* explains that:

The current production of Aboriginal identities and subjectivities has not occurred outside the socio-intellectual traditions and practices of Western institutions. I have come to appreciate the importance of being informed about the history, knowledge and institutions of the West ... [and recognize] just how much European history, knowledge and institutions have been, and continue to be,

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<sup>30</sup> Annette M. Jaimes and Theresa Halsey. "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America." *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*. Ed. Annette M. Jaimes. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992. 331.

productive of Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples' lives. I have come to value the merits of drawing on strands of theorizing that intertwine and intersect to produce the analysis required to understand the multiple and sometimes contradictory positioning of Aboriginal peoples.<sup>31</sup>

St. Denis's stance shows a genre of political, social and economic strategies taken by Aboriginal organizations and indigenous peoples who spend their lives working to create change for their people, all within the colonizer's system. However, her viewpoint is necessary because it points to an area of indigenous feminism that encourages women to work within the colonial system to find answers to their problems. Dr. Alfred comments indirectly on St. Denis's position. He explains, "It is impossible either to transform the colonial society from within colonial institutions or to achieve justice and peaceful coexistence without fundamentally transforming the institutions of the colonial society themselves [itself]."<sup>32</sup> As well, Freire and Coulthard explain that when indigenous people locate themselves within the colonizer's system, they eventually come to identify with their oppressors' recognitions and theories.<sup>33 34</sup> Indigenous feminists' reliance on the colonial system will be challenged in order to understand how the Anishinaabekwe ideology can be integrated into indigenous feminism. By integrating the Anishinaabekwe ideology into the indigenous feminist dialogue, it may encourage a severing of indigenous feminism's reliance on the colonial system as it pertains to identifying with

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<sup>31</sup> Verna St. Denis. "Feminism is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism and Diversity." *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 42-43.

<sup>32</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005. 154.

<sup>33</sup> Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> Glen Coulthard. "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Recognition in Canada." *Contemporary Political Theory* 6.4. (November 2007).

the oppressors' recognitions and theories. I feel that an indigenous feminist viewpoint is necessary when describing the problems of colonialism but only when coupled with the purpose of radical feminism emerging as radical *indigenous* feminism.

The foundation of my research lies in the fact that indigenous women and our unique values of womanhood survived the destructive force of colonialism. Although we have survived colonization, we are now left with the task of regenerating our knowledge in order to reclaim our worldview located in empowerment. We must account for indigenous women living a contemporary life because the majority of us do not live traditionally any longer and we cannot erase the severe impact of colonialism and patriarchy. Many indigenous women support a reclaiming of their tribal voices in order to reflect contemporary lifestyles. This regeneration is not meant to signal a reversion to traditionalism<sup>35</sup> but to make our values applicable to contemporary life. More specifically, Mililani Trask recognizes that:

As Indigenous women, we have rich traditions upon which we can rely and from which we can and should draw our sustenance ... acknowledging our spiritual belief systems and incorporating them to the greatest extent possible in our daily lives are keys to self-empowerment and self-determination for Indigenous peoples.<sup>36</sup>

Trask inspires new capacities for traditions in her fight for Hawaiian sovereignty; however, this discussion is more complex, as Emma LaRocque points out. Although we

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<sup>35</sup> The term traditionalism is taken from *Wasase*, "Traditionalism, the movement to restore the social, cultural, and political integrity of our communities by restoring ancient models of governance and social interaction, has degraded into a laughable form of self-centred New Ageism, a ceremonial show or smokescreen behind which the dark abuses of the colonial master on a personal and collective level continue." Alfred 225.

<sup>36</sup> Devon Abbott Mihesuah. *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. 170.

need to “rebuild and restore ourselves and our cultures, this cannot mean that we refrain from confronting patriarchal and sexist attitudes or oppressive behaviours.”<sup>37</sup> What is needed then is an Anishinaabekwe perspective and regeneration of our knowledge, while confronting the colonial values inherited by our communities.

After reviewing the literature, it was found that the current indigenous feminist dialogue, although it addresses colonialism, patriarchy and sexism, does not use indigenous worldviews or teachings of womanhood to challenge the effects of colonialism. The Anishinaabekwe ideology is the source of our regeneration as we seek to overcome the effects of colonialism in our lives. Our ideology is the foundation from which to challenge the effects of colonialism. Included in this regeneration is a profound challenge to our internalized oppression, which will ultimately lead to the success of our decolonizing-regeneration struggle. It involves the regeneration of the Anishinaabekwe ideology and of seeing ourselves as ogichitaakwe. This dialogue can be strengthened by using radical indigenous feminism.

### Research Method and Methodology

It has been widely recognized that indigenous women have always formed the core of our communities.<sup>38 39 40</sup> It was our ancestors who carried the knowledge of the Anishinaabe values and ethics, many of which were concealed because of the destructive force of colonization. Yet, many teachings still exist because of the strength of our

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<sup>37</sup> Emma LaRocque. “Métis and Feminist: Ethical Reflections on Feminism Human Rights and Decolonization” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Paula Gunn Allen. *The Sacred Hoop*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey. “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America.” *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*. Ed. Annette M. Jaimes. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992. 311-344.

<sup>40</sup> Winona Laduke. *Last Standing Woman*. MN: Voyageur Press, 1997.

people. They are integrated in our lives and include the niizhwaaswi gikinoo' amaagewinan (seven teachings), which provide teachings about how to live life with Anishinaabe values.

The niizhwaaswi gikinoo' amaagewinan (seven teachings) are a foundational teaching of the Anishinaabe people. They include:

- Zaagi'idiwin (love): unconditional love is to know that when people are weak they need your love the most. Your love must be given freely. If you put conditions on your love, it is no longer true.
- Mnaadendmowin (respect): respect others, their beliefs and yourself. If you cannot show respect, you cannot expect it to be given.
- Nibwaakaawin (wisdom): to have wisdom is to know the difference between good and bad and to know the result of your actions.
- Aakdehewin (bravery): to be brave is to do something right even if you know it is going to hurt you.
- Debwewin (truth): to learn truth, love with truth and speak with truth.
- Gwagakwaadziwin (honesty): to achieve honesty within you, to recognize who and what you are; do these things and you can be honest with all others.
- Dbaadendiziwin (humility): to humble yourself and recognize that no matter how much you think you know, you know very little of all the universe.

The niizhwaaswi gikinoo' amaagewinan were used as my research methodology as I entered into relationships with the six Anishinaabe elders who agreed to take part in my research. I have used these teachings in conducting my research as both an Anishinaabe woman and a student in the Indigenous Governance Program. By conducting interviews,

the research process and method of storytelling was automatically free flowing. We are taught that storytelling is the way our people transmit the teachings and knowledge that the research has honoured. Through the niizhwaaswi gikinoo' amaagewinan, the Anishinaabe elders were able to know that there is a deeply spiritual and community-based worldview guiding my research. Furthermore, I have adhered to the Indigenous Governance Program's *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context* (2003).

#### Interview Structure and Chapter Arrangement

The Anishinaabe elders who hold the knowledge of the teaching of the ogichitaakwe are located in the most northwestern portion of Ontario in the area of Treaty #3 and Robinson Superior 1850. I interviewed the Anishinaabe elders Willie Wilson and Annie Wilson of Rainy River First Nation, Robin and Kathleen Green of Shoal Lake #40 First Nation, Ogimaabiik of Nicickousemenecaning First Nation and Agnes Hardy of Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek for this thesis. Learning from Anishinaabe elders who carry the teaching of the ogichitaakwe will reflect how our teachings are transmitted to the next generation through the sharing of oral testimony. I chose these elders to interview because they are well known within the Anishinaabe community to be extensive knowledge holders, who have committed their lives to teaching our people.

The research will benefit the community and provide our people with an understanding of the ogichitaakwe and how its regeneration will address colonialism in our lives. The Anishinaabe elders talked about the immense importance of our women returning to our Anishinaabe teachings of womanhood and our values. This is where the benefit to the community lies. Having completed the thesis, by keeping true to my accountability to the

niizhwaaswi gikinoo' amaagewinan and my people, the thesis has been presented individually to the Anishinaabe elders.

In Chapter Two, Decolonization and Regeneration: The Re-Emergence of Anishinaabekwe Ideology, I discuss the role of Anishinaabekwe ideology with regard to decolonization and regeneration. In this discussion, I present the teaching of the ogichitaakwe to show the importance of indigenous women finding their voice in combating the effects of colonialism on indigenous worldviews. I will also discuss the contentious aspect of our Anishinaabekwe ideology inheriting patriarchal and Christianized values. Integral to this presentation is not only the empowering exercise of explaining the way colonial values found their way into our ideology but the importance of re-imagining the teachings in order to undo colonial influences.

In Chapter Three, An Approach for Radical Indigenous Feminism, I present a discussion of indigenous feminism while using what bell hooks envisions about radical feminism in order to uncover the revolutionary potential for challenging colonialism. In addition, I discuss how the dialogue of creating solutions to the effects of colonialism inadvertently promotes a victim mentality. Addressing the effects of colonialism through the victim mentality results in the continuation of indigenous women's oppression and generalized and ineffective solutions.

In Chapter Four, The Role of Anishinaabekwe Mothering and Wiisokotaatiwin, I show how the mothering aspect of the Anishinaabekwe ideology provides the ultimate way to seek an end to the effects of colonialism in our lives. I also offer my vision of re-imagining self-consciousness-raising groups through Wiisokotatiwin. The main objective

of the Wiisokotatiwin is to provide the opportunity to decolonize, regenerate, and build radical indigenous feminism.

Chapter Five will provide a thesis summarization and conclusion.

## Chapter Two

### Decolonization and Regeneration:

#### The Re-Emergence of Anishinaabekwe Ideology

When I chose to challenge my own oppression, I was left feeling bruised and battered. I realized that the ideologies that had directed my life were tantamount to internalized oppression. They were treaty and aboriginal law, the pursuit of self-government within Canada as backed by Section 35 of the Constitution, and economic development. Through a process that took years, I realized that none of these things would lead to the empowerment of my people or myself; rather, they would secure our assimilated place within the oppressor's colonial system. Therefore, I began my search to find teachings of empowerment. I looked to our Anishinaabekwe ideology and found it will assist in overcoming the effects of colonialism and regenerate our distinctiveness.

I have learned that understanding Anishinaabemowin (language) through the English language cannot do justice to the inherent meaning of the words. Having said that, I do not speak the language fluently but I am striving to learn and apply the meanings in my life. *Ogichitaa* was explained to me by Anishinaabe Elder Willie Wilson. Willie is a fluent speaker of Anishinaabemowin. He explained, "If you translate *ogichitaa* it means 'You are going over.' You are the one who makes things happen; you are the bridge to make things happen."<sup>41</sup> This translation is essential to understanding a key aspect of our worldview as Anishinaabe. Our language is action-orientated and therefore specific responsibilities may be attached to a word to reflect what the word/action intends. When

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<sup>41</sup> Willie Wilson. Personal Interview. July 21, 2008. Rainy River First Nation, O.N. 5.

Ogimaabiik was asked to share the teachings of the ogichitaakwe (woman), she explained:

I call myself ogichitaakwe, in a different way maybe from the other ogichitaakwe. I am a teacher, an elder; I run a home. When I raised my kids, I was ogichitaakwe: someone that runs the home and provides for their children. And all the things a mother does or a grandmother and great grandmother. That is my ogichitaakwe way. I also see other ways of being an ogichitaakwe. For example, when I attend a powwow, there are four ogichitaakwe who watch over the drum. The four women represent the four directions of the drum and they will sing four songs. The Anishinaabekwe represent the ogichitaakwe as well, in their own way. Although the drum belongs to the men, the ogichitaakwe are the keepers of the drum. They will often bring the offerings meant for the drum such as food, etc. The point is [that] an ogichitaakwe can be represented in many ways. There are also ogichitaakwe in the Treaty #3 area who represent the elder's council. As I understand the role of this ogichitaakwe, a person will go to them to seek a specific teaching or answer such as receiving an Anishinaabe name. These are my definitions of ogichitaakwe but I also believe all Anishinaabekwe are ogichitaakwe; you're ogichitaakwe, we all are! That's my understanding.<sup>42</sup>

Ogimaabiik's understanding represents the many ways of being an ogichitaakwe. There is no one sure way to be an ogichitaakwe, which would reflect a western linear approach to understanding the word, but a fluid, responsive interpretation of the teaching. Learning from Ogimaabiik's perception of ways of being ogichitaakwe is an important

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<sup>42</sup> Ogimaabiik. Personal Interview. July 24, 2008. Nicickousemenecaning First Nation, O.N. 4.

aspect of Anishinaabekwe ideology in combating the effects of colonialism in our lives. She emphasizes three ways of being ogichitaakwe: in the home, as keepers of the drum and an elder's council. Ogimaabiik speaks from her lifetime of experience and says that she is an ogichitaakwe by being a mother, a grandmother and an elder. Her responsibility to care for and raise her family with the Anishinaabe worldview is her first connection to being an ogichitaakwe. Another way of being an ogichitaakwe is to protect and keep the drum. At some powwows, I have seen an event when there is a traditional drum for the men; the ogichitaakwe will dance for and prepare the drum by offering semaa (tobacco), food, prayers and songs for the four directions that they represent. They will enter at the grand entry and be present at the end when the eagle staff is taken out of the powwow circle, which represents the beginning and ending of the powwow. Finally, there are ogichitaakwe who represent the elders' council in Treaty #3. They come together to give advice to their political leadership in addition to helping the people individually with ceremony and medicine. The medicine aspect of ogichitaakwe was also mentioned by Robin and Kathleen Green. They explained that to be an ogichitaakwe was the highest position one can be in relation to our medicines.<sup>43</sup>

The differing ways of being ogichitaakwe are a signal to the meaning or action of the word that Willie explained, "to be the bridge to make things happen." Ogimaabiik's first connection to being an ogichitaakwe (through being responsible for her family) had the most influence on regenerating decolonized empowerment. Robin and Kathleen Green explained the ogichitaakwe would do anything for their people; they would give up anything to be at the frontline, always for their people. I believe if we, as Anishinaabe

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<sup>43</sup> Robin and Kathleen Green. Personal Interview. August 1, 2008. Shoal Lake #40 First Nation, O.N. 1.

women, choose to connect on a mental, physical, emotional and spiritual plane to the responsibility for ourselves/people/family as ogichitaakwe, we can be the bridge to challenging colonialism at its roots, to be at the frontline for our people – the bridge to make change happen.

The first goal of this process is located in the personal decolonization dialogue. If people choose to challenge their internalized oppression in order to regenerate themselves as strong Anishinaabekwe, the Anishinaabekwe teaching of the ogichitaakwe will be integral to the process. Winona Laduke comments on this connection in her novel, *Last Standing Woman*, as she shows us upsetting stories of the realities of colonialism and its effect on Anishinaabekwe. Laduke emphasized how disempowerment occurred but she was able to show (a) how the women in her story were strong ogichitaakwe before the assault of colonialism, and (b) how they fought to carry on those traditions through it. They were able to pass down the ogichitaakwe identity by maintaining the following aspect of the Anishinaabe philosophy:

The Bears are different. In past times, they were the warriors, the ogichitaa, those who defended the people. Sometimes we still are. We are what we intended to be when we have those three things that guide our direction – our name, our clan and our religion.<sup>44</sup>

Laduke demonstrated (a) the acceptance of the values of ogichitaakwe, (b) the loss of identity, and (c) the inherent regeneration through the ogichitaakwe ethics. The influence of the ancestors, ceremony and culture are all essential elements of the regeneration of

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<sup>44</sup> Winona La Duke. *Last Standing Woman*. MN: Voyageur Press, 1997. 17, 299.

Anishinaabekwe empowerment from the effects of colonialism. I will share my own experience in combating internalized oppression and regeneration in order to show the necessity of critical examination combined with identity formation, i.e., the application of such teachings as that of the ogichitaakwe.

As a young girl, I embarked on a journey to understand my identity as an Anishinaabe. It was a journey filled with many teachings, steep learning curves and vivid experiences. It involved learning to listen to what was inherently in me. I had to see how the effects of colonization had eroded my identity as a strong Anishinaabekwe. The journey has no beginning or end but consists of many pathways of existence.

Being sick and tired of living an empty, lost, depressed life began to draw me out of the lethargy of oppression. I remember the day as though it just happened. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon and I was at a park beside my high school, skipping my afternoon classes. I was questioning my life. What purpose did my life have? Why was I so angry and feeling so lost? I was not happy with myself for many reasons: I skipped class all the time and used drugs and alcohol in an attempt to escape the horrible feeling of emptiness and lack of self-respect, which explains why I paid no attention to my physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. I grew up in a Christian home and for some time I had felt as though I was being lied to. Something inside of me was screaming at me to change my life, reject Christianity and all its dichotomies, and start believing in who I was as Anishinaabe. Although I was not aware of it at the time, I know my ancestors were guiding me that day. They were there to catch me as I fell and raise me back up. On that day, I decided to reject Christianity and my colonial identity and began to examine myself to find out who I was. After I had made this decision, I felt a foreign,

yet compelling urge to take action, coupled with a feeling of exhilaration, which is still with me today. For the first time in my life, I felt freedom. After that day, every decision I made and every negative and positive experience I faced had a purpose. Although I did not realize it then, my ancestors had just directed me to the pathway of decolonization and self-realization.

Before that fateful afternoon, I was on a path of self-destruction, a path on which many of our people currently find themselves. I was on this path because I did not know what love and respect was. My ancestors chose to help me; I did not choose to help myself, they chose me. I am still on the path of self-realization and I have to remember who I am and where I came from in order to remain true to myself. I have to be cognizant of the reality and lure of colonization. It is like any addiction; quitting the addiction is one thing, maintaining your sobriety is another. In my experience, it can be easy to let go and forget about my responsibilities as an Anishinaabekwe in order to enjoy the passive, materialistic, and detached lifestyle of a “Canadian.” When I have fallen prey to the fake lifestyle of materialism, my spirit and my ancestors have guided me back to my original responsibility. Those of us who commit ourselves to living a lifestyle our ancestors would be proud of know the everyday challenges and rewards. On a daily basis, I connect to my identity as Anishinaabekwe by acknowledging my name, my clan and my ancestors.

The statement “We are what we intended to be when we have those three things that guide our direction – our name, our clan and our religion” was an important teaching for Ogimaabiik. Before my interview began with Ogimaabiik, we introduced ourselves in an Anishinaabe way. I told her my purpose for visiting and offered her my tobacco. I told her my clan and where I came from. She then asked if I had an Anishinaabe name with

namesake items. I told her my name and explained my colours. She was happy about that and spoke of the immense importance of our people receiving these gifts. The gifts will help our people heal and transform into healthy people again. This was the foundation of the interview; in order to regenerate we must know our identity as Anishinaabe through our name, gifts and clan.

Kim Anderson's (Cree/Métis Nations) important work, *A Recognition of Being - Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, is critical to any discussion on the regeneration of womanhood teachings and decolonization. She stated:

We have become accustomed to male dominance and this provides the soil for social ills like family violence, incest, sexual abuse and child neglect. I see these problems as a sickness that is the legacy of colonialism and something we must address as we stand at the brink of decolonization. We can talk about self-government, sovereignty, cultural recovery and the healing path, but we will never achieve any of these things until we take a serious look at the disrespect that characterizes the lives of so many Native women. We must have a vision of something better, because our future depends on it.<sup>45</sup>

Anderson's vision for something better is a theory of identity formation that involves "resisting negative definitions of being; reclaiming aboriginal traditions; constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities."<sup>46</sup> Anderson believes that by reclaiming the teachings, ceremonies and philosophies of our ancestors,

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<sup>45</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

our identity as native women will be regenerated. The thesis underlying her theory of identity formation is to question (a) how native women successfully use these tools in their modern lives, and (b) how we can learn from those who have reclaimed balance in their quest for identity.<sup>47</sup> I see Anderson's work as one of the many foundational steps women must take on their journey to overcome the negative identity markers we have inherited from patriarchal values, assimilation policies and Christianity. Her discussion of how women have kept their strength through colonization and how traditional teachings can be used today adds to the validity of this thesis. She maps out how women resisted negative definitions of being in order to uncover the aspects that allowed them to stay strong despite the negativity. These aspects include strong families, grounding in native community, connection to land, language, storytelling and spirituality. In addition to the reclamation of indigenous values regarding women, these aspects are central to my own discussion of Anishinaabekwe ideology. However, differentiation is apparent in the act of personal decolonization, which then signals regeneration and a re-imagining of our teachings.

Through her outline, Anderson presented a succinct discussion of how reclaiming these elements provides positive identity formation for women. Yet, a missing piece is found in her analysis – how personal decolonization must occur first and is necessary in order to challenge colonialism and re-imagine our traditions. In addition, her promotion of pan-indigenous identity formation is complicated because she does not focus on one indigenous identity but promotes a generalized melting pot of many nations' traditions. I

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 189

am Anishinaabe and although it is important to build alliances with other nations, I am only concerned with the Anishinaabekwe ideology and worldview.

While identity recovery is crucial in redressing the inherited negative effect of colonialism on identity, Anderson unfortunately leaves out the process of seeing one's own oppression and making the hard choice to challenge it in order to address colonialism at its foundation. The aspect of challenging internal oppression is crucial to empowerment as well as challenging the current hegemonic stranglehold of the state on our people and our land.

The process of applying our teachings to our lives, as Anderson suggests, is essential. However, if the teachings are not grounded in our personal determination to challenge colonialism, it will ultimately leave the roots of our disconnection intact. I will share my experience of regeneration and show how it has helped me reconnect to the values of Anishinaabekwe ideology while directly addressing the foundation of my disconnection.

All my adult life, I have been health conscious. I maintain a level of exercise and somewhat healthy eating habits, which allow me to be considered physically fit. Yet it was not until I connected the struggle of combating my own oppression to the struggle of living well that I started the process of becoming an ogichitaakwe. I had to balance my lifestyle by exercising with a goal of achieving physical strength, understanding that the food I ate was a precursor to gaining physical strength. The physical strength that I gained developed my emotional, mental and spiritual stability, which I had previously lacked in confronting colonialism. When I was just "health conscious" it made no difference as to how I perceived myself as an Anishinaabekwe; I had no drive to live the meaningful healthy lifestyle my ancestors would want me to live. Now that I have

connected my internal struggle with oppression to the struggle of regenerating my people, being physically fit is a purpose in my life. I have a drive to be healthy because I realize it involves more than just me; it is for the bigger cause of regeneration and empowerment of which I am a part. Being cognizant of living a healthy lifestyle is also part of my personal regeneration, which is a process of daily renewal. It goes hand in hand with the struggle of combating colonialism; we must connect the two in order to make any difference on a personal and community level. Because I have been chosen by my ancestors to be on a path of integrity, self-worth and respect, I can take pride in connecting with the teaching of the ogitchitaakwe.

In understanding that decolonization must first occur on a personal level in order for community change to happen, I was inspired to embrace a new way of thinking that opened the doors to new possibilities. Specifically, I took in what Dr. Alfred taught me about fundamentally challenging our colonial reality. We need to ask, “Who do we think like, who do we act like, who do we behave like? Do we act with integrity and respect? Will our ancestors look upon us and feel proud of our existence?” Having reflected on these difficult questions, I wondered how using the strength of fundamental teachings found in Anishinaabekwe ideology could inspire us to want to make change. I needed to learn that in helping my people I had to choose those who seek change. It is futile to try to change someone who does not want to change. Dr. Alfred reiterated the personal decision to make change, as follows:

We who seek to bring about change in others and in society can only offer guidance out of shared concern and reflection based on our own experience so

that others anxious for the journey can listen and then embark on the challenge for themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Now, I can stand up and proudly say that I am living my life as my ancestors would want. As an ogichitaakwe, it is essential that I focus my energy and passion on the health of my people. Because my ancestors chose me for the path of truth, I am responsible to them and my people for my life. As I continue to challenge my own oppression and regenerate my identity as an Anishinaabekwe, I must question what I can do for my community. If we do not recommit ourselves to regenerating our knowledge in this generation, the next will be completely lost, along with our Anishinaabe existence. Basil Johnston (Anishinaabe Nation) reiterates:

Anishinaabe men and women were instilled with a sense of obligation to the community that required them to give something back to the people for all the benefits and favours they received ... each person was bound to return something to his or her heritage and so add to its worth.<sup>49</sup>

We must work on re-instilling this sense of obligation in ourselves in order to make changes for our people.

#### Colonial Values and the Re-imagining of our Traditions

*The fact is there is no such thing as a smart human being for it is only a matter of time before their ideas are updated, changed or eradicated. And this tendency to blindly hold on to a belief system sheltering it from new possibly transformative information is nothing less than a form of intellectual materialism.<sup>50</sup>*

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<sup>48</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005.

<sup>39</sup>  
<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> <http://zeitgeistmovie.com>

The tension between traditional teachings and the influence of colonialism and patriarchy upon them was seen in some instances in my interviews with Anishinaabe elders. Kathleen Green, Ogimaabiik and Agnes Hardy reiterated the importance of our teachings of womanhood. What cannot be discounted is the influence of Christianity on these teachings. For example, when Agnes responded to my question about how to regenerate ourselves through our teachings, she described her own experience:

Our teachings of womanhood were not taught to our generation. Nobody sat us down to explain sexual relationships or having babies. I think our teachings were shared to women when only Anishinaabek were here. But I believe the church interfered with our transmission of knowledge. For example, while in church or in school no one was allowed to speak of menstruation, as women were considered dirty. In fact, we were physically abused if someone was caught talking about our menstruation teachings.<sup>51</sup>

Agnes shows how the demonization of our bodies is a calculated strategy employed by the Christian Church. Agnes grew up during a time of complete fear of our ways and knowledge because of the Christian view of our ideology being satanic. It is inevitable that our teachings of womanhood would be limited during this process. Andrea Smith also comments on the truths of the effects of colonization on women as patriarchal gendered violence, the demonization of our societies, our lands and bodies being inherently violable and rape-able, which led to the loss of our lands. She went on to say, “In order to colonize a people whose society was not hierarchical, colonizers must first

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<sup>51</sup> Agnes Hardy. Personal Interview. July 28, 2008. Thunder Bay, ON. 8.

naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy.”<sup>52</sup> Patriarchal values and violence were the vehicles by which the colonizer was able to create the assimilation policies in addition to undermining indigenous women’s power.

I do not believe it was coincidental that our colonizers worked so diligently to demonize women while taking our land. Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo/ Sioux Nations) described the colonizers’ strategy:

The physical and cultural genocide of American Indian tribes is and was mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy ... the colonizers saw (and rightly) that as long as the women held unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at total conquest of the continents were bound to fail. In the centuries since the first attempts at colonization in the early 1500s, the invaders have exerted every effort to remove Indian women from every position of authority, to obliterate all records pertaining to gynocratic social systems and to ensure that no American and few American Indians would remember that gynocracy was the primary social order of Indian America prior to 1800.<sup>53</sup>

Allen reveals the connection between taking our land and destroying the value of women in our communities. This connection is central in challenging the patriarchal features of our teachings. Because of the influence of the church and Christianity, I was not surprised when Kathleen Green, Ogimaabiik and Agnes Hardy spoke of the many “Do Nots” which are now imbedded in our women’s teachings because it is deemed common knowledge. They all spoke of how women are not to touch any article of a man’s clothing, regalia,

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<sup>52</sup> Andrea Smith. *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005. 23

<sup>53</sup> Paula Gunn Allen. *The Sacred Hoop*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986. 3.

dishes or food while on our moon time<sup>54</sup> because it would negatively effect his physical wellbeing, i.e., giving him headaches, whether he be father, husband or son. We cannot attend a ceremony, smudge, dance or swim and we must wear skirts. The usual response to why we “Can’t Do” is because we are powerful and sacred during our moon time.

I have adhered to the “Do Nots” of moon time during my personal life and I have usually felt embarrassed and disempowered. I connect these isolating and shamed feelings to the Christianization of these teachings but more importantly, their connection to the void of replacing the “Do Nots” with the “Do’s.” Again, Kim Anderson asked the same questions:

Women are beginning to look for alternatives to the simple, “You can’t come into this ceremony, because you are on your time.” We need to know, then, what can we do? Where can we go? What do we need to learn, and what is our work at this time?<sup>55</sup>

Although she asked these questions, I found there was no discussion or challenge generated by asking why we “Can’t Do” in the first place but compliance to the common knowledge. What can we do during our time that will combat the embarrassment, shame and disempowering “Do Not” experiences? In addition, what can we as Anishinaabe women do to re-imagine the “Do Nots” should we decide to keep them? I do not advocate the dismissal of the “Do Nots” because they were created for a purpose, but I certainly advocate (a) critical analysis of how Christianity affected our teachings, and (b)

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<sup>54</sup> Moon time is generally referred to by indigenous peoples as a time that signifies a woman’s menstruation cycle.

<sup>55</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 167.

reformulating them to reflect our current regeneration efforts. This is the hard work of decolonization and it will be met by some with outright denunciation. After all, we are talking about matters that our communities consider traditional.

Janice Acoose (Nehiowe-Metis/Ninahkawe Nations) considered the colonial binary of good and evil in her book, *Iskwewak – Kah’ Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws*. She described how the stereotypical image of indigenous women as either Indian princess or easy squaw is reflective of the colonial mentality and as such:

Our lives, as Indigenous women, are still constructed within this very male-centred white-European-Christian, and now white Euro-Canadian, ideology. This ideology informs Canadian institutions, which construct and reproduce stereotypical images of Indigenous women that are based on binary opposites good and bad.<sup>56</sup>

Our understanding of our place or worldview does not operate in binaries. Our stories and Anishinaabekwe ideology include the concepts of seasonal changes, living off the land and a universal understanding that we are a small part of something much grander – the cycle of life on MuzzuKummikKwe (Mother Earth). Subsequently, it is our responsibility to engage in the critical examination of colonial binaries like the “Do Nots” and “Do’s” of our moon time in order to determine if and how they should be represented in our Anishinaabekwe ideology. Not only that, but as Anishinaabekwe addressing the “colonial stains on our existence”<sup>57</sup> we are actively involved in decolonization, addressing

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<sup>56</sup> Janice Acoose. *Iskwewak – Kah’ Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws*. Toronto, ON: Women’s Press, 1995. 43.

<sup>57</sup> Chapter title in Taiaiake Alfred’s, *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*.

patriarchal values and male masculinity. Our stories tell us that women are the teachers of knowledge and are sacred because of our intimate connection to MuzzuKummikKwe. Of course it is our responsibility then to re-imagine our teachings in order to regenerate from the detrimental effects of colonialism and Christianity.

Ogimaabiik described an important understanding of our connection to the land with regard to our womanhood and worldview. She noted:

When I was growing up there was an abundance of blueberries and wild rice. Today, our blueberries and wild rice are disappearing. I remember being told that if I didn't complete the berry fasting ceremony I would contribute to the berries not being able to reproduce themselves. During your ceremony, you have to refrain from touching and eating any type of berry for a year. If you do, you are risking the abundance of the crop. Unfortunately, I see the ramifications happening now. For example, last year the wild rice looked very abundant. When I went to harvest the rice, there was hardly any there. As I talked to people from the east and west, I learned that the wild rice was lacking all over. This outcome is the result of our young girls becoming women without our ceremony in place. It's not their fault, it's just that we are not teaching them to practice our womanhood ceremonies. This is why it is very important to acknowledge our young girls and to take care of them.<sup>58</sup>

Ogimaabiik is able to capture how our Anishinaabekwe ceremonies not only provide a foundation for our young women to begin their journey as women but create a relationship to MuzzuKummikKwe with whom we are intricately connected. The severed

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<sup>58</sup> Ogimaabiik. Personal Interview. July 24, 2008. Nicickousemenecaning First Nation, O.N. 6.

connection she points to is the result of a forced, collective cultural genocide endured by the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island; indeed, we are fortunate to have people like Ogimaabiik who have a memory of our ways.

Basil Johnston noted that the meaning and importance of Anishinaabe womanhood are contained in stories. Our stories tell us that Anishinaabe women are intimately connected to MuzzuKummikKwe because Geezhigo Kwe (Sky Woman) infused the land with the attributes of womanhood. As Anishinaabe women, we cannot disconnect ourselves from the land, and as MuzzuKummikKwe regenerates herself, she is directing us to complete our own regeneration and renewal. As can be seen through Ogimaabiik's words, we are at a time when our first mother, MuzzuKummikKwe, cannot regenerate the wild rice and berries because our young women, as a result of colonialism, are not being raised to carry on our relationship to her.

There are no easy answers to these very real problems encountered by our people and our land. By acknowledging our condition and by making a concerted effort to regenerate this relationship, however, we will ultimately be able to counter the disconnection imposed by the colonizers and their values. I believe there is a place for our teachings about our moon time but they must be re-imagined to challenge the patriarchal "Do Nots" so we are no longer submissive to colonial imposition. Ogimaabiik and Basil Johnston's words are a testament to our continued survival despite colonization because Anishinaabekwe still exist. Lee Maracle (Sto:lo Nation) speaks powerfully about this survival. She noted:

We have not lost our culture or had it stolen ... the essence of Native culture still lives in the hearts, minds and spirits of our folk. Some of us have forsaken our

culture in the interest of becoming integrated. That is not the same thing as losing something. The expropriation of the accumulated knowledge of Native peoples is one legacy of colonization. Decolonization will require the repatriation and the rematriation of that knowledge by Native peoples themselves.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, Paula Gunn Allen noted how in spite of many of our matriarchal teachings and beliefs being forgotten because of colonialism, the fact that women survived means that some teachings live on. This same dialogue is addressed by one of the elders who was interviewed by Steve Wall in his book, *Wisdom's Daughters: Conversations with Women Elders of Native America*, who states:

We as Indian people have never forgotten the status of women. Those who have gotten away from the traditions may act as if they don't remember, but all of us know inside. Our memories are long, as long as the line of generations.<sup>60</sup>

The elder describes the teachings indigenous women carry within our spirit and our connection to our ancestral grandmothers. Maracle, Allen, and the elder interviewed by Wall recognize that indigenous women's collective memories exist through their "hearts, minds and spirits."

I believe our memories also connect us to MuzzuKummikKwe (Mother Earth) and our indigenous worldview. I see this represented in my own experience and it is a powerful realization. Once I had embraced my Anishinaabekwe identity, my spirit began to yearn to be on the land. For someone who grew up in the city, it seemed odd at first.

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<sup>59</sup> Lee Maracle. *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*. Vancouver, BC: Press Gang Publishers, 1996. 92.

<sup>60</sup> Steve Wall. *Wisdom's Daughters: Conversations with Women Elders of Native America*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993. ix.

What could I possibly do on the land, which is something I know nothing about? The feeling intensified as I matured and I knew I had to find people who could teach me about not only the land, but the Anishinaabe relationship with MuzzuKummikKwe. I found these people in my partner and his family. This internal emotional and spiritual connection should be regenerated in combating the effect of colonialism through personal decolonization and re-empowerment. I believe it is Ogimaabiik's hope that our collective connection to the land will revitalize MuzzuKummikKwe.

In Part V of Anderson's book, she described the aspects of traditions that can be reclaimed with the purpose of identity recovery. She stated:

Identity recovery for our people inevitably involves the reclaiming of tradition, the picking up of those things that were left scattered along the path of colonization ... certainly for Native women reclaiming traditions is the means by which we can determine a feminine identity that moves us away from the western patriarchal model.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, identity recovery by re-learning and living our teachings is important to re-empower women after the assault of colonialism. It is also crucial for us to move away from the patriarchal view of ourselves. This discussion is more complicated than the disempowered > learn traditions > re-empowered spectrum of identity formation that Anderson promotes. Emma LaRocque (Metis Nation) notices the complications involved in positive identity formation in her essay, *Métis and Feminism: Human Rights and Decolonization*. Although she recognizes the importance of Kim Anderson's work, she is nonetheless critical of the lack of debate generated on motherhood, women wearing skirts

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<sup>61</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 157.

and the underlying patriarchal, Christian notions of women. LaRocque contended that the maternalization Anderson promotes as the “Aboriginal ideology of motherhood” is totalizing and exclusionary:

Many women today choose not to be mothers, and they neither have desire nor appreciate being forced into what is essentially a heterosexist framework, even if a feminine one. Ultimately, motherhood does imply biology, and, as deployed by Anderson, defines “womanhood.”<sup>62</sup>

LaRocque’s position regarding maternalization and biology is an important aspect of this discussion because we must be cautious in our attempt to reclaim static and romanticized views of ourselves. Further, she unlocks an important discussion:

We must be careful that, in an effort to celebrate ourselves, we not go to the other extreme of biological essentialism of our roles by confining them to the domestic and maternal spheres, or romanticizing our traditions by closing our eyes to certain practices and attitudes that privilege men over women.<sup>63</sup>

To be unaware of the possible dilemmas involved in reclaiming traditions would allow the continued existence of patriarchal values in the traditions. An example of the consequence can be seen in the idealization of the skirt.

#### My Ancestors Did Not Wear European Skirts!

There is much debate generated by women about wearing a skirt as it applies directly to ceremony and women’s power. I will present Kim Anderson’s discussion at length to

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<sup>62</sup> Emma LaRocque. “Métis and Feminist: Ethical Reflections on Feminism Human Rights and Decolonization.” *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 63.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

give the reader the context and content of the debate. Anderson interviewed Ruth Morin (Cree Nation) about the skirt to open the discussion:

Ruth Morin learned the importance of the skirt when she met a female elder on a plane. The elder gently tugged at the knee of her pants and said, “This stands in the way of your power, because when you wear a dress, your power and your female energy can connect with the earth in a much easier manner.” Up until that point, Morin did not know about this. Today she understands the significance of wearing skirts. “The skirt itself represents the hoop of life. And so, as a woman, you need to walk like a woman, you need to sit like a woman, you need to conduct yourself as a woman and part of that is being recognized, not only on this earth, but also in the spirit world as a woman. I took it as a message,” she says of their encounter, then laughs, “so I have not worn pants since that day.”<sup>64</sup>

Emma LaRocque responds to Anderson’s presentation by claiming:

Such an assertion reflects a statement of faith, and while we must respect people’s faiths, what do we do when a faith turns to dogma that requires submission or contradicts other rights? I do not wear skirts, and I most certainly do not feel any less connected to the earth. Indeed, I take umbrage to any suggestion that my spirituality is wanting simply because of clothing or ceremony ... this view is strikingly similar to patriarchal Christian and other fundamentalist constructions

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<sup>64</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 168.

of “woman” and one wonders to what extent the influence of residential schools and other patriarchal agencies and attitudes, both old and new, is at work here.<sup>65</sup>

I agree with LaRocque as I reflect upon my own experience in being told to wear a skirt as part of my job description as a Youth Caseworker conducting restorative justice circles. I was also chastised at a yupiwi ceremony for wearing pants and had a man cover my legs with a blanket. It seems ridiculous to me that my connection to my ancestors and manitous (spirits) is bridged by my clothing. What attention is given to my mind, my heart and my intentions? To have our intellectual and spiritual connection relegated to a skirt is simply unacceptable. Again, to consign our purpose to a physical space as represented by the skirt is a detachment from our intellectual presence. At its roots is according privilege to male masculinity while denigrating femininity because men do not have to contend with clothing as representing their power and connection to spirituality. An example of the totalizing effect of this mindset can be seen in Anderson’s presentation of Laverne Gervais-Contois and Vera Martin’s opinions, as follows:

Martin stood up and slightly bent her knees so that her skirt touched the floor to create a circle around her. “This is my tipi” ... Gervais-Contois was struck by this image, thinking, “It’s true. This is her. This is her world, her tipi. You have to respect the tipi. If you walk in a different way, or start drinking or staggering, then you are away from your tipi.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Emma LaRocque. “Métis and Feminist: Ethical Reflections on Feminism Human Rights and Decolonization” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia, MB: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 63-64.

<sup>66</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 168.

What is central to this discussion is Anderson's response to these women's opinions. She explained:

When Vera Martin told me about the skirt as tipi, I felt not only a great sense of responsibility but also a great sense of what I can only describe as mother love ... the teaching around the tipi/skirt speaks to the pure physical, creative and spiritual energy of women as life giver, and it speak to her responsibilities as one who must nurture life once it has been produced.<sup>67</sup>

By not investigating how colonialism has affected our teachings, we allow the continued presence of oppression and patriarchal values. Anderson's response represents a segment of our population that will not challenge what is deemed to be tradition and traditional roles, but accept it and integrate the knowledge into their lives. For some, this is acceptable and they see nothing wrong with it. I respectfully disagree.

Lee Maracle discussed what the skirt represented to indigenous women: it was a feeble form of protection against our colonizer's desire to rape our ancestors.<sup>68</sup> I understand that the effects of the traumatic history of genocide can be forgotten by our people in our attempt to cope but we can no longer say, "I did not know" and accept the promotion of patriarchal and sexist traditions at face value. The most powerful tool we have today is the truth. "In a colonized reality, our struggle is with all existing forms of political power, and to this fight, we bring our only real weapon: the power of truth."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 168, 169.

<sup>68</sup> Lee Maracle, "The Significance of the Study of Oratory." Invited speaker for the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria, February 18, 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005. 280.

We must tell it and retell it, until the patriarchal values and messages embedded in our traditions are re-imagined by those of our people who are committed to decolonization.

Essential to the process of regenerating our indigenous values of womanhood and missing from Anderson's work is the critical assessment of how our traditions and knowledge has been influenced by colonial beliefs. "It is thinking through what we think we know to what is actually true but is obscured by knowledge derived from our experiences as colonized peoples."<sup>70</sup> We must question how "the influence of the residential school and other patriarchal agencies and attitudes"<sup>71</sup> forms our construction of indigenous knowledge. Certainly, in our communities "there are few elders alive who were not raised in the tradition of the Catholic Church."<sup>72</sup> Being aware of how these colonial messages were integrated into our traditions and understanding is the first step in decolonization. Dr. Alfred concurs and argues, "We need to acknowledge how our contemporary cultures have been shaped by colonialism ... the cure for the colonizer's disease that has affected us at the core of our existence ... consists of self-transformation."<sup>73</sup> In Chapter 4, I provide a detailed process of how self-transformation can occur by using self-consciousness-raising groups.

In regenerating indigenous values that would make sense in our contemporary lives and in measuring them against the detrimental influence of colonialism, LaRocque envisioned:

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>71</sup> Emma LaRocque. "Métis and Feminist: Ethical Reflections on Feminism Human Rights and Decolonization." *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 64.

<sup>72</sup> Lee Maracle. *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*. Vancouver, BC: Press Gang, 1996. 111.

<sup>73</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005. 278-279.

As women, we must be circumspect in our recall of tradition. We must ask ourselves whether and to what extent tradition is liberating us as women. We must ask ourselves wherein our sources of empowerment lie ... as Native women, we are faced with very difficult and painful choices, but, nonetheless, we are challenged to change, create and embrace traditions consistent with contemporary and international human rights standards.<sup>74 75</sup>

As I understand LaRocque's statement, in regenerating our traditions we must be careful and ask ourselves which ones would lead to our empowerment. Indeed, there are some traditions that could not be contemporized, because it would challenge our contemporary empowerment. For example, I have been taught that in the Anishinaabe traditions it was not out of the ordinary for a man to have multiple wives or for a woman to marry her first cousin on her mother's side. These traditions were accepted in our governance structure of clan systems and relations, but they would not be acceptable today. However, in being "circumspect of our recall of tradition" we must take hold of our traditions and challenge them, not give them all up or neglect their original purpose. We must be careful not to deny their relevance and applicability in our lives.

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<sup>74</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 36-37.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

## Chapter Three

### An Approach for Radical Indigenous Feminism

For a number of years I relied on my identity as an Anishinaabekwe to provide the pathway to decolonization but I began to reflect upon my experiences and realized a hard truth: I am silenced, marginalized and at times judged by my appearance by other indigenous people because of the patriarchal values we have inherited. An example was seen in an interview I had with a provincial territorial organization (P.T.O.) when I first graduated with my bachelor of arts degree (honours). I had applied for a position as treaty researcher with a P.T.O. and they invited me to an “informal” interview that was actually a lunch break from their chief meetings. I sat down with three older native men who presently worked in the P.T.O. They did not ask me any questions about the treaty researcher position but acted as though I was there merely to meet them for lunch. At the time I remember feeling a little out of sorts because I was prepared to deliver a sound interview regarding the position, but quickly realized that was not what was expected of me. I must mention that I did not have the experience to understand what I was encountering then, but I do now. As a young Anishinaabekwe eager to begin working with my people, I was judged in a way that required no words because of the intricacies of patriarchy, male masculinity and culturalism.<sup>76</sup> Looking back, I realize that I may not have been dark enough, submissive enough or male enough to be considered for the position. I was not judged by my experience, education or knowledge because I was not asked a single question about the position of treaty researcher. I remember leaving that

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<sup>76</sup> Culturalism is defined by Devon Mihesuah, “Culturalism exists when tribal members view each other with disdain because of their cultural adherences.” *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. 104.

mockery of an interview feeling embarrassed and blaming myself for not being good enough for the position I so desperately wanted.

What do we do when our own people (men and women) benefit from the inherited values of patriarchy and when this type of scenario happens all too often to indigenous women? We cannot achieve true decolonization and freedom when our people are unwilling to challenge the intricacies of patriarchy and colonial values. The current decolonization dialogue falls short in addressing these very real effects. Sandy Grande (Quechua Nation) provided an example of how our decolonization and liberation movement is lacking when she stated:

Since most indigenous women link their subjugation to colonization and recognize the integral participation of white women in this project, they have consistently voiced these misgivings about the feminist movement. Their resistance is also buttressed by the “widely shared belief that American Indian women do not need feminism.” Indeed, while patriarchy may be a salient feature in the structural oppression of women in Western societies, many indigenous societies reveal an overall de-emphasis on virtually all relations of domination and submission ... many indigenous women share historical memories and contemporary experiences of women as warriors, healers, spiritual leaders, clan mothers, tribal leaders, council members, political activists, and cultural proprietors, and thus, already live with a sense of their own traditional “feminist” agency. [And further] the historical legacy of reciprocity, shared governance, and female spiritual empowerment fuels the belief among women that they do not

need “liberation” since they have always been “liberated” within their own tribal structures.<sup>77</sup>

Prior to contact, this was true, but it is not true today. If it were true, we would not see our people being physically or sexually abusive to our women and children or, indeed, any type of violence. As Mihesuah stated, “Misogyny, colourism, ethnocentrism, and physical abuse are sad realities among Native people, and unless Natives do something about these problems, no one else will.”<sup>78</sup> Our people live in a dangerous world and this danger is not changed by the romanticized view we hold about our pre-contact ancestral tribal structures. Of course, to remember our ancestors’ teachings and way of life is crucial to our current regeneration efforts but it cannot be the only avenue or tool to use. Some feminist theory can be used to strengthen our struggle.

Feminism confuses our people. When I first began learning about indigenous and radical feminism, I was aware of this confusion. Some of the questions I had to ask myself in learning about indigenous feminism were “Can we be Anishinaabekwe (woman) and feminists? When I call myself a feminist am I taking something away from my identity as Anishinaabekwe?” I thought that feminism was useless in decolonization because we have our teachings, which should guide the change. I developed an awareness of feminism early in my academic journey and concluded that it was inappropriate for our struggle. When I began my thesis research, my early drafts were confused in stating the problems of using this whitestream theory. From this skewed starting point, I began traversing indigenous feminism and quickly came to the same conclusion. Although I did

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<sup>77</sup> Sandy Grande. *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. 149.

<sup>78</sup> Devon Mihesuah. *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. xiv.

not realize it at the time, through this learning process I was able to build a critical consciousness about using radical indigenous feminism as a tool in the effort to decolonize and regenerate as strong Anishinaabekwe.

Sandy Grande's investigation of feminism in her book, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*, resonates with my personal experience. Her discussion of feminism begins by acknowledging:

I feel compelled to begin by stating: I am not a feminist. Rather, I am indigena. While, like other indigenous women, I recognize the invaluable contributions that feminists have made to both critical theory and praxis in education, I also believe the well-documented failure of whitestream feminisms to engage race and acknowledge the complicity of white women in the history of domination positions it alongside other colonialist discourses. Indeed, the colonialist project could not have flourished without the active participation of white women.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, Haunani-Kay Trask (Hawaiian Nation) describes the discomfort associated with feminism by sharing her own experience. She notes, "The feminism I had studied was just too white, too America. Only issues defined by white women as "feminist" had structured discussions. Their language was based on First World "rights" talk, the Enlightenment individualism that takes for granted "individual" primacy. Last, but in many ways most troubling, feminist style was aggressively American."<sup>80</sup> Grande and Trask demonstrate that feminism is whitestream and uncritical of either its colonialist foundation or current participation in the colonialist project. In addition, Grande's words

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<sup>79</sup> Sandy Grande. *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. 124.

<sup>80</sup> Haunani – Kay Trask, "Feminism and Indigenous Hawaiian Nationalism." *Signs*. Summer 1996. 909.

are a political statement because she is clear that she is a Quechua woman and not a feminist. She described the argument as follows:

Indigenous women do not view themselves as the oppressed victims of male patriarchy; rather, they perceive both men and women as subjects of an imperialist order, choosing to confront their struggles as indigenous people and not only as indigenous women ... for indigenous women, the central dominating force is colonization, not patriarchy; and the definitive political project is decolonization, not feminism.<sup>81</sup>

This statement marks a clear separation between being an indigenous woman struggling with her own people towards decolonization, and being a feminist. Despite the fact that the majority of our traditions and teachings reflect an unquestioned high respect for women, I have come to the realization that we cannot rely on this status to provide us with all the necessary tools to combat patriarchy and colonialism. While I agree with Grande that our nations must collectively challenge the imperialist order, I also believe that in order to achieve this goal, we must overcome patriarchal values on our road to decolonization. In other words, we need to use a specific feminist theory as a tool to challenge the patriarchal values our people have inherited from colonization.

In my previous discussion, I describe how Christianization, residential schools and the imposition of patriarchy disrupted our Anishinaabe ideology and teachings regarding women and our communities. As a result, we can no longer look only to our teachings for empowerment and regeneration from colonialism; the simple fact is that we need more tools. When I began exploring indigenous feminism, my first reaction was exactly that of

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<sup>81</sup> Sandy Grande. *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. 152.

Grande's. Of course we do not need waabishkiiwekwe (white women) feminism; we are indigenous women, Anishinaabe women. However, after reflecting upon my own path of decolonization I realized that indigenous and radical feminist theory has great potential. In addition, indigenous feminism is central to this discussion because it provides a theoretical platform to connect with the Anishinaabekwe ideology. I feel that an indigenous feminist viewpoint is necessary when describing the problems of colonialism but only when coupled with the purpose of radical feminism, to emerge as *radical indigenous feminism*.

In the struggle to overcome the effects of colonialism and regenerate our life ways and philosophy as Anishinaabe people, bell hooks' view of radical feminism is essential. She provides a definition of radical feminism as stated by Cellestine Ware, who notes:

Radical feminism is working for the eradication of domination and elitism in all human relationships. This would make self-determination the ultimate good and require the downfall of society as we know it today.<sup>82</sup> [Furthermore], radical feminism opposes existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. Thus, radical feminists tend to be sceptical of political action within the current system, and instead support cultural change that undermines patriarchy and associated hierarchal structures.<sup>83</sup>

Radical feminism can provide an avenue to challenge and overcome the inherited patriarchal underpinnings of our teachings while articulating the problems associated with seeking solutions in the political/colonial system. Combining radical and indigenous

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<sup>82</sup> bell hooks. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984. 19.

<sup>83</sup> Jone Johnson Lewis. *Radical Feminism*. June 8, 2009  
<[www.womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/g/radicalfeminism.html](http://www.womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/g/radicalfeminism.html)>

feminism provides an essential tool in the struggle to overcome the effects of colonialism, and keeps our foundation rooted in our worldview and teachings.

The approach taken by indigenous feminism signals a departure from seeking empowerment within the Anishinaabekwe ideology. Rather, solutions are sought from colonial agencies, which promote a victim mentality. Prescribed solutions fall short when measured against the community goal of regeneration. This aspect of indigenous feminism is challenged by the integration of womanhood ideologies such as the Anishinaabekwe ideology. By this integration, I believe indigenous feminism's reliance on the colonial system to provide solutions will be lessened if not completely abandoned.

In reviewing the arguments of indigenous women, I want to make it clear that I do not wish to undermine their beliefs. This would be an act of oppression against other indigenous women. However, I do differentiate myself from their arguments in order to discuss them through respectful dialogue. Devon Mihesuah examined the problem of envisioning the "monolithic Native woman." She stated:

There is not one among Native women, and no one feminist theory totalizing Native women's thought. Rather, there exists a spectrum of multi-heritage women in between "traditional" and "progressive," possessing a multitude of opinions about what it means to be a Native female. There is no one voice among Natives because there is no such thing as the culturally and racially monolithic Native woman.<sup>84</sup>

I agree with Mihesuah. Anishinaabekwe ideology and radical indigenous feminism is an avenue that I feel would allow Anishinaabekwe to challenge their colonial mentality. I do

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<sup>84</sup> Devon Abbott Mihesuah. *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. 6-7.

not want to suggest, however, that it is the only or the right way for all women. Having said that, I agree with Kim Anderson's assessment of the situation and I apply it to this thesis. She wrote:

We can talk about self-government, sovereignty, cultural recovery and the healing path, but we will never achieve any of these things until we take a serious look at the disrespect that characterized the lives of so many Native women. We must have a vision for something better, because our future depends on it.<sup>85</sup>

This chapter encompasses my vision for something better. What is currently represented by indigenous feminism and the Indigenous Women's Movement does not further the decolonization-regeneration dialogue.

Joyce Green described how indigenous and non-indigenous women met to discuss what indigenous feminism meant to them at the 2002 Aboriginal Feminist<sup>86</sup> Symposium, where "Aboriginal feminism is the tool to bring about decolonization" was discussed. Stemming from the symposium, Green edited a book entitled, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, which was released in 2007 to continue the discussion of indigenous feminism. In analysing this work, I concluded that rather than using indigenous feminism to facilitate decolonization (which I suggest cannot happen), indigenous women's ideology coupled with radical indigenous feminism will achieve decolonization and regeneration. Joyce Green begins the discussion on indigenous feminism.

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<sup>85</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 14.

<sup>86</sup> In *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* and in *The Fourth World: An Indigenous Perspective on Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Activism*, the term Aboriginal feminism is also used. However, for the purpose of consistency I will only use the term *indigenous feminism* throughout this chapter.

Green claims that indigenous feminism is a topic that is widely understood by critics to be “non-existent or untraditional, inauthentic, non-libratory for Aboriginal women and illegitimate as an ideological position, political analysis and organizational process.”<sup>87</sup> She bases her argument on indigenous feminists and noted, “They exist and they choose the label, the ideological position, the analysis and the process.”<sup>88</sup> Green’s analysis is engaging and she elucidates the many solid arguments of indigenous feminism, as follows:

The emerging Indigenous feminist literature and politics, while the terrain of a minority of activists and scholars, must be taken seriously as a critique of colonialism, decolonization and gendered and raced power relations in both settler and Indigenous communities .... Indigenous feminism is a valid and theoretically and politically powerful critique of the social, economic and political conditions of Aboriginal women’s lives.<sup>89</sup>

I agree that a serious critique of colonialism, decolonization, and gendered and racialized power relations is necessary. However, what is central to the decolonization-regeneration struggle, and seemingly absent in her argument, is indigenous women’s connection to their ideology of womanhood. This absence shows that indigenous feminism does not include the ideology of womanhood, such as the Anishinaabekwe ideology.

The absence of indigenous values of womanhood is emphasized by Green, who stated, “Aboriginal feminism brings together two critiques: Feminism and anti-

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<sup>87</sup> Joyce Green. “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 20.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

colonialism to show how Aboriginal peoples, and in particular Aboriginal women, are affected by colonialism and by patriarchy.”<sup>90</sup> She continued, “Aboriginal feminism provides a philosophical and political way of conceptualizing and of resisting the oppressions that many Aboriginal people experience.”<sup>91</sup> Instead of using indigenous feminism as a way to examine the “philosophical and political way of conceptualizing and of resisting the oppressions,” indigenous women must also use their womanhood ideology to form an argument against colonialism and patriarchy coupled with radical indigenous feminism. The absence of indigenous values of womanhood in favour of indigenous feminism is a recurring theme in the discussion. It is based on the critique of indigenous feminism by Jaimes and Halsey. They noted, “The utilization of feminism disconnects indigenous women from their own tribal values.”<sup>92</sup> Green responded to the main points held by Jaimes and Halsey about indigenous feminism, as follows:

Aboriginal women’s authenticity is challenged when they are defined as feminist. It is as though some authority has decided that Aboriginal women cannot be culturally authentic or traditional or acceptable if they are feminist. Indeed, some women find themselves criticized for being tools of colonial ideology or for being traitors to the community.<sup>93</sup>

Her argument is instructive. It reflects Devon Mihesuah’s statement that there is no such thing as the monolithic native woman. However, I must question indigenous women’s

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>92</sup> Annette M. Jaimes and Theresa Halsey. “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America.” *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*. Ed. Annette M. Jaimes. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992. 331.

<sup>93</sup> Joyce Green. “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 24-25.

adoption of indigenous feminism as their only platform for describing their experience with colonialism. A fusion of womanhood ideology and radical indigenous feminism may take the current dialogue a step further and provide (a) an avenue to include the decolonization-regeneration struggle to challenge colonialism, and (b) a dialogue framed by Anishinaabekwe empowerment. Not only is it a great empowering exercise to learn indigenous womanhood ideology but, as stated in my previous discussion, it is the responsibility of women to regenerate teachings to challenge patriarchy and colonialism. I believe the use of indigenous feminism alone to achieve these goals will not be successful in combating colonialism; currently, indigenous feminism is not critical of engaging colonial theories and systems while speaking of decolonization. As previously noted, an example is shown in Verna St. Denis's essay, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*.

St. Denis argued, "The overwhelming majority of Aboriginal people have gone through some degree of socialization into Christianity as well as incorporation into the patriarchal capitalistic political economy and education system, and are therefore subject to western ideologies of gender identities and relations."<sup>94</sup> As a result of the assimilationist definition she provides, she goes on to explain that:

The current production of Aboriginal identities and subjectivities has not occurred outside the socio-intellectual traditions and practices of Western institutions. I have come to appreciate the importance of being informed about the history, knowledge and institutions of the West ... [and recognize] just how much European history, knowledge and institutions have been, and continue to be,

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<sup>94</sup> Verna St. Denis. "Feminism is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism and Diversity." *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Ed. Joyce Green. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2007. 41.

productive of Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples' lives. I have come to value the merits of drawing on strands of theorizing that intertwine and intersect to produce the analysis required to understand the multiple and sometimes contradictory positioning of Aboriginal peoples.<sup>95</sup>

St. Denis's stance is not uncommon in that many indigenous peoples spend their lives working to achieve change for their people within the colonizer's system. While I cannot advocate what St. Denis promoted, her viewpoint is necessary because it shows how indigenous feminism encourages women to work within the colonial system to find answers to the oppression they see in themselves and in their communities. I feel that the stance taken by indigenous feminism is no different from the rights and recognition discourse that has shown the futility of seeking rights from your oppressor.<sup>96 97 98 99 100 101</sup>

Audre Lorde passionately explained why working within the colonial system would achieve no real change in the lives of women, as follows:

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 42, 43.

<sup>96</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> James Tully. "The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom." *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Ed. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton and Will Sanders. Cambridge University Press, 2000. 36-59.

<sup>98</sup> Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.

<sup>99</sup> Glen Coulthard. "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Recognition in Canada." *Contemporary Political Theory* 6.4 (November 2007): 437-460.

<sup>100</sup> Lee Maracle. "Decolonizing Native Women." *Daughters of Mother Earth: The Wisdom of Native American Women*. Ed. Barbara Alice Mann. Connecticut: Praeger, 2006.

<sup>101</sup> Audrey Roy. "Sovereignty and Decolonization: Realizing Indigenous Self Determination at the United Nations and In Canada." Master of Arts Thesis. University of Victoria, 2001.

about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.<sup>102</sup>

It has been undeniably shown, as Dr. Alfred explained, "It is impossible either to transform the colonial society from within colonial institutions or to achieve justice and peaceful coexistence without fundamentally transforming the institutions of the colonial society themselves."<sup>103</sup> When one chooses to seek answers within the colonizer's system, an automatic acceptance of the colonizer's values is initiated while an automatic erosion of indigenous values occurs. I agree with Freire<sup>104</sup> and Coulthard<sup>105</sup> because they explain that when indigenous people locate themselves within the colonizer's system they eventually identify with their oppressors' theories (rather than their indigenous philosophies). Looking to prescribed colonial remedies for empowerment creates continued dependency on the colonial system. The use of the Anishinaabekwe ideology coupled with radical indigenous feminism might provide empowered solutions to the effects of colonialism.

#### Addressing the Victim Mentality

At this point, I want to develop the importance of regenerating women's strength and addressing women's oppression from a place of empowerment rather than viewed and addressed from the victim mentality created by colonialism. Earlier I mentioned how Andrea Smith speaks to the truths of the effects of colonization on women being

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<sup>102</sup> Audre Lorde. "*The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House.*" *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. California: The Crossing Press, 1984. 112.

<sup>103</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005. 154.

<sup>104</sup> Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.

<sup>105</sup> Glen Coulthard. "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Recognition in Canada." *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6.4 (November 2007).

patriarchal gender violence, the demonization of our societies, our lands and bodies being inherently violable and rapable, which leads to the loss of our lands. I must point out that while Smith gives an excellent descriptive account of colonialism and its effects on indigenous women, she does not go far enough in outlining strategies in addressing indigenous women's oppression. By not first separating women's struggle from the state or the colonizer's system before reaching solutions, Smith has no other avenue but to use the same system that has maintained our oppression in finding answers. The result is the entrapment of solutions within the colonial system through the victim mentality of colonialism. Similarly, Ratna Kapur articulates the problems with engaging remedies that centre on the victim mentality. She examines, "how the international women's rights movement has reinforced the image of the woman as a victim subject, primarily through its focus on violence against women."<sup>106</sup> An example of how the focus on violence against women creates solutions which promote the victim mentality can be seen in Smith articulation of reparations. She states:

Boarding school policies demonstrate that violence in Native communities, and by extension, other communities of color, is not simply a symptom of dysfunctionality in these communities. Rather, violence is the continuing effect of human rights violations perpetrated by state policies. Consequently, these policies serve as a focal point for thinking about how we can centre an anti-violence

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<sup>106</sup> Ratna Kapur. "The Tragedy of Victimization Rhetoric: Resurrecting the Native Subject in International/Postcolonial Feminist Legal Politics." *Harvard Human Rights Law Journal*, Vol. 15, 2002. 2.

analysis in the movement for reparations, because gender violence is a harm for which the state needs to be held accountable.<sup>107</sup>

I argue that when finding solutions, they must be concentrated within one nation and be created through women located in one community for change to occur. Our focus should not be placed on state accountability but on our own accountability as Anishinaabe people. While I agree with Smith's description of sexism, gender violence and the loss of lands as being the obstacles in preventing our ability to decolonize and assert sovereignty, my disagreement lies in her strategies being policy reform and working within the colonial system. We have to look to our own ideologies to achieve solutions such as the Anishinaabekwe ideology. Chiinuks and Na'Cha'uaht's commitment to the Stop the Violence March through the regeneration of ayts-tuu-thlaa, the coming of age ceremony provides a relevant example of such solutions.

In 2006 Chiinuks (Ruth Ogilvie, Nuu-chah-nulth Nation) and Na'Cha'uaht (Cliff Atleo Jr., Nuu-chah-nulth Nation) helped create a powerful expression of community empowerment through action by organizing a march to address violence against women,

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, a small delegation of young Nuu-chah-nulth activists visited the community of Pacheedaht, marking the start of a 10-day journey through all 15 Nuu-chah-nulth communities on Vancouver Island. The Stop the Violence March was conceived to focus attention on the issue of domestic violence and to clearly state that it would no longer be tolerated. The intent of the march was to create space for Nuu-chah-nulth women and men to speak the truth about their experiences, space to begin a process of restoring dignity and balance to their

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<sup>107</sup> Andrea Smith. *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005. 3.

communities by taking responsibility and action. In addition to creating space and awareness, the travelling delegation felt it was important to leave something positive in each community. Shawls were presented to a select number of female community members in the spirit of the ayts-tuu-thlaa, a coming of age ceremony meant to honour and hold up young Nuu-chah-nulth women.<sup>108</sup>

This example speaks volumes about the strength of community in their struggle to find solutions to the effects of colonialism on their people. What stood out the most was the emphasis placed on holding up and honouring the young women through ayts-tuu-thlaa, the coming of age ceremony. I can just imagine how treasured and full of empowerment the young women must have felt by having been honoured for their Nuu-chah-nulth identity as women. Even though Chiinuuks and Na'Cha'uaht chose to take on the heavy and painful issue of violence against women (the very acts that cause victimization) by involving ayts-tuu-thlaa, the coming of age ceremony, and honouring young women by the placing of a shawl indicates the regeneration of Nuu-chah-nulth empowerment. Rather than focusing on the victimization of women that occurred, they chose to use the Nuu-chah-nulth ideology to regenerate the inherent power of womanhood while combating the effects of colonialism. The Stop the Violence March and the vital anti-colonial work carried out by Chiinuuks and Na'Cha'uaht shows how the effects of colonialism on womanhood can be addressed from a place of empowerment.

Aboriginal organizations provide an example of the investment in state-prescribed remedies. The Native Women's Association of Canada is one example of how our colonizer continues the assimilation project. The NWAC was ushered into existence in

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<sup>108</sup> Glen Coulthard, "Interview with Chiinuuks and Na'cha'uaht" *New Socialist* 58 (September-October 2006): 29.

the 1970s following the effort of women to change the sexist and assimilationist section of the *Indian Act*. Section 12 1 (b) of the *Indian Act* ensured a woman (and any present or future children) who married a white man would automatically lose her Indian status. The same was not enforced for native men regardless of whom they married. The work that indigenous women, the forbears of the NWAC, undertook during the 1970s and 1980s to reinstate indigenous women and their families in their own communities and their ability to claim Indian status is invaluable. I am very grateful for what they achieved because my own family was affected by the sexist and colonial legacy of the *Indian Act* and the enfranchisement policy. However, on a deeper level, I question why they continue to involve themselves in a colonial system that was created to deny and destroy our collective power. Dr. Alfred finds it ironic that the once-radical political motives of the national leadership are now co-opted; I feel it is applicable to the NWAC's motives. He stated:

Twenty years ago, they were positioned at the cutting edge of change ... but now that those same people are in positions of leadership, they are resisting attempts to move the challenge to the next stage. Our politicians find themselves cooperating with their (former) enemies and adversaries to preserve the non-threatening, very limited resolutions they have worked with the colonial powers to create and define as end objectives. They have accommodated themselves to colonialism, not defeated it. And they have forgotten that the ancestral movement always sought

total freedom from domination and complete revolt against empire, not halfway compromises and weak surrenders to watered-down injustices.<sup>109</sup>

The NWAC, created out of the national voice of women to end sexist laws and relationships is now firmly entrenched in the colonial system that continues to dominate all of our Nations.

It is not the aim of this chapter to deconstruct how and why Aboriginal organizations are created as miniature colonial-style governments. However, Howard Adams' *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View* provides an insightful discussion as to how this occurs. Although his reference point is from the late 1980s, I feel it is still relevant to the topic of Aboriginal organizations because in 2009 they are still firmly located in the colonial system. Adams stated:

The three national organizations – Assembly of First Nations, the Native Council of Canada, and the Métis National Council – are typical middle-class bureaucracies that are not at all representative of the native masses. In some native organizations, the influential decision makers are white consultants and, in the case of the Indian Brotherhood [A.F.N.] organizations, even employees of the Indian Affairs Branch – the colonizer.<sup>110</sup>

I would add the NWAC to Adams' analysis because it is indeed modelled after the Assembly of First Nations.<sup>111</sup> The NWAC is caught up in working within the colonial system, not challenging the current hegemony but joining with it, allowing the roots of

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<sup>109</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2005. 26.

<sup>110</sup> Howard Adams. *Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native Point of View*. Ontario: Fifth House, 1989. 157.

<sup>111</sup> Patricia Monture Angus. *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations' Independence*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 1999.

domination and oppression to grow. The NWAC, as well as every other Aboriginal organization, is part of the Aboriginal services industry<sup>112</sup> where participants make their pay check from the effects of colonialism and oppression of our people. With the colonial government providing financial security, they ensure that no real and sustained changes will occur in our lives. The colonizer stays in power and the roots of colonialism and the myth of sovereignty remain firmly in place. To this end, Grace Ouellette (Metis, Cree and Assiniboine Nations) described the effect of internalized oppression in which our people plead to our colonizer for repair, as follows:

For the most part, Aboriginal women and children (as well as some Aboriginal men) ... experience dual oppression – from within their own Aboriginal band governments and from the non-Aboriginal governing institutions. This oppression occurs within health and welfare services and programs, education funding and voting privileges in First Nation's band affairs, as well as at the provincial and national levels ... the NWAC address many of these concerns at the national and provincial levels.<sup>113</sup>

The oppression supposedly addressed by the NWAC involves the direct effects of colonialism on indigenous people. Seeing these issues as oppression and not as a direct result of colonial imposition does not challenge the core problem and will provide only band-aid solutions. To put it another way, our colonizer has allowed the creation of the NWAC, and a multitude of other Aboriginal organizations, through funding

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<sup>112</sup> I use the term *Aboriginal service industry* as a way to describe the colonial trappings of government-funded jobs that give a semblance of assistance to indigenous peoples. It is used to explain the work our people do within our oppressor's system.

<sup>113</sup> Grace J. M. W. Ouellette. *The Fourth World: An Indigenous Perspective on Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Activism*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2002. 54.

agreements<sup>114</sup> to permit the organization to deal with the on-the-ground effects of colonialism, which indigenous peoples live with daily such as violence, welfare, suicide, band council politics, poverty, etc. Make no mistake, to confront our attachment to the colonizer while committing to the decolonization-regeneration effort is arduous, but it must begin somewhere. In the second edition of *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, Dr. Alfred attested to the decision that must be made, as follows:

But when you come to the realization that you are on the wrong path, you have a choice to make: Do I change my course and go in the direction I know to be the right one, compromising the status and power I have built for myself, or do I stay on this mistaken pathway, compromising what I know to be truly indigenous? Anyone who knows their language, who understands ceremonies, who has heard traditional elders talk about what it is to be a Native person knows that there are clear teachings about their responsibilities, their roles, their relationship to land, and their relationship to one another. These lessons are so profound and so clear when you hear them. And they are taught to us over and over again. So, when you find yourself at the decision point, without question, you give up your position, your salary, and your consulting fees. You have to imagine what your ancestors would have wanted you to do.<sup>115</sup>

Dr. Alfred clarifies the hard decisions we must make when we commit to the responsibilities of our identity, people and ancestors as well as living a decolonized-regenerated life. Simply put, indigenous women who are living a life dedicated to

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<sup>114</sup> Dean Neu and Richard Therrien. *Accounting for Genocide: Canada's Bureaucratic Assault on Aboriginal Peoples*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood & Zed Books, 2003.

<sup>115</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*. Second Edition. Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2009. 4.

overcoming the effects of colonialism through decolonized regeneration will not promote solutions produced by our colonizer via Aboriginal organizations. Empowerment is located in the wisdom of our grandmothers and personalized commitment to maintaining a healthy, strong existence.

Ogimaabiik embodies Anishinaabekwe empowerment because she made a conscious decision to continue living off the land by hunting, fishing and trapping on her own. She also rejects the materialistic lifestyle choices by maintaining the Anishinaabe philosophy. She explains:

I live in very much in a traditional way. I live in Nicickousemenecaning, in the bush. I still do a lot of living off the land to get traditional food, as I am a trapper. [Even though I am older] I am still able to live off the land. I also make pemmican from deer, moose, fish and smoke beaver, rabbit and partridges. I eat more of [traditional] food than [the white man's] food. The food we receive from the land is what is best for us. Deer and beaver will eat food [such as roots] that we also use to make medicine. When I eat traditional food, I am curing myself. And besides, I like it."

Ogimaabiik chooses to live with empowerment provided by the land and the Anishinaabe philosophy. The Anishinaabe way of life stands in stark contrast to using the political/colonial system in addressing oppression. Indeed, Dr. Alfred clarifies the foundation needed to offer our people a solution to colonial prescribed solutions. He explains:

Political and social institutions, such as band councils and government-funded service agencies, that govern and influence life in First Nations today, have been

for the most part shaped and organized to serve the interests of the Canadian state. Their structures, responsibilities, and authorities conform to the interests of Canadian governments, just as their sources of legitimacy are found in Canadian laws, not in First Nations interests or laws. These institutions are inappropriate foci for either planning or leading the cause of Indigenous survival and regeneration. Reconfiguring First Nations politics and replacing current strategies, institutions and leadership structures with those rooted in and drawing legitimacy from Indigenous cultures is necessary for creating renewed environments capable of supporting Indigenous ways of being. Transformations begin inside each person, but decolonization starts becoming a reality when people collectively reject colonial identities and institutions that are the context of violence, dependency and discord in Indigenous communities.<sup>116</sup>

Chiinuuks also talks about why looking to the state for solutions would not help her people in addressing violence against women. She was asked to speak about the importance of organizing outside the colonial-state system and replied:

I think it goes without saying that if I want to remain an authentic Kousa (human being, real person), organizing must always fall outside of the colonial system. Everyone knows that the state has always sought to destroy Indigenous ways of being in the world. The kind of organizing we began with in this march is rooted in our responsibility as Indigenous peoples to our land, home and community. We organize on the basis of the threat of the day. Today this means neo-colonialism and its effects, which includes the systemic rage that has turned inward on

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<sup>116</sup> Taiaiake Alfred. "Colonialism and State Dependency." Unpublished research paper prepared to the National Aboriginal Health Organization Project Communities in Crisis. 2009. 5.

ourselves. Since the colonial-state can't address these issues, we must find solutions that derive from our own communities.<sup>117</sup>

By using our own ideologies to address decolonization, we will be able to attack the roots of colonialism instead of continuing to justify our oppression by looking to the state, who is our oppressor, for remedies. As I stated previously, we have to recognize the roots of colonialism as being the perpetrator of the outright assault and disempowerment of our inherent strength and identity as Anishinaabekwe. Aboriginal organizations provide an example of the investment in state-prescribed remedies.

In addition to seeking state remedies, Smith describes a global reparation movement as a strategy for uniting all colonized people in order to urge the state more forcefully to accept accountability for reparations.<sup>118</sup> Through this strategy, she widens the struggle to include all women of colour. In this regard, Smith is promoting the unification of a solution being addressed by all colonized people, which provides an example of the entrapment of our struggle within the colonial system. My Anishinaabe philosophy, values and beliefs could not be addressed through the solution Smith presents. It is in itself oppressive to incorporate all indigenous nations within solutions whereby my way of life and philosophy will disintegrate into a global indigenous network or movement. It will also work to break down our struggles with colonialism in our communities and the Anishinaabekwe perspective will be lost among the global women of colour

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<sup>117</sup> Glen Coulthard. "Interview with Chiinuuks and Na'cha'auht." *New Socialist* 58 (September-October 2006): 31.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

engagement. This again points to Smith's generalized rhetoric in creating strategies to address the oppression of all women of colour rather than having a solution for a certain community.

Alliance building and sharing experiences of the effects of colonialism are essential to the Indigenous Women's Network (the Network represents the indigenous women's movement). However, the indigenous women's movement is challenged by the need to create solutions specific to women's oppression. Because its main purpose is to have women come together to examine victimization through colonialism, any solution to the problems is automatically based on the victim effect of oppression which works to promote the victim mentality of colonialism.

In Winona Laduke's *Collection of Essential Writings*, the issue appears of the indigenous women's movement working on solutions. "We have united to share with one another our skills and support to each other for the basic survival of our people. Our underlying framework is to work within the visions of our elders, as we apply Indigenous values to resolve contemporary problems."<sup>119</sup> Also, from the Indigenous Women's Network website:

Indigenous women, having few other places to turn, come to IWN for help in facing the struggles in their communities with cultural, environmental and economic threats. As civil society unfolds in reservation communities, Indigenous

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<sup>119</sup> Winona Laduke, *The Winona Laduke Reader: A Collection of Essential Writings*. MN: Voyageur Press, 2002, 238.

women and non-profit organizations need to organize to form a united voice and to create our vision for our future.<sup>120</sup>

Indigenous women understand the effects of colonialism have been a necessary focus in order to find solutions. The creation of an Indigenous Women's Network<sup>121</sup> attests to the need for women to unite. The Network also provides a safe place where women can share their personal experiences of their oppression, which emphasizes the learning through sharing aspect. In addition, it is a place where women can create solidarity relationships and realize that they are not alone in the fight to overcome colonial oppression.

Having said that, the unification of solutions in the indigenous women's movement, which represents many indigenous nations, does not specify a solution that will solve either a single woman's or tribe's concern. The women's movement cannot create a solution for the Anishinaabekwe in my community of Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek because that is our responsibility. Furthermore, it would be unfair to expect the indigenous women's movement to take on the responsibility of creating solutions for all indigenous women. Although we experience the same symptoms and effects of colonialism, we find the solution by reflecting our own Nation's needs. We must not forget that we each come from a particular indigenous nation with its own belief systems, philosophies and ways of addressing crisis. In addition, to universalize a solution to overcome our oppression is to take away the ability of women to create their own

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<sup>120</sup> The Indigenous Women's Network. February 2, 2009 <<http://indigenouswomen.org/General/History-of-IWN.html>>

<sup>121</sup> The Indigenous Women's Network is separate than the Aboriginal or indigenous women's movement spoken to in regards to the Native Women's Association of Canada. Its main catchment area is the U.S.A. but they strive to be the global voice of indigenous women. For more information, please see <<http://indigenouswomen.org/Home.html>>

response in their community. Finding solutions in one Nation and one community will allow women to connect to the purpose of self-consciousness-raising groups, which I present in the next chapter of this thesis.

We have to put to rest the form of indigenous feminism that allows our colonizers to maintain their power. The time to re-imagine indigenous feminism is here but it cannot be done by one person alone. Decolonized indigenous women will have to come together to create a critical discussion on what radical indigenous feminism will produce from the foundation of our identities as indigenous women. Critical dialogue needs to take place, with encouragement and assessment of ideas from a decolonized, ethical basis.

## Chapter Four

### The Role of Anishinaabe Mothering and Wiisokotaatiwin “Gathering Together for a Purpose”

The concept of mothering is central to the Anishinaabekwe ideology and our decolonization-regeneration efforts. Renee Elizabeth Mzinegiizhigo-Kwe Bedard (Anishinaabe Nation) provides a powerful understanding of the Anishinaabe ideology of mothering and motherhood, and how it connects the Anishinaabe Nation to “the health and wellbeing of our families, community, nation and the world around us.”<sup>122</sup> It is important to note that the concept of mothering our people extends to all indigenous nations and provides a common link in our decolonization efforts. Previously, I briefly discussed Emma LaRocque’s critique of maternalization to show that we must be cautious in our attempt to reclaim static and romanticized views of ourselves. Yet, this discussion provides a crucial step in understanding how Anishinaabekwe ideology can be the driving force in challenging the effects of colonialism.

Bedard provided a discussion of Anishinaabekwe ideology that encompasses the concept of mothering. She made it clear that:

Anishinaabe women have passed down knowledge and traditions that celebrate our ability to not just bring forth life, but to mother. Mothering and motherhood extends far beyond the act of giving life to another human being. Anishinaabe

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<sup>122</sup> Renee Elizabeth Mzinegiizhigo-Kwe Bedard. “An Anishinaabe-kwe Ideology on Mothering and Motherhood.” *Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*. Ed. D. Meme Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell. Canada: Demeter Press, 2006. 72.

mothering and motherhood includes the concepts and ideas of life-giving, fostering, adoption, raising up, aunties and grannies.<sup>123</sup>

Bedard's definition agrees with my own understanding of mothering learned through my relationships to my family, friends and my urban Anishinaabe community. For example, while at a feast or a ceremony, it is a common occurrence that the children are looked after not just by their mother and father but by the people in attendance; it is accepted that our people are all extended family members who foster and nurture our children and youth. Again, Bedard provided an insightful description of mothering. She noted:

Some of the most important mothers are women in our families and communities who do not have biological children of their own, but take on the role of aunties, grannies, and even adoptee mothers. One does not have to be biologically related to a child to act as either auntie or grannie .... In Anishinaabe communities, mother, auntie and grannie are fluid and interchangeable roles, not biologically defined identities.<sup>124</sup>

In my adult life, I have taken up my responsibility as an Anishinaabekwe to mentor and foster youth, regardless of the fact that I am not a mother. Yet, I take great care in mothering the youth in my life who are children of friends or family; I am honoured to be named auntie to them. It is important to note that even in our professional lives many of our people take up their responsibility to mother children, youth and adults. Take for example the many indigenous teachers, youth and childcare workers, counsellors, etc. who dedicate their work life to being mentors to our people. This shows that the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 66, 67.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 73, 74.

Anishinaabekwe ideology encompasses the concept of mothering, regardless of giving birth. I believe that to nurture and mother extends to Anishinaabe men as well; no one is left out of the immense effort.

Indeed, to nurture and hold up our people is a role we must ensure takes place in our lives in order to rebuild the relationships that have been negatively affected by colonialism. For women, this endeavour is especially close to our hearts and well-being because our stories inform us that Anishinaabekwe have an intimate relationship with Muzzu-Kummik-Kwe (Mother Earth) as life givers. As such, we carry the primary responsibility in ensuring the survival of our people, our teachings and values. The Anishinaabekwe ideology tells us that we are directly linked to the land. It begins with understanding our connection to our first mother, Muzzu-Kummik-Kwe. “The Anishinaabe ideology of mothering and motherhood holds that, like Mother Earth, we have a responsibility as women to foster and nurture the next generation and to allow others to assist in this process, such as aunties and grannies.”<sup>125</sup> This relationship and responsibility is even more essential following our decolonization-regeneration. Leanne Simpson (Anishinaabe Nation) passionately expresses the importance of Anishinaabekwe in regenerating our nation and ourselves. She notes, “By living our self-determination as vital women, we become powerful catalysts, allowing our nations to rise through state-prescribed agendas and to carry pre-conquest visions of self-determination into reality.”<sup>126</sup> I believe that the concept of mothering (as it applies to our decolonization-regeneration effort) includes all our people. For those Anishinaabekwe who are

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>126</sup> Leanne Simpson. “Birthing an Indigenous Resurgence: Decolonizing Our Pregnancy and Birthing Ceremonies.” *Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*. Ed. D. Meme Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell. Canada: Demeter Press, 2006. 32.

committed to overcoming colonialism by investing in the decolonization-regeneration effort and who choose to become mothers by having children, their responsibility becomes intensified.

Leanne Simpson has broadened the responsibility of mothers not just in creating life but connecting it to our collective goal in challenging colonialism and regenerating our Nation. Kim Anderson puts into perspective the reason why regenerating our understanding and connection to mothering and motherhood is essential. She stated:

Because of the cultural genocide that we have experienced, we have a real need to recover ways that are distinct from Euro-Canadian tradition. We look for tradition and culture that is free of the influence of the colonizer as we move through the process of decolonization. We want to return to things that we may truly call our own.<sup>127</sup>

Simpson describes how, by reclaiming the Anishinaabekwe ideology of pregnancy and birth, it became a direct challenge to the contemporary western medicalization of pregnancy and birth. A specific example of how western medicalization is challenged can be found in Simpson's investigation of how indigenous women's birthing was affected by colonialism. She explained:

Calculated colonialism changed birthing. Okanagan writer Jeanette Armstrong writes that by specifically targeting the power of Indigenous women as life-givers, colonizers were able to disintegrate our communities and move our peoples towards genocide (ix). The Western medicalization of birth replaced our ceremony. Bottles and substandard formula took the place of nursing, detachment

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<sup>127</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Ontario: Sumach Press, 2000. 34.

supplanted attachment, and mothering was replaced by the physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual abuse of the residential school system. By undermining our most sacred and powerful ceremony and our most sacred responsibilities of mothers, our colonizers thought they could achieve the destruction of our nations.<sup>128</sup>

Simpson's commanding statement describes how colonialism detrimentally affected the knowledge of indigenous women about our ceremonial responsibility as mothers. Furthermore, she explains that although our colonizer forced us into their "true way" of birthing, this does not mean that we could not regenerate our birthing values and ceremony. She noted:

When colonialism hijacked our pregnancies and births [by forcing us into their ways of birthing], it also stole our power and sovereignty as Indigenous women ... in order to heal our Nations, our communities and our families, we need to reclaim this ceremony. By reclaiming pregnancy and birth, we are not only physically decolonizing ourselves but we are also providing a decolonized pathway into this world.<sup>129</sup>

Simpson maintains that the first step in regenerating our unique ceremonies is learning from the elders and grandmothers.

Our grandmothers tell us that the answers lie within our own cultures, ways of knowing and being and in our languages. When I listen to them talk about pregnancy, childbirth and mothering, I hear revolutionary teachings with the

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<sup>128</sup> Leanne Simpson. "Birthing an Indigenous Resurgence: Decolonizing Our Pregnancy and Birthing Ceremonies." *Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*. Ed. D. Memee Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell. Canada: Demeter Press, 2006. 28.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

potential to bring about radical changes in our families, communities and nations.<sup>130</sup>

Simpson captures the essence of our struggle to decolonize and regenerate; having our grandmothers pass on revolutionary teachings to our mothers and their newborn babies by practising the Anishinaabekwe way of birthing completes a full circle. When I first read Simpson's essay it moved me to tears. I realized that she is able to speak to the hearts of Anishinaabekwe whose life is committed to seeing our people healthy, regenerated and living free from the effects of colonialism. She was able to put our fight for freedom, our regeneration of values, ethics and our purpose for decolonizing into a new perspective. Our grandmothers share revolutionary teachings intended to renew our people's strength, health and ultimately to defeat colonialism in our lives; this sentiment was also present in my interview with Anne Wilson.

Anne Wilson<sup>131</sup> is an Anishinaabe grandmother, medicine woman and an elder who shared with me the importance of rebuilding our people. When I visited her, she talked about the importance of Anishinaabekwe re-learning how to use a moss bag or tikaanaagan<sup>132</sup> for newborn babies and how this knowledge would enable us to renew our strength as a people.

As we visited, she expressed how vital it is for our women to relearn our pregnancy and birthing knowledge. An example of the knowledge she strives to reinforce is the moss bag. Anne took the moss bag and tikaanaagan with her to Anishinaabe communities

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>131</sup> Annie Wilson. Personal Interview. Manitou Rapids First Nation. July 12, 2009.

<sup>132</sup> A tikaanaagan is a cradleboard. The child is placed securely inside to be safe, secure and to learn the skill of observation.

who wish to learn about birthing teachings. She went on to explain that we must also recover knowledge about when a baby is first born. For example, she explained that in Canadian hospitals, the medical professionals clean the baby after birth. In contrast, our knowledge tells us not to wash the baby right away but to look at the baby's head and hands; we do this because it will tell the family about the life of the child and how s/he will be strong. The wrapping on the baby's hand may show his/her purpose in life. The crown is kept as it may show how long a life the baby will have. Indeed, the knowledge regarding birthing must be renewed. Simpson reiterates that the goals of regenerating our knowledge is connected to the goal of self-determination. She explains:

If more of our babies were born in the hands of Indigenous midwives using Indigenous birthing knowledge, on our own land, surrounded by our support systems and following our traditions and traditional teachings, more of our women would be empowered by the birth process and better able to assume their responsibilities as mother and as nation builders. More of our children would be able to gain guidance from the story of their emergence from the spirit world through the doorway into this world. More of our men would be connected to their traditional responsibilities in pregnancy, birth and fathering. The foundations of our nations would be strengthened.<sup>133</sup>

In addition, Anne explained the reason we must re-learn birthing practices is because it will enable the child to be a strong Anishinaabe person. In essence, in order for our decolonization efforts to have the greatest effect, we must begin the process of

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<sup>133</sup> Leanne Simpson. "Birthing an Indigenous Resurgence: Decolonizing Our Pregnancy and Birthing Ceremonies." *Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*. Ed. Lavell-Harvard, D. Meme. and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell. Canada: Demeter Press, 2006. 29.

regeneration at pregnancy. Simpson also confirms why strengthening our foundation is important, as follows. “Reclaiming Indigenous traditions of pregnancy, birth, and mothering will enable our children to lead our resurgence as Indigenous peoples, to rise up and rebel against colonialism in all its forms, to dream independence, to dance nationhood.”<sup>134</sup> When I reflect on Anne’s interview, I believe she wanted me to understand that regenerating our Nation from the effects of colonialism begins with how we raise our children in the Anishinaabekwe ideology. The essays by Renee Bedard and Leanne Simpson clearly make the connection between Anishinaabekwe ideology and the regeneration of our Nation. I will now move on to discuss how mentorship and guided dialogues can provide the opportunity to decolonize, regenerate and build radical indigenous feminism.

#### A Model for Mentorship

I first learned about self-consciousness-raising groups (CR groups) in reading *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* by bell hooks. She discussed the revolutionary potential of feminism and announced:

Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born a female ... before women could change patriarchy, we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness .... Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it is perpetuated and maintained .... Early on in [the] contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became the setting where women

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 32.

simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation. On a basic level, many hurt and exploited women used the consciousness-raising groups therapeutically. It was the site where they uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds. This confessional aspect served as a healing ritual. Through consciousness-raising, women gained the strength to challenge patriarchal forces at work and at home.<sup>135</sup>

hooks went on to explain that the CR groups often took place at someone's home where a more comfortable atmosphere could be provided. When taken out of the context of the feminist genre and placed in our struggle to decolonize, the CR group becomes a tool in our efforts.

Creating a CR group based on our Anishinaabe worldview and language will provide the depth of connection necessary to achieve personal transformation. The Anishinaabe term Wiisokotaatiwin means coming together for a purpose or gathering for a purpose. Instead of placing conversion to feminist politics as the foundation of the CR group, the foundation for Wiisokotaatiwin will be to usher in critical consciousness with the intent to create a pathway to personal decolonization and regeneration. In reflecting on the intent of this thesis, the use of Wiisokotatiwin is essential. How else will Anishinaabekwe be able to begin the process of personal decolonization and regeneration? Of course, it is possible to achieve decolonization on your own, in academia or through guided dialogues. However, considering how many of our people are struggling with oppression, lacking opportunities to attend schools and universities, we need more avenues to achieve

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<sup>135</sup> bell hooks. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000. 7-8.

decolonization. Dr. Waziyatawin Wilson explains, “Sustained resistance to the status quo requires such energy that fostering a crucial mass of support for decolonization efforts in a community is necessary for long-term success at recovering Indigenous life ways.”<sup>136</sup> I believe that by using the format of Wiisokotaatiwin, a guided mentorship process can take place. Through mentorship, Anishinaabekwe will begin the process of personal decolonization while undoing the assault of colonialism. By building a mentoring relationship through Wiisokotaatiwin, we can foster a commitment that is essential to creating change. We can use it to restore our inherent power from a place of empowerment rather than through the victim mentality created by colonialism. Dr. Alfred and Dr. Corntassel agrees:

Change happens one Warrior at a time – our people must reconstitute the mentoring and learning-teaching relationships that foster real and meaningful human development and community solidarity. The movement toward decolonization and regeneration will emanate from transformations achieved by direct-guided experience in small, personal groups and one on one mentoring towards a new path.<sup>137</sup>

By creating a mentorship like Wiisokotaatiwin, the renewal of the inherent strength of Anishinaabekwe ideology will be achieved in order to address the roots of our disconnection: colonialism. Embedded in this process is the replacement of our colonial identity with our Anishinaabekwe identity. This is why understanding the purpose of the

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<sup>136</sup> Waziyatawin Wilson. “Reclaiming Our Humanity: Decolonization and the Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge.” *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*. Ed. Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 72.

<sup>137</sup> Alfred and Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism.” *Politics of Identity – IX. Government and Opposition Ltd*. Ed. Richard Bellamy. UK: Blackwell, 2005. 613.

ogitchitaakwe is essential. By choosing to identify as an ogitchitaakwe, we also choose to commit to both our personal regeneration and our Nation's regeneration. The following is my vision for Wiisokotaatiwin in personal decolonization and regeneration.

### *Purpose*

The purpose is for Anishinaabekwe to learn of and then challenge internalized oppression and the effects of colonialism in their lives. It will challenge Anishinaabekwe to see whom they act, think, talk, and behave like to generate the process of seeing their own oppression; the women will be continually guided, protected and cared for during this powerful metamorphosis. It will provide for a condensed re-teaching of history: the history of assimilation through colonization and the myths of Canadian sovereignty. The original purpose of the CR group to foster a feminist politic will also be used where critical discussions of radical indigenous feminism take place. The purpose will be to have Anishinaabekwe understand how radical indigenous feminism is a tool in our efforts to decolonize and regenerate. The process may reveal an Anishinaabe philosophical and ethical construction of radical indigenous feminism; to this end, an Anishinaabe term may replace the English term radical indigenous feminism.

### *Method*

The method of the mentorship that will be used for regeneration will be traditional Anishinaabe sharing circles, where respect and security are automatically free flowing. Participation in Wiisokotaatiwin is voluntary; however, I suggest the group meet for at least one year in which their commitment must be maintained throughout. I would suggest meeting once a week for two to four hours, but the group will help decide on the appropriate frequency. There will be no consequence for missing a session. The first few

sessions of the Wiisokotaatiwin will inform the women as to what we are fighting for: our existence as Anishinaabekwe. The intent of the Wiisokotaatiwin is to speak to the heart and spirit of the women in order to get them reconnected to who they are and what their responsibilities are. My hope is that this will become their main driving force and they will realize their responsibility as Anishinaabekwe connected to the purpose of the ogichitaakwe. If after realizing their responsibility and feeling they cannot take it on, then they may go.

### *Commitment*

Wiisokotaatiwin will involve an obligation to begin exercising and eating with the purpose of living a lifestyle worthy of our ancestors and will aid in connecting their struggle to overcome personal oppression to the struggle against colonialism. The women must commit to our regeneration by dedicating their lifestyles and choices to the Anishinaabekwe ideology and the identity of an ogichitaakwe. As the mentorship will rely on the Anishinaabe philosophy, its focus will be building and fostering ogichitaakwe relationships, coupled with the integration of Anishinaabe elders who will provide the teachings, guidance and stories necessary to re-build the women's Anishinaabe distinctiveness. The mentorship will be a reciprocal process. For example, the first wave of Anishinaabekwe to commit to Wiisokotaatiwin after a year will become the mentors of new women who join. I think it is valuable to have a parallel Wiisokotaatiwin for men as well. I foresee the groups running separately but working together on occasion to offer a balance to the process of regeneration.

By using Wiisokotaatiwin as a mentoring and regenerating process, the roots of our disempowerment (the effects of colonialism) will be examined. At the same time, the

Anishinaabekwe ideology will be placed as the new foundation on which women can stand in addition to using radical indigenous feminism as a tool in our efforts to decolonize. This process is not an easy, gentle or rapid experience; it involves seeing and dismantling your own oppression, grieving for the life you once knew and re-emerging as a stronger woman. At that time, the woman will be informed by Anishinaabe values, be committed to radical indigenous feminism and can challenge the foundation of colonialism as ogichitaakwe. As Winona Laduke envisioned in her characters in *Last Standing Woman*, the regeneration of Anishinaabekwe ideology and ogichitaakwe knowledge were instrumental elements to be achieved *before* the community women were able to overcome the effects of colonialism, violence against women and the loss of land.

The responsibility we have to our ancestors and future generations is embedded in the process of regeneration and is central to the Wiisokotaatiwin.

It was from their ancestors that the Anishinaabeg inherited their understanding of life and being, all that they were and ought to be. What the grandfathers left as a legacy was the product of their minds, hearts and hands. The living were to accept the gift, enlarge it, and then pass it on to the young and the unborn.<sup>138</sup>

In regenerating our Anishinaabekwe ideology and ogichitaakwe knowledge, we not only provide purpose but fulfill our responsibilities to our ancestors and future generations. This teaching shows the Anishinaabe ethic of reciprocity: as we receive guidance and purpose from our stronger identity, we must give back to the Anishinaabe nation.

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<sup>138</sup> Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*. Ontario: McClelland and Stewart, 1976. 27.

I was expected, as was every person, to do something for the people in return for what they had done for me. Whatever I knew, whatever my skills, whatever my beliefs, everything I owed to my kin, my neighbours and my Anishinaabe origins.<sup>139</sup>

Basil Johnson stated, “It will not be until our grandchildren and their grandchildren return to the ways of their ancestors that they will regain strength of spirit and heart.”<sup>140</sup> I believe this time is now.

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<sup>139</sup> Basil Johnston, *The Manitous*. Ontario: Key Porter, 1995. 140.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

#### Personal Commitment

My thesis has investigated how the Anishinaabekwe ideology in collaboration with radical indigenous feminism may be useful in challenging the impacts of colonialism in the lives of Anishinaabe women. Inherent in the research question are the teachings of the ogichitaakwe. I have interviewed Anishinaabe elders as they are considered to hold knowledge specific to the teachings of the ogichitaakwe in addition to the worldviews of the Anishinaabe philosophy, values and teachings. During the interviews I asked questions that relate to understanding the teaching of the ogichitaakwe such as: would you like to share what the teaching of the ogichitaakwe means to you? From your knowledge, are there any values associated with the ogichitaakwe? Is the teaching of the ogichitaakwe in any way different from the teachings of womanhood? How does the teaching of the ogichitaakwe relate to Anishinaabe women's roles and identity? As a person who has lived with the teaching of the ogichitaakwe, can you share how you have seen the teaching is used? How do you feel the teachings of the ogichitaakwe can be applied to combating internal oppression and the impacts of colonialism for Anishinaabekwe?

The solutions for challenging the impacts of colonialism come from our communities. By conducting interviews with my Anishinaabe elders I've learned that we must challenge our colonial identities resulting from colonization and regenerate ourselves using our own ideologies and practices – this is the foundation of our re-empowerment. This thesis was initiated by my personal commitment to help myself, my family,

community and Nation to overcome the effects of colonialism by regenerating our Anishinaabekwe ideology. To this end, I've included my own experiences in working towards decolonization throughout to make it meaningful to the Anishinaabe community. Furthermore, my decision to interview Anishinaabe elder's speaks to community engagement and the passage of knowledge to other Anishinaabe people who want to learn. My journey through recognizing my internal oppression and choosing to challenge it is represented in this work. The hard work it took to re-emerge as an ogichitaakwe allows me to take great pride in the people of the Anishinaabe Nation and have conviction in our purpose. My life's work is to mentor and mother our people to a state of healthiness, happiness and empowerment. This will be achieved only through a common commitment to personal decolonization in order to become an ogichitaakwe and the will to carry on. The road is not easy once committed to the teaching of the ogichitaakwe and to decolonization but it is essential for the regeneration of our culture. This is why creating avenues like Wiisokotaatiwin is so important; it allows us to maintain a strong foundation so when we feel like giving up, our Anishinaabe relations will encourage us to continue.

My objective in undertaking this research is to commit to the regeneration of Anishinaabekwe ideology; by utilizing the inherent strength and power of Anishinaabe womanhood we can look to overcome Anishinaabe women's oppression and disempowerment. Our identities as Anishinaabe women have sustained an immeasurable injury from the impacts of colonialism and by regenerating our unique Anishinaabe teachings we will be able to address the effects of colonialism. This research is important as it has explored Anishinaabekwe teachings in order to demonstrate their usefulness in

empowerment exercises. This research is valuable because the Anishinaabe Nation must rely on our own values, teachings and ethics when confronting colonialism in ourselves and in order to help our communities. My hope is this thesis will benefit the community as it will provide the space for Anishinaabe knowledge to be shared and it will be available to the Anishinaabe people.

### Chapter Summarization

In Chapter Two, Decolonization and Regeneration: The Re-Emergence of Anishinaabekwe Ideology, the application of tradition was discussed to show that it is necessary not only to learn and apply teachings in our lives, but also to re-imagine them as they have been reshaped by Christianized and patriarchal values. I have discussed the role of Anishinaabekwe ideology with regard to decolonization and regeneration. In this discussion, the teaching of the ogichitaakwe was shown to signal the importance of Anishinaabekwe finding their voice in combating the effects of colonialism. The other crucial aspect of tradition regeneration is the hard work of personal decolonization. Challenging one's internal oppression is an ongoing process and it must occur in parallel with tradition regeneration. I have shown that it is our responsibility not only to challenge inherited patriarchal and sexist values in our Anishinaabekwe ideology and practices but to do so from a decolonized viewpoint, as ogichitaakwe.

In Chapter Three, An Approach for Radical Indigenous Feminism, I've revealed that the use of radical indigenous feminism can provide an avenue to challenge and overcome the inherited patriarchal underpinnings of our teachings while articulating the problems associated with seeking solutions in the political/colonial system. I've also addressed that a central tenet in regenerating ourselves is to ask the question "By what means are

we to become empowered?" I have shown that the pathway provided by aboriginal organizations (i.e., the Native Women's Association of Canada) in the effort to become empowered is no longer a viable option. While the Indigenous Women's Network is still a place for indigenous women to support and encourage each other in our struggle to overcome the effects of colonialism, it is imperative to focus on our own community efforts to decolonize first. When we have achieved personal decolonization and regeneration, the Indigenous Women's Network will be the vehicle by which we can cause a foundational change in solidarity, i.e., land struggles.

In Chapter Four, *The Role of Anishinaabekwe Mothering and Wiisokotaatiwin*, I have highlighted how the mothering and motherhood aspect of the Anishinaabekwe ideology provides the ultimate way to seek an end to the effects of colonialism in our lives. Additionally, I have presented my vision of re-imagining self-consciousness raising groups through *Wiisokotaatiwin*. The main objective of *Wiisokotaatiwin* will be to provide the necessary space to decolonize, regenerate and build radical indigenous feminism. Through *Wiisokotaatiwin* I have shown that the process of personal decolonization can occur; a redeveloping of our identities as *ogichitaakwe* takes place, thus changing the view of ourselves as victims of colonialism to being re-empowered by our ideology where the use of radical indigenous feminism as a tool is central to our efforts.

We can no longer look into the abyss of colonialism and think we have no choices. Our Anishinaabe distinctiveness and philosophy survived the brutality of colonization thanks to the philosophy our ancestors taught us. It is now our collective responsibility to

commit to our decolonization and regeneration efforts to honour not only our ancestors but to ensure the next generation will emerge as completely regenerated Anishinaabe.

Niinwendimaaginatok – all my relations.

## Glossary of Anishinaabe Words

Anishinaabemowin – language

Anishinaabekwe – Anishinaabe woman

Geezhigo Kwe – Sky Woman

Manitou – spirit

MuzzuKummikKwe – Mother Earth

Niizhwaaswi gikinoo'amaagewinan – seven grandfather teachings

Zaagi'idiwin – love

Mnaadendmowin – respect

Nibwaakaawin – wisdom

Aakdehewin – bravery

Debwewin – truth

Gwagakwaadziwin – honesty

Dbaadendziwin – humility

Ogichitaakwe – an Anishinaabekwe who is committed to helping the Anishinaabe people

Semaa – tobacco

Tikaanaagan – cradleboard; the child is placed securely inside to be safe, secure and to learn the skill of observation

Wiisokotaatiwin – gathering together for a purpose

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